

# **European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning**

2007 Update

A final report to DG Education and Culture of the European Commission

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# **European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning**

## 2007 Update

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The European Inventory is an ongoing project to periodically collect information on current practices in validation of informal and non-formal learning, with an emphasis on good practice, across Europe and to make this information available to a wide range of audiences. The European Inventory 2007 Update is the third Inventory report. For this version of the Inventory each country chapter has been revised to reflect developments in policies and practice for validation of informal and non-formal learning since 2005. Two additional countries, not previously included in the Inventory, have also been included: Croatia and Turkey.

As well as the updated country chapters, the 2007 Inventory includes three 'sectoral' booklets to provide an overview of developments in the public, private and third sectors. Six in-depth case studies have also been produced and over 100 abstracts of relevant literature have been prepared. The report brings together conclusions on the current state-of-play with regards VINFL in Europe and suggests recommendations for the future implementation of the Inventory project.

## Methodology

The methodology for the update of the Inventory was based on a number of key research activities. These included:

- **Systematic web and literature review:** to obtain information on recent developments in all study countries, information on new initiatives and further information on already identified initiatives –for instance new research and policy papers available, policy evaluations and data on take-up. We also conducted additional desk research with a focus on the development of validation in Higher Education.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** additional information was provided by over 90 stakeholders either by e-mail, telephone or face-to-face interviews.
- **Quality assurance procedure:** Each draft chapter underwent both internal and external quality assurance checks. In total, over 60 individuals provided their feedback on the draft reports.
- **Literature abstracts:** over 100 abstracts of literature were produced on validation of non-formal and informal learning from sources external to the Inventory. These were categorised according to the document type, country coverage and keywords which could be used to facilitate their usage by users.

- **Case studies:** six initiatives were chosen to form the subject of in-depth case-studies. The case studies were based on desk research and up to four interviews each.
- **Sectoral compendia:** three thematic compendia of practices and methodologies were prepared (one for public sector initiatives, one for private sector initiatives and one for voluntary sector initiatives) based on the findings in the country chapters. The compendia are accompanied by a list of relevant projects, methodologies and practices that have been selected as good practice examples.
- **Analysis and final reporting:** all the data gathered during the previous phases of the research was analysed in order to answer the key questions for the project. The findings were compiled in the conclusions chapter of the 2007 Inventory. A recommendations chapter has also been included, to suggest possible 'ways forward' for the Inventory project in the future.

## Key findings

Here, we outline some of the key findings which are discussed in more detail within the sectoral compendia and the conclusions sections of the Inventory in terms of **motivations** for endorsing validation of informal and non-formal learning:

- Economic factors (e.g. using validation to facilitate staff development, ensure the most effective use of resources, comply with regulations regarding professional qualifications, meet skills needs or aiding in re-structuring processes)
- Social factors (e.g. providing opportunities for disadvantaged people to reintegrate into the labour market and society as a whole, as validation helps to establish equality in the education and training systems and in the world of work)
- Education system factors (e.g. improving access to and efficiency in the formal education system, using validation to create individual pathways and avoid repetition of learning which has already been achieved)
- Demographic factors (e.g. increasing ageing of the population and migration levels can help combat unemployment particularly amongst these groups, which often have a wide range of skills that are not recognised)
- Technological factors (e.g. the development of new technologies accentuates the appreciation of technical skills gained through informal and non-formal means in sectors such as these, in relation to which the formal education system is not well suited to keep up with developments)
- EU policy developments (e.g. contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy and other key EU policy goals)
- Increased awareness/ acceptance of validation amongst stakeholders (e.g. greater awareness has led to greater use and involvement of stakeholders)

- Increased use of qualification frameworks (e.g. contributing to making a reality their focus on learning outcomes, regardless of where skills have been created)

These motivations are reflected differently in different countries. Levels of **take-up** and acceptance of methods to validate non-formal and informal learning vary greatly across countries and sectors, as does the availability of information on take-up and methodologies. In general, quantitative data on the dissemination and outputs of validation activities is limited. It is nevertheless clear that initiatives range in size from those supporting very small numbers of learners (e.g. a dozen or less individuals achieving qualifications as part of a pilot project) to very large-scale impacts (over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through the French system of VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Experience*) between 2002 and 2005, in Denmark, nearly 129,000 Individual Competence Clarifications were recorded between 2004 and 2006; in Norway around 14,000 candidates per year obtained a crafts qualification through validation in the late 1990s and approximately 60,000 went through a validation procedure in relation to upper secondary education between 2000 and 2005 –additional figures are provided in the main report). The public sector is indeed often where the initiatives are larger in scale, although there are also examples of high take-up initiatives in other sectors: in Finland, for instance, over 80,000 Recreational Study Books have been distributed so far to recognise young people's participation in voluntary activities; in France, between 2002 and 2005 the social partners financed over 110,000 validation actions.

A wide range of **stakeholders** support the implementation of these validation initiatives, including public sector organisations, national and regional bodies, European bodies and other international organisations, social partners, third sector organisations, individual private sector and third sector organisations, individual education providers, counsellors, assessors and external observers.

In terms of differences between countries, the 2005 Inventory divided countries into **three broad clusters**: those with high, medium and low degrees of development of VINFL. In 2007, it is possible to make the same distinction between the 32 countries covered by the updated Inventory and we further develop these categories, providing illustrative examples, in the conclusions chapter of the report. Countries with a high degree of development have moved from the introduction of validation policies to the implementation of validation practices and validation schemes and methodologies are applicable to most or all parts of the education system. Most have legal structures in place to support validation methods, together with a strong policy framework. Examples of this cluster include Denmark, Finland and France, amongst others. Countries with a medium degree of development have either recently set up a legal or policy framework for validation and are currently in the process of implementing it, or have had experience of piloting a variety

of different methodologies on the basis of which they are currently developing a national approach. Examples of countries in this cluster are Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, amongst others. Countries with a low degree of development show a relatively low degree of acceptance of methods to validate informal and non-formal learning. In these countries the benefits validation may now be acknowledged by the stakeholders involved but as yet there is little in terms of policy or practice which actually facilitates the validation of informal and non-formal learning. In some cases, there may still be resistance from stakeholders to the introduction of VINFL due to the continuing strong position of formal education and training. Countries in this cluster include Latvia, Malta and Croatia, amongst others.

With regards **approaches** to validation, the 2007 Inventory classifies initiatives according to the same typology as used in 2005:

- tests and examinations (the identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system);
- declarative methods (based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed by a third party, in order to verify the self-assessment);
- portfolio methods (using a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways);
- observation (extracting evidence of competence from an individual while they are performing everyday tasks at work); and
- simulation and evidences extracted from work (simulation is where an individual is placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario in order to have their competencies assessed. For a process of evidences extracted from work, a candidate collects physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes. This may relate to work situations, voluntary activities, family or other settings),

thereby permitting observations to be made regarding the trends in the use of these methods and their strengths and weaknesses. In the public sector it is possible to identify examples of initiatives within each of the categories of methods. In the private and third sectors by contrast, a few types of approaches dominate practice: portfolio and declarative methods are most prevalent, although in the private sector there is also some use of tests and examinations. We provide some detail in relation to the findings for each approach, in particular their positive and negative points, below.

*Test and examinations*, popular among educational institutions, represent in the views of most stakeholders a reliable and objective assessment of an individual's knowledge or competences and therefore find their strength in ensuring fairness, reliability and

transparency. However, for individuals accessing validation as a 'second chance', in particular in those cases when they have dropped out of formal education earlier in life, tests and examinations may represent a barrier to access, as they may be associated with previous negative experiences of education and training.

In contrast, *declarative approaches* may be more accessible to groups which are at a distance from formal education and training. However, this method relies on the individual's ability to provide a realistic assessment of his or her own competences. In terms of validity and reliability, the strength of the method therefore depends on clear guidelines and standards for the individual to use and on the provision of support or 'mentoring' during the preparation phase.

The *portfolio* approach aims to overcome the risk of subjectivity, by introducing a mix of instruments to assess the individual's competences and can incorporate assessments by third parties. However, the introduction of third party assessment does not solve all problems. It is still very important that quality assurance processes are in place to ensure the consistency and transparency of this third party assessment and ensure equality and fairness in the validation process for all candidates. In general, we have seen that a good portfolio for validation, in the eyes of assessors, is characterised by being easy to assess because it is focused on specific matched learning outcomes.

Examples of the use of *observation* can often be found in the vocational education and training sector. Observation involves the extraction of evidence of competences while an individual is performing everyday tasks at work, which then is judged by a third party. It therefore stands to reason that this approach is particularly appropriate in vocational education and training. As it was the case in the 2005 inventory, it is more difficult to identify examples of *simulation* methods or *evidences extracted from work*.

Placed at the heart of the notion of lifelong learning, validation of informal and non-formal learning has been found to be an increasingly important area of activity for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders. It is likely that developments in the coming years will take place at an even faster pace and more diversified form. The challenge for the next version of the European Inventory will be to capture and distil learning from these developments, to the benefit of all countries and stakeholders involved.

# 1.0 Introduction

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*By Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

ECOTEC is delighted to present this final report, the "European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning; update and further development" (Contract – 2006 – 4516 / 001-001 EDU-ETU). This report satisfies the agreement with the European Commission to provide a final report by the end of 2007.

Today, a diversity of approaches and practices of identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning exists and is emerging in Europe. The European Inventory provides an up-to-date catalogue of good practices in validation and is a vital reference for all stakeholders. Each country chapter has been revised for 2007, to reflect developments in policies and systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning since 2005. Two additional countries have also been included: Croatia and Turkey.

As well as the updated country chapters, the 2007 inventory includes three 'sectoral' booklets to provide an overview of developments in the public, private and third sectors. Six case studies have also been developed and over 100 abstracts of relevant literature have been prepared.

ECOTEC has broadly followed the overall approach and methodology set out in the accepted proposal. Slight changes are detailed in the section of this report describing the overall methodology for the study.

The remainder of this report, then, includes the following sections:

- Outline of methodology (Section 2);
- Public Sector Compendium (Section 3)<sup>1</sup>
- Private Sector Compendium (Section 4)
- Third Sector Compendium (Section 5)
- Country chapters (Sections 6 – 37)
- Case Studies (Sections 38 – 43)
- Conclusions (Section 44)
- Recommendations (Section 45)
- Terms of Reference (Annex 1)
- List of organisations consulted (Annex 2)
- Compendium of literature abstracts (Annex 3)
- Databases of public sector initiatives (Annex 4)

<sup>1</sup> All compendia, country chapters and case studies are also available as individual documents on the Inventory website

- Database of private sector initiatives (Annex 5)
- Database of third sector initiatives (Annex 6)

## 2.0 Methodology

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*By Manuel Souto Otero, Anne-Mari Nevala and Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 2.1 Meeting the contract objectives

The overall and specific objectives of this study are detailed in the Terms of Reference for this assignment (see Annex 1). The overall objective of the contract was to:

- quality assure and update information currently contained in the European Inventory (2004 and 2005 versions);
- further develop the format and presentation of the European Inventory to facilitate exchange of experiences and support mutual learning.

The project then had five specific objectives:

- Objective 1: to add relevant information currently not covered by the Inventory, covering initiatives in the public as well as in the private domain;
- Objective 2: to quality assure and update information currently contained in the European Inventory (2004 and 2005 versions);
- Objective 3: seek a closer integration of the European Inventory and the CEDEFOP Virtual Community;
- Objective 4: to further develop the format and presentation of the European Inventory to facilitate exchange of experiences and support mutual learning
- Objective 5: Develop the inventory into a tool more actively supporting the "Education and Training 2010" cluster on recognition of learning outcomes started in March 2006.

In order to achieve these objectives ECOTEC implemented the methodology outlined in the next sub-section.

## 2.2 Methodology

In this section we explain the actual implementation of the methodological stages of the project, which were as follows:

- Inception
- Data collection
- Quality assurance processes and update of public, private and third section initiatives
- Library of external resources
- Interim report
- Case studies
- Follow-up quality assurance
- Data analysis
- Web development
- Dissemination
- Reporting
- We provide further details on each of these stages of the methodology below.
- Inception meeting

The project began with an Inception Meeting with the client, to confirm the methodological approach and refine the work programme and quality plan for the project. This allowed more detailed discussion of the precise expectations and requirements of the study and how it could best meet the needs of the Commission. The methodology outlined in the proposal was agreed to be suitable and following the meeting, ECOTEC produced an inception report.

### 2.2.1 Data collection

Following the inception report, data collection for the project began through the production of country reports for the countries which had not been covered in the 2005 Inventory and literature review for the countries covered in the previous version of the Inventory.

### 2.2.2 Task 1: Country reports for Turkey and Croatia

Project country studies were undertaken for Turkey and Croatia. These country studies included an inventory of validation methodologies, practices and initiatives in public, private and voluntary sectors as well as an overview of the key stakeholders and their responsibilities in the development of appropriate policies and systems, as it is the case with other European 2004 and 2005 Inventory chapters. ECOTEC is collaborated with country experts for the production of these chapters.

### 2.2.3 Task 2: Literature, web review and stakeholder interviews

ECOTEC carried out a systematic web and literature review of recent literature in order to obtain information on recent developments in all study countries, information on new initiatives and further information on already identified initiatives –for instance new research and policy papers available, policy evaluations and data on take-up.

The range of different data sources used for the search for validation initiatives are explained below.

- Refernet and OECD

ECOTEC reviewed and extracted recommended examples from international comparative studies / projects which have been carried out after the Inventory of 2005. This mainly refers to the on-going OECD project on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal and the work of CEDEFOP (through the Refernet network) on its theme 08 - Accumulating, transferring and validating learning.

- Recommended examples from other international projects on validation

ECOTEC also scoped information from other international comparative studies / projects on validation of informal and non-formal learning to review examples that they had identified as initiatives demonstrating effective practice. These international projects / studies include, amongst others:

- ▶ EC Socrates/Grundtvig 1 programme: Recognition and accreditation of experiential learning – a way for better accessibility of adult education (REACTION)
- ▶ Leonardo da Vinci (2007-2013) Thematic Group on Transparency of qualifications, Validation on informal and non-formal learning, credit transfer. Background report 2007.
- ▶ European Economic and Social committee: Mutual recognition of skills and competencies learned through volunteering (MOVE)
- ▶ Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande (NVL)
- ▶ Joint Action Programme of the European Commission: REcognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education (REFINE)
- ▶ Leonardo da Vinci Netherlands: European Network VPL (Validation Prior Learning)
- ▶ UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (2003) Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and Qualifications. First follow-up report, 2003.
- ▶ UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (2004) Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and Qualifications. Second follow-up report, 2004.
- ▶ UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (2005) Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and Qualifications. Third follow-up report, 2005.
- ▶ UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (2006) Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and Qualifications. Evaluation report – 2006.

In addition to reviewing European level literature on validation, a significant amount of work was undertaken to identify examples and short 'case studies' from national level sources. This meant reviewing academic literature and literature from public agencies, and carrying out interviews with relevant stakeholders.

A full list of organisations interviewed can be found in Annex 3 of this report. In total, over 90 individuals provided information for the country chapter updates, either via face-to-face or telephone interview, or by e-mail.

#### 2.2.4 Quality assurance processes and update of public, private and third sector initiatives

The creation of a robust quality assurance system was given substantial attention from the start of this update of the Inventory. A set of general criteria were followed for the selection of methodologies and initiatives for inclusion in the Inventory. Initiatives were assessed against general criteria that are regarded as a foundation for high quality initiatives on validation. These were based on messages from the 2004 Common European Principles and from the 2005 Inventory.

#### Main messages from the European Common Principles for validation in 2004 and the European Inventory 2005

- Validation of non-formal and informal learning should first and foremost serve the needs of individual citizens.
- Benefits of validation to different stakeholders should be clear and well promoted.
- Validation is as a general principle voluntary. The individual should decide whether it should take place.
- In private and public organisations where validation is implemented this should be based on social dialogue. Methods and procedures should be developed in a partnership with all relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries, in order to ensure the necessary buy-in – especially the buy-in of employers.
- In the case of summative validation, individuals should enjoy the right to appeal a validation result.
- Special provisions should be designed for individuals with special needs to ensure equal (and fair) access to validation.
- The privacy of individuals should be respected.
- The procedures and criteria for the assessment should be transparent, and the assessment criteria must be relevant and standardised.
- Validation should be supported by information, guidance and counselling services.
- The validation process must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- Assessors must be professionally competent and trained to carry out the assessment: High-quality tutors

## Main messages from the European Common Principles for validation in 2004 and the European Inventory 2005

and assessors are paramount for the successful take-up.

- Quality assurance mechanisms should be at the heart of any validation system.
- Take-up of an initiative can function as one of the important yardstick to measure success.
- The assessment of the degree of acceptance of initiatives should take into consideration, inter alia:

**PUBLIC INITIATIVES:** Whether initiatives feature in national strategies or in the legal framework.

**PRIVATE INITIATIVES:** Whether initiatives are promoted and recognised by sectoral stakeholders or individual employers.

**VOLUNTARY SECTOR INITIATIVES:** Whether wide social recognition and awareness among businesses and education institutes exists.

It is important to emphasise that 'effective practice' in the context of validation of informal and non-formal learning is highly context specific and this required a good deal of interpretation of the general guidelines outlined in the above table. Moreover, for some national chapters we were able to pick the best examples from a wide range of initiatives. In other countries, where the development of policies for validation of informal and non-formal learning are in their infancy, we had to bring out examples of existing practice – without making particular reference to 'effective practice' as such – in order to give a flavour of developments in that particular context.

ECOTEC's original proposal also outlined our intention to carry out an online survey of higher education institutions. The survey was suggested in order to address the recommendation in the Inventory of 2005 that the next edition of the Inventory should include more detail on higher education institutions which have been active in developing policies for validation of learning that has taken place outside of the formal system.

In order to conduct the survey, ECOTEC purchased the World Higher Education Database (WHED) published in 2006 by the international association of universities and prepared a database of contacts which could be used for the web survey, together with a draft questionnaire which was submitted with the interim report. However, at the request of the client, the survey was not carried out as several other research activities had been conducted within the Higher Education sector around this time which were relevant to the Inventory and collected similar information to that requested in our questionnaire. It was therefore felt that a new survey would result in a duplication of effort. Instead, ECOTEC conducted a review of the following research:

- ▶ The Bologna Stocktaking 2007
- ▶ BeFlex: Benchmarking Flexibility in the Bologna Process

This review of documentation was used to inform the development of three key outputs of the 2007 Inventory: a case study on validation in Higher Education, the public sector compendium and the final overview report. Our comprehensive update of each country chapter has also included a specific focus on validation in higher education, thus giving details (where available) of the current situation in each of the 32 countries.

Following the review of the 2005 chapters on the basis of more recent literature (mainly national reports, Refernet material and draft OECD reports) and interviews ECOTEC undertook the selection of initiatives to be included in the 2007 Inventory national chapters. National chapters were then updated, with most national reports having seen a full transformation due to the significant developments that have taken place in the last two years. This comprehensive update of each chapter and interviews with stakeholders replaced the original proposed e-mail survey of relevant stakeholders.

The key issues to which we aimed to pay particular attention in the national reports were:

- ▶ Developments since 2005.
- ▶ Description of assessment methodologies.
- ▶ Validation of informal and non-formal learning in higher education.
- ▶ Validation of informal and non-formal learning in the private sector.
- ▶ Policies and practice for quality assurance.
- ▶ Take-up of initiatives.
- ▶ Barriers for further development.
- ▶ Lessons learnt from existing national systems or pilot projects.

This update was followed by internal quality assurance, whereby all chapters have been reviewed by two different people at ECOTEC.

The external quality assurance process then began with an identification of key questions / gaps in information. Each national report sent for external quality assurance started off by outlining, in bullet points, the key concerns in the reliability of data and information gaps identified by ECOTEC's team through the internal quality assurance procedure.

This was followed by identification of between 1 and 6 individuals from each country to whom the chapter was sent. These were usually:

- ▶ representatives of national ministries of education (or respective boards of education);
- ▶ members of the DG EAC cluster on 'Recognition of Learning Outcomes';

- ▶ social partners;
- ▶ practitioners;
- ▶ academics.

Responses were received (with comments and feedback, or confirming approval of the chapter) from over 60 individuals.

#### 2.2.5 Library of external resources

Building on the literature review undertaken for the project, ECOTEC produced over 100 abstracts of literature (see Annex 4) on validation of non-formal and informal learning from other sources external to the Inventory, to feature on the Inventory website and provide further assistance to all those interested in this topic. These were categorised according to the document type, country coverage and keywords which could be used to facilitate their usage by users.

#### 2.2.6 Interim report stage

An interim report was submitted in July 2007. This report gave an update on the progress made in the first six months of the contract and an overview of the emerging project findings. The report was discussed at an interim meeting in Brussels.

#### 2.2.7 Case studies

The interim report included 13 different suggestions for case studies and following discussions at the interim meeting, from which six initiatives were chosen to form the subject of the 2007 Inventory in-depth case-studies. These are:

- ▶ Knowledge Centres, Denmark: Validation as a tool to support the integration of disadvantaged groups (in this case, unemployed migrants)
- ▶ Role of the VAE Jury, France: Study of a VAE assessment method in practice – the use of a panel or jury to determine the outcomes of a validation application
- ▶ Investing in People, Italy: A detailed examination of a competence portfolio piloted with disadvantaged groups in an area suffering from high unemployment
- ▶ Child Line, Lithuania: An example of a bottom-up initiative within the third sector
- ▶ Validation in the Processing Industry, Netherlands: An study of validation in practice in the private sector
- ▶ Validation in Higher Education, various countries: A discussion paper on validation in HE, focusing on experience in Belgium, Estonia and Norway

The case studies therefore cover a range of countries and sectors and provide useful lessons for a range of stakeholders. The case studies were based on desk research and up to four interviews each.

### 2.2.8 Follow up quality assurance

Substantial efforts were undertaken in the context of the project to quality-assure its results. As indicated above, the external quality assurance procedure began with the identification of between 1 and 6 individuals from each country to whom the chapter was sent, after their drafting. Where responses were not received by e-mail from these contacts, follow-up calls were made in order to collect their feedback on the country chapters. In addition, the updated country chapters were published on the Inventory website in October 2007, with requests for feedback where appropriate. By publishing the chapters online, it was intended to attract a wider audience than the initial quality assurance stages. Finally, sections of the final report were sent to members of our external advisors' panel. Comments were received on time to be incorporated into this report from Odd Bjorn Ure from FAFO.

### 2.2.9 Data analysis

The purpose of this work package was to analyse all the data gathered during the previous phases of the research to answer the key questions for the project, for instance:

- ▶ What new developments have occurred since the last version of the Inventory at national and sectoral level?
- ▶ Has more data on outputs and processes been collected?
- ▶ What are the disadvantages and the benefits for the different stakeholders?
- ▶ Which functions are being fulfilled by current methodologies for validation and what instruments are being used to fulfil those functions?
- ▶ What developments in terms of the governance of education systems and re-definition of the traditional role of policy actors are we seeing as a result of the development of validation methodologies?
- ▶ How can the Inventory better feed into other initiatives being undertaken at European and other levels?

During this phase ECOTEC analysed:

- ▶ secondary data (gathered to an important extent through the literature reviews outlined above in this proposal);
- ▶ primary data collected for the project through interviews with stakeholders; and
- ▶ primary data collected through case studies.

### 2.2.10 Web development

During the last phases of the project the Inventory website has been developed to contain the updated information produced within the context of the 2007 Inventory. Thus, draft country chapters were made available on the Inventory website and other reports, including the draft final report, and the individual sectoral compendia produced within it will be added as these outputs receive final client approval. Given the decision to transfer the European Inventory website to the CEDEFOP domain, and in agreement with the client, no further enhancements have been made to ECOTEC's Inventory website.

### 2.2.11 Dissemination

ECOTEC has continued to disseminate the project through participation in relevant conferences and discussion groups, whenever applicable and budgetary possible. For example, ECOTEC has participated in two PLA cluster meetings, where it disseminated the project and gathered information for it, in line with its initial proposal for the project. ECOTEC has also produced dissemination materials, which have been used in international conferences such as the European Conference on "Valuing Learning" which took place in Lisbon at the end of November 2007. ECOTEC will also liaise with the manager of the Virtual Community to disseminate the launching of the final report for the 2007 Inventory when this is approved by the client.

### 2.2.12 Reporting

A number of outputs have been produced for the updated European Inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning, including a range of reports -other outputs, such as dissemination materials, and external library are covered in previous sections. These are:

- ▶ Country Reports: describing initiatives in different countries, and between different sectors in different countries, including up to date information obtained through the data collection for the project (e.g. update/ review of the chapters by Ministries, consultation with academics, surveys of social partners and educational institutions).
- ▶ Sector specific compendia and database of initiatives: three thematic compendia of practices and methodologies have been prepared (one for public sector initiatives, one for private sector initiatives and one for voluntary sector initiatives). The compendia are accompanied by a list of relevant projects, methodologies and practices that have been selected as good practice examples.

In addition, this draft final report has been prepared for discussion with the client in Brussels in December 2007. A final report will be prepared by the end of the year, taking into account the comments made by the client during the draft final report discussions. The report will comply with the requirements outlined in the terms of reference and will contain the set of outputs outlined in this proposal.

## 3.0 Public Sector Initiatives – A Compendium

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*By Manuel Souto Otero, Jo Hawley and Anne-Mari Nevala (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 3.1 Introduction

This compendium forms part of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning<sup>1</sup>. The Inventory provides an up-to-date catalogue of good practices in validation and is an important reference for stakeholders. It is made up of 32 individual country chapters, six case studies, three ‘sectoral’ compendia (of which this is one) and an overall report of findings. The compendia (public, private and third sector) discuss key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches within the three different sectors. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation (in particular, at practitioners), who will find the compendia have an eminently practical focus.

This Public Sector compendium examines the following issues in turn:

- Rationale for involvement
- Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives
- National Legislation / Policies
- Validation in different educational sectors and subjects
- Methods employed
- Outputs / Outcomes and Impact
- Barriers to take-up
- Success Factors
- Conclusions

The findings within the 32 country chapters of the European Inventory 2007 have been analysed to inform the content of this compendium. Throughout, examples of initiatives have been taken from the country chapters<sup>2</sup>, to illustrate good practice and lessons learned in the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) in the public sector. The aim is to enhance the exchange of experiences and to enable different sectoral stakeholders to learn from tried and tested initiatives in their field without needing to refer to the detailed individual country chapters.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/)

<sup>2</sup> Many examples are examined in more detail within the individual country chapters, all of which can be found on the European Inventory website

## 3.2 Rationale for involvement

To begin with, we will examine the main reasons, identified in the research, for the introduction of validation of informal and non-formal learning by the public sector. These are listed in turn below:

### 3.2.1 To support mobility within education / training and in the labour market

Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning helps to improve access and mobility of individuals, both into and within education and employment. A number of countries have introduced VINFL as a means of facilitating mobility. For example, in Turkey<sup>1</sup>, the basic rationale for the development of a validation system is to enable the transition between different types of vocational training. The individual can utilise his/her competences gained through non-formal training when moving, to apprenticeship training or other kind of formal training. In France, national education policy during the 1980s sought to increase the number of people entering higher education and in 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to higher education.

### 3.2.2 To promote 'efficiency' within education and training

VINFL represents a way of improving the 'efficiency' of education and training, by helping to ensure that individuals are able to access tailored learning opportunities. In Finland, the basic principle underlying the national system of competence-based qualifications (which can be awarded regardless of how and where the competences and knowledge have been acquired) is to reduce the study time required based on the validation of those competences an individual already possesses. Thus, adults with previous work and/or study experience should only study those areas of study programmes that provide them with skills that they do not yet command. In Iceland too, a number of validation projects have been implemented which aim to avoid duplication in study paths for the beneficiaries.

### 3.2.3 To promote equality of opportunity

Validation of informal and non-formal learning represents an opportunity for individuals to achieve recognition for their skills and competences, regardless of where these were acquired. As such, it supports the promotion of equality of opportunity and helps to establish a 'level playing field' in education / training and the labour market.

In Belgium, for example, the Flemish model of validation is designed to be of equal relevance to a wide range of target groups, including not only those in mainstream

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that since the regulations are still being prepared, the implementation of validation has not started as of yet in Turkey.

employment and job seekers, but also the self employed, unqualified school leavers, immigrants and others. The guiding principles of the approach are non-discrimination, equal opportunities and social integration.

#### 3.2.4 To support disadvantaged groups

VINFL is seen in some countries as a tool to support disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants and refugees, the unemployed, older workers etc. In Sweden, for example, the first initiative in the field of VINFL was the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) from 1997 to 2002. This initiative aimed to combat unemployment through the expansion of adult education in Swedish municipalities. In Luxembourg too, two formative methods of validation, the '*bilan de compétences*' and the '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' are only available for the unemployed. Another example can be found in our case study on the Knowledge Centres in Denmark, which outlines the use of validation to raise employment levels among migrants.<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.2.5 To support lifelong learning

A number of countries recognise the contribution VINFL can make to the development and implementation of a strategy for lifelong learning. The Hungarian strategy for lifelong learning, for example, refers to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning as a key area for development. Many other countries, including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Slovak Republic and Spain, recognise VINFL as an integral element of their lifelong learning policies.

A 2007 Commission Communication on '*Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation*'<sup>2</sup> explored this correlation in further detail. The Communication reports that in 2007, among the same 32 countries covered by the Inventory, 25 had a strategy, framework, validation system or national targets in place for Lifelong Learning (LLL) or had LLL policies in place but no explicit strategy. Of these 25, 18 either had a strategy, framework, validation system or national targets in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning, or had policies in place but no explicit strategy.

#### 3.2.6 To achieve 'coherence' with other (EU) countries

In a number of countries, it is evident that the impetus for developments in the sphere of validation has been the desire to achieve 'coherence' with other (EU) countries. This is the case in some new Member States, such as Bulgaria but also in the 'old' Member States too. For example, in Luxembourg, the introduction of VINFL has been in part a

<sup>1</sup> See the full case study available from the European Inventory website

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Delivering Lifelong Learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation, Annex 1, Draft 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010 Work Programme", COM(2007) 703 final

response to a kind of ‘validation tourism’ which had developed, whereby individuals would travel to France to gain accreditation for their skills and competences through the French validation system then return to Luxembourg, where the qualifications they had gained could be recognised through a process of *homologation* (conversion).

### 3.2.7 To address sectoral needs

Validation can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, for example in relation to skills shortages or in order to comply with regulations regarding professional qualifications. In Ireland, validation has been developed in response to demand for certification from employed individuals and employers<sup>1</sup> and the need to meet new regulatory requirements in sectors such as security, childcare, construction and hospitality. In the Czech Republic as well, there are also a number of decrees which regulate the validation of informal/non-formal learning for professions which require a certificate / qualification before an individual can commence work. Later, we will examine the use of validation as a method to support the qualification of teachers and education professionals, which takes place in a number of countries covered by the Inventory.

Other examples of national-level reasons for the development of validation in the public sector are the need to respond to demographic changes (Norway) or to combat a qualifications deficit (Portugal). Section 3.7 will explore further the wide range of benefits to individuals, stakeholders and societies / economies as a whole from the introduction of VINFL.

<sup>1</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

### 3.3 Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives

In this section, we will explore the methods of development of VINFL which have been identified. Approaches can be divided into 'bottom-up' and 'top-down'. Following a description of both approaches, we will also outline the importance of partnership-working. Finally, we will examine the influence of European policy and funding on the introduction of validation.

#### 3.3.1 Top-down approaches

In a number of countries, VINFL has resulted from a top-down stimulus, through the introduction of national policies or laws. France was the first EU Member State to introduce legislation with respect to validation and we will use this country as an illustration of the development of a comprehensive VINFL policy over time. The timeline below outlines the gradual introductions of validation in legislation, both in relation to education and employment, from 1934 to 2002 – for other examples see below in this compendium.

France, the introduction of legislation relating to VINFL, a timeline	
1934	Legislation introduced to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience.
1985	Decree adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to higher education (HE). The process, termed 'VAP 85' enables any person aged at least 20, who ceased their initial studies a minimum of two years ago, to apply for a place on a HE course
1986	Ministry of Employment created a network of over 100 publicly-run skills assessment centres ( <i>Centres Interinstitutionnels de Bilans de Compétences</i> , CIBC). These centres were designed to enable individuals to analyse their skills and the opportunities open to them and, on this basis, to define a personal training or occupational plan.
1991	A law passed on the 31st December 1991 gave all workers with at least five years professional experience <sup>1</sup> a legal right to obtain a <i>bilan de compétences</i> (personal skills audit). The same law introduced the right to 24 working hours paid leave to undertake the process at an accredited centre (including, but not exclusively, the CIBC). The system is financed by a combination of compulsory employer contributions and direct subsidies from central government. The <i>bilan de compétences</i> is also available to those out of work.

<sup>1</sup> And having worked for the same company for at least 12 months

1992	Further legislation <sup>1</sup> enabled the concept of <i>Validation des Acquis Professionnels</i> ('VAP 92') to be used for exemptions for qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture (secondary and higher education). People with five years' work experience could apply for exemptions by submitting a portfolio detailing the activities undertaken and skills (competences) gained through their experience, which was then examined by an assessment panel ( <i>jury</i> ), who on this basis, could award credits for elements of a course of study or to allow access to a course where other formal qualifications would otherwise be required.
1999	The above law was this extended to include qualifications delivered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.
2002	The Social Modernisation Act: validation was extended to include all the main types of qualification ( <i>certification</i> ) used in France and allow complete qualifications to be awarded on the basis of knowledge gained through experience. This broadened concept of VAP is referred to as <i>Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)</i> or Validation of Prior Experience. The 2002 law made access to validation of knowledge gained through experience a right for everyone with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience (compared to five previously).

We will explore the use of legislation and policies in further detail in Section 3.4.

### 3.3.2 Bottom-up approaches

Some initiatives for VINFL have developed without initial top-down intervention - in response to an identified need by formal education providers, rather than a political impetus or legal obligation. The first mechanism to validate non-formal and informal learning in England originated from the Higher Education (HE) sector. A mechanism for 'Accrediting Prior Learning' (APL) was established for HE in the early 1990s, which was not connected to any government policy and originated from the education providers themselves, hence a 'bottom-up' approach. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) became interested in recognising non-formal learning as a route for those with relevant knowledge and experience but no traditional qualifications to gain access to higher education. Today, the majority of universities and some further education training providers in the UK have APL at either institutional or departmental levels, or both<sup>2</sup>.

In Finland, a now widespread validation methodology for competences in ICT was developed by the Finnish Information Technology Development Centre (TIEKE) together with the education and labour administration and labour market organisations. The development work of the CDL was initially co-financed by the Ministry of Education. The Computer Driving Licence (CDL), launched in 1994, has since become a widely

<sup>1</sup> Law no. 92-678 of the 20 July 1992 promoted by the Ministry of Labour, followed by decree no. 93-538 of the 27 March 1993

<sup>2</sup> Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

acknowledged proof of information technology (IT) skills, not only in Finland but all over the world. Four different types of certificate have been developed to match the different levels of know-how and skills most often required in the information society.

In other countries, although an initial stimulus is made at national level, the development of methodologies for VINFL has been encouraged through a bottom-up approach, by supporting pilot initiatives. This is particularly noted in the Netherlands and Sweden - both countries pursued a non-regulated approach in order to stimulate experimental pilots.

In the 2003 bill on Validation (Ds 2003:23) (*Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande*) the Swedish government stated that it was 'too early' to regulate validation. The government felt that more time should be given to pilot projects to gather more experiences and to further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing acts. Today, there is still no national regulation relating to validation of non-formal and informal learning. The National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 to enhance regional cooperation and to explore quality and methodological issues around the topic.

The Dutch government also decided not to stipulate elaborate policies and regulations regarding validation. The idea was that the market itself would find the best way to develop, implement and use validation. Under the policy of "Stimulating and not regulating" (also referred to as "let a thousand flowers bloom" by the national EVC [validation] Knowledge Centre) different education institutes, different sectors of industry and other stakeholders were given the opportunity to experiment with EVC without being immediately bound to any rules and expectations<sup>1</sup>. The experimentation with EVC has led to a great number and very diverse set of validation examples, a situation that in spite of its advantages has also led to confusion among users concerning the differences in quality of all these EVC procedures.

In Sweden too, one of the most important questions at the moment is the quality aspect of validation. Due to the very varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, one of the main objectives of the National Commission on Validation is to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation<sup>2</sup>. Thus, we can see that bottom-up methods of development need to be supported by top-down guidance and support, to ensure transferability and comparability of different initiatives in the long-term.

<sup>1</sup> Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Kaemingk, E, November 2006; *Openingsspeech Nationale EVC dag (14 November)*, Kenniscentrum EVC. Retrieved 15 August: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/cfc0755dbc64e15936aa56338bb1d0c7.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/cfc0755dbc64e15936aa56338bb1d0c7.php)

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

### 3.3.3 Partnership-working and consultation

Regardless of the method of development chosen, our research has highlighted the importance of working in partnership and of carrying out consultation with relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure buy-in and take-up of the initiatives developed. Partnership-working can enable learning and good practice to be shared and can also help to increase the visibility, credibility and impact of a project.

A number of countries covered by the Inventory have recognised or demonstrated the importance of partnership-working. In Sweden, where we have seen that a 'bottom-up' process of development is promoted, in the 2003 bill on validation<sup>1</sup>, the government emphasised that the responsibility for validation should be shared between educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities and that especially regional cooperation is essential.

In the Finnish competence-based qualification system the assessment methods and requirements are determined together with social partners on the basis of vocational competence standards. It is indeed, the role of tripartite qualification committees, appointed by the National Board of Education, to define the competence-based examinations. At local and regional level it is also their role, together with training providers, to supervise the organisation of the tests and confirm approved qualifications<sup>2</sup>.

In Luxembourg, a working group on validation has been set up, composed of two representatives of the Ministry of Education, two representatives of vocational training schools and two representatives of each Chamber. Other relevant stakeholders are also able to contribute to the work of the group. This working group oversees the development of validation methodologies and procedures, which thus incorporate inputs from all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions (represented by the sectoral Chambers).

The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in Iceland undertakes most of the work with industry on validating non-formal and informal learning. Since its launch in 2003, the centre has established itself as a pivotal actor in the development of methods and procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. The Centre has been able to achieve this due to its strong ties with industry, the education system (both formal and non-formal) and the Ministry of Education. It is felt that the procedures developed will be widely acknowledged in Iceland because of the ETSC's credibility on a national level.

<sup>1</sup> Ds 2003:23, *Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande*

<sup>2</sup> VET providers nominate local boards (representatives of employers, employees, VET providers, teachers and students of the field concerned) to ensure the quality of vocational skills demonstrations. The board decides on the arrangement and assessment of skills demonstrations and awards appropriate certificates.

These examples help to illustrate how partnership working can ensure the sustainability of validation, by enabling VINFL to be designed in line with need and by ensuring take-up and buy-in across the board.

### 3.3.4 European Policy and Funding

The European policy agenda has provided a significant impetus for developments in national systems of VINFL. This includes the promotion of Lifelong Learning, the Common Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning and the move towards a European Qualifications Framework (since much of this work has as its aim the development of competence and output-based systems). In Denmark, for example, the policy on 'Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System' (2004) has been developed along certain principles, which are in accordance with the EU Bologna and Lisbon declarations. In the new Member States, it is also evident that the imposition of accession criteria stimulated the modernisation of education and training, which have helped to lay the foundations for the development of VINFL.

European Policy has also had an impact on countries which are not Member States. In Iceland the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is now looking at developing a new qualifications framework, which is compatible with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). It will take an estimated three years before the new 'National Qualifications Framework' is launched but as a result, Iceland should eventually have a system in place that is capable of recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning nationally<sup>1</sup>. The most recent policy documents from candidate countries indicate a similar trend. For instance, this topic is being taken forward in the framework of the National Vocational Qualification System in Turkey.

European funding has also been used to support the implementation of VINFL initiatives. In new Member States, such as Bulgaria and Romania, a number of Phare<sup>2</sup> projects have helped to lay the foundations for future implementation of VINFL. The development of the Computer Driving License in Finland, mentioned above, was initially supported by the European Leonardo da Vinci programme and ESF funding from the EQUAL Programme has been used in Lithuania by the *VšĮ Skudutiškis Academy* to develop and pilot a methodology for the assessment of competences.

In the Czech Republic, an approach to recognition of partial qualifications in Further Education was piloted through ESF-funded projects with the objective to gradually launch

<sup>1</sup> Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe (2007)

<sup>2</sup> The Phare programme is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Union to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union

this on a national basis<sup>1</sup>. An important ESF project in this respect is the UNIV project (*Recognition of the results of non-formal education and informal learning in networks of schools providing education services for adults*, August 2005 – July 2008) which is carried out by NÚOV, the National Institute of technical and vocational education.

European Funding has also been used to support further development of VINFL in countries where it is relatively established. For example, in France, projects supported by the European Social Fund, with a value of 1.5 million euros per year, have been implemented with the aim of helping universities to put in place the necessary frameworks to deliver VAE.

The EU also provides support for the development of VINFL through providing information (e.g. the European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning) and guidance (e.g. the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning) as well as encouraging the sharing of good practice and lessons learned (the European Commission Cluster on Recognition of Prior Learning and events such as the 2007 Conference "Valuing Learning: European experiences in validating non-formal and informal learning" held in Lisbon as part of the Portuguese European Presidency).

We can therefore see that European-level support, either through policy recommendations, financial support or information and awareness-raising, has been very important for the introduction and wider implementation of VINFL across Europe and also outside of the EU.

### **3.4 National Legislation / Policies**

We have already touched briefly on the introduction of legislation or policy at national level to provide a framework for the implementation of VINFL. In general, legislation or policy relating to this topic falls under the policy areas of education and training or employment. Portugal is an interesting example, since the country now has one over-arching system for validation, which was developed and put into operation by the Ministries of Education and Labour together.

This update of the European Inventory has confirmed that wide-reaching developments have taken place throughout Europe in policies, methodologies and legislative frameworks concerning validation since the last Inventory of 2005. Developments have taken place across all of the countries to either strengthen existing systems for validation or introduce

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*; Čiháková, H, Stretti, M, 2007, *VPL2 casestudies- in-case analysis*, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

new legal and policy frameworks to support the development of VINFL. These developments have included, for example:

- Introduction of new laws or policies for the creation of a framework for the development of a national methodology for the validation of informal and non-formal learning (e.g. Luxembourg, Slovak Republic);
- Introduction of new laws to support further development of methods for, or greater take-up of validation of informal and non-formal learning (e.g. Denmark, Netherlands);
- Reforms to improve existing systems (e.g. Denmark, France, Finland);
- Setting up of new public agencies to oversee the development and implementation of validation strategies and systems (e.g. Iceland, Malta);
- Implementation of pilot projects to test or develop national systems (e.g. Italy, Ireland, Iceland);
- The development of competence-based occupational standards (e.g. Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Turkey);
- Development of validation of informal and non-formal (VINFL) procedures in higher education (e.g. Belgium, Lithuania, Finland, France, Estonia, Norway).

We will explore three particular areas of crucial importance in the development in terms of national legislation and policy in more detail below: the development of competence-based standards, the development of national qualifications frameworks and the setting up of new public agencies to oversee the development and implementation of validation strategies and systems. The first two of these issues have also been explored to some extent in the private sector and third sector compendia which also form part of the European Inventory 2007.

#### 3.4.1 The development of competence-based standards

A number of countries have made progress in terms of the development of competence-based standards. These can serve as a reference for the implementation of VINFL and ensure transparency and comparability in terms of assessment and award of qualifications. When prepared in partnership with relevant stakeholders, they strengthen the link between education / training and the labour market and improve the relevance of qualifications.

For example, Romania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to start developing competence-based occupational standards, which are the reference points for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Order No. 3329/81/2005 established the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in that country. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the occupational standards, carried out in

centres of validation and if they are successful at demonstrating skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, to receive an official certificate.

In Slovenia, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are working vocational or professional qualifications that are required for an occupation or an individual set of tasks within an occupation. The system of assessment and certification of NVQs is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of how the knowledge, skills and competences were obtained. The knowledge and skills required to acquire an NVQ are determined by a catalogue of standards for professional knowledge and skills. These catalogues are developed on the basis of the relevant occupational standard. Occupational standards define the code and the name of occupation, level of difficulty of work, competence, and field of work, main tasks, knowledge and skills. By 2007, 279 occupational standards and 69 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills had been published in the Official Gazette.<sup>1</sup>

In the French Community of Belgium, a *Note d'orientation stratégique* is adopted each year by the social partners and the public employment services via the *Commission consultative et d'agrément*. This *Note* gives strategic direction to the measures in place to serve the community decrees on validation and specifies for which professions *titres de compétences* (certificates which can be earned through VINFL) should be made available. The number of qualifications that can be achieved through the use of validation methods therefore increases year by year. The procedure for development of these *titres de compétences* is described in the box below.

#### Developing competence reference frameworks for use in VINFL, Belgium

For each profession, a *Commission de Référentiels* has been established which brings together the social partners for the sector with education and training providers. Within a timeframe of four to six months these *Commissions* are expected to meet at least six times in order to determine competence and validation reference frameworks for the professions within the relevant sector:

- A competence reference framework (*référentiel de compétence*) defines the profession, a list of the key activities which are carried out and the skills required within the profession.
- Within the competence reference framework, the profession is then subdivided into 'competence units' (*unités de compétences*). The number of competence units associated with a profession varies between two and five, each of these corresponding to a *titre de compétences*.
- For each competence unit, a validation reference framework (*référentiel de validation*) must be defined. The validation reference framework specifies the evaluation criteria and the professional activity which can be observed to determine whether the individual possesses the competences required to be granted the *titre de compétence*.

<sup>1</sup> Data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

Competence units for each profession are thus recognised through a certificate (*titre de compétences*) which is obtained via an examination (a professional observation). These certificates confirm the individual's ability to carry out a certain element of a profession and are legal documents, recognised by the three governments of the French Community. However, they do not bring the same legal rights as a certificate awarded through formal qualification.<sup>1</sup>

Once the validation reference frameworks have been finalised with complete consensus and approved by the Governments, the validation centres begin to deliver the corresponding certificates.

In the Netherlands, it is interesting to note that the majority of the EVC (validation) procedures are particularly aimed at competence level at upper secondary/post-secondary VET level (MBO). This is not only due to the fact that most labour market positions are placed at this level but also because of the availability of a ready-usable standard - the VET qualification structure which is based on competences. Such a standard based on competences is not available at tertiary VET level because each tertiary VET institute is free to develop its own standards, which makes validation more complex.

It is important to note that the development of competence-based standards or learning outcomes is, in itself, a complex and challenging process. Yet, it has been noted that the application of agreed assessment standards forms the basis of reliable validation systems.

One of the main tensions related to standards is that, in practice, they are used for accountability purposes and not for reflective learning on the part of candidates. Assessment is predominantly used to generate some kind of marks rather than to help students to understand the discipline's standards and notions of quality. Thus, as Stephen Adam noted in 2004 "*The introduction of learning outcomes is, and has always been, subject to much disagreement and has raised much passion in educationalists*".<sup>2</sup> He identifies a range of objections relating to the introduction of learning outcomes, including fundamental issues such as the significant costs involved, not least for the associated staff development process.

Knight (2002<sup>3</sup>) goes further to argue that the assessment of complex and divergent achievements is inherently unreliable – a point which, arguably, relates more to VINFL than formal education. Other authors, such as Beaumont (1995<sup>4</sup>) and Castle (2004<sup>5</sup>) also

<sup>1</sup> Rapport conjoint 2008 sur la mise en oeuvre du programme "Education et Formation 2010", Belgique francophone

<sup>2</sup> Adam, S., Using Learning Outcomes: A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels, University of Westminster, June 2004

<sup>3</sup> Knight, P. T. (2002) "Summative assessment in higher education: practices in disarray" *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 27, num. 3, pp. 275-286.

<sup>4</sup> Beaumont, G. (1995) *Review of 100 NVQs and SVQs*. London, Department for Education and Employment.

<sup>5</sup> Castle, K. (2004) "Retention and achievement: Making a difference for NVQs" in Maey, R. *The Research and Development Bulletin*. The Research Centre, City College Norwich, vol. 2, num.3.

refer to problems in the definition of standards and common misunderstandings as a result of them being too complex and containing much jargon terminology, which can even lead to non-completion due to student anxiety and lack of motivation. According to authors such as Price and Rust (1999<sup>1</sup>) and O'Donovan et al. (2001<sup>2</sup>), through recent experience it is in fact becoming increasingly clear that increasing transparency through the provision of explicit criteria and grade descriptors does little to improve understanding of standards by staff or students.

Misunderstandings and lack of clarity on standards are also common between assessors. Indeed, creating a shared understanding between them –even at the level of the educational/training/assessing institution, let alone whole systems- is challenging –both in the context of formal and non-formal/ informal learning.

For those countries where these challenges have been overcome and competence-based standards or learning outcomes have been introduced, it is possible to see that the development can help to facilitate the introduction of VINFL, by ensuring that assessments are consistent across all sectors and providers.

#### 3.4.2 The development of national qualifications frameworks

We have already highlighted the influence of the European policy agenda on national developments and this is particularly notable in terms of the development and introduction of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). In countries where an NQF exists, these can, in the same way as occupational standards, serve as a reference for the implementation of VINFL and ensure transparency and comparability in terms of the assessment and award of qualifications.

For example, in Ireland, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), launched in October 2003, allows formal, non-formal and informal learning to be recognised within one national structure. It is based on standards or learning outcomes and as such allows parity of recognition to be achieved across all forms of learning. The framework is therefore compatible with the European policy agenda and aims to facilitate learner mobility within and between national systems.

In fact, the launch of the NFQ put renewed and increased emphasis on VINFL in Ireland. This is because the NFQ embodied the idea that: *“Equal value should be given to all these forms of learning (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal), regardless of source, how it is*

<sup>1</sup> Price, M. and Rust, C. (1999) The experience of introducing a common criteria grid across an academic department, *Quality in Higher Education*, vol.5, num. 2, pp. 133–144.

<sup>2</sup> O'Donovan, B., Price, M. & Rust, C. (2001) The student experience of criterion-referenced assessment (through the introduction of a common criteria assessment grid), *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 38(1), 74–85.

*achieved and when in life it is achieved*<sup>1</sup>. The Framework comprises ten different reference levels, each defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill and competence<sup>2</sup>. The learning outcomes set out in the Framework provide a common reference point or basis for validation. Over time, the development of new Framework awards (including minor, special and supplemental awards) is expected to provide further opportunities for validation<sup>3</sup>.

In the United Kingdom, the three Qualifications Frameworks (England and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) have been based on the use of ‘credits’

#### National Qualifications Frameworks and VINFL, UK

The qualification frameworks that have been/are being developed in each UK country are all ‘credit’ frameworks, which have a number of similarities. They all adopt a common currency whereby ‘units of learning’ can be assigned a ‘credit value’. For example, one credit may be awarded for learning outcomes achieved in ten hours of learning time at a specified level of difficulty<sup>4</sup>. The levels of difficulty in England, Northern Ireland and Wales operate on a nine point scale from entry level to level 8, whilst Scotland uses a scale ranging from entry level to level 12.

By using this system of awarding and assigning credit, it is possible to recognise learning outcomes achieved in any setting. For example, from mainstream qualifications achieved in a school, college or university to in-house training received within a company, non-formal learning undertaken in a voluntary sector organisation or even learning achieved through personal, work or leisure experiences. As long as there are specific learning outcomes that can be equated to certain ‘units’ of learning, credit can potentially be assigned or awarded. The key is to have robust quality assurance procedures in place to ensure that credit is awarded in a uniform manner across the board.

Assigning and awarding credit in this way allows parity to be achieved across the entire qualification framework. For example, allowing academic and vocational qualifications to be compared as well as equating mainstream qualifications with non-formal and informal learning. Hence:

- It allows learners to transfer between different types of courses e.g. from non-formal to more formal learning;
- It prevents learners from having to repeat units if they have completed them elsewhere;
- It allows learning to be recognised, even if full qualifications have not been achieved;
- It allows combinations of units to be studied, which may more closely match the student’s individual learning requirements, and;
- It makes learning transferable across national boundaries.

In short, the U.K credit systems hope to offer more flexible qualification frameworks, which are better able to support learners through lifelong learning.

<sup>1</sup> Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training (June 2005)

<sup>2</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The CQFW Credit Common Accord (2006);

National qualifications frameworks and / or standards therefore represent useful reference tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning and to ensure equality of opportunity in terms of the recognition of all forms of learning.

### 3.4.3 Validation Agencies

A number of countries have now established national agencies or bodies to oversee developments in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Such national coordination bodies can help to ensure consistency and transparency across all sectors and providers.

In the Netherlands, for example, the EVC<sup>1</sup> Knowledge Centre aims to collect and share knowledge and good practices on validation of prior learning. It aims to stimulate the use of validation practices by developing a sustainable infrastructure for the application of EVC in education and the labour market, in regions and in sectors.<sup>2</sup> To achieve these goals, the EVC Knowledge Centre is building and expanding its network of EVC-professionals who develop, improve and publicise new EVC methods.

The newly established (August 2007) National Knowledge Centre of Competence Assessment in Denmark will have as its primary tasks to gather, develop and spread knowledge on assessment of competences for the benefit of a number of stakeholders: educational institutions, professional organisations, third sector organisations, guidance centres, private and public enterprises, and citizens.

In Norway, the National Institute for Adult Learning, or Vox, has a number of responsibilities with regards the implementation of VINFL, as outlined in the box below.

<sup>1</sup> Erkenning Verworven Competenties - Recognition of Acquired Skills

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from the website of the EVC Knowledge Centre, [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php)

## A National Validation Agency, Vox, Norway<sup>1</sup>

Vox carries out a number of activities in the area of validation of informal and non-formal learning. These include: national surveys, networking, training, information campaigns and national projects.

The Institute has the main responsibility for providing information about the Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Information is provided on the web site [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no), at national and international conferences and seminars and through other publicity materials.

Vox also runs a national network which supports the system of validation in the upper secondary education system.

In terms of training, over the years 2004/2005 a national tour was organised, delivering two-day training sessions for assessors in upper secondary education. 788 participants were involved.

During 2006, Vox undertook various projects relating to specific issues and target groups in relation to validation, such as a project to improve the cooperation between employment offices and education centres, projects working with the public sector and higher education, a review of good practice in upper secondary education and various projects relating to documentation in working life.

In addition, Vox has developed a standard format for a 'Competence Card' to describe learning at work. The Competence Card helps an individual to map and describe their professional competence such as sector knowledge, work responsibilities, working methods and personal skills. The tool can be downloaded at [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no). The tool is accompanied by a guide on how to successfully carry out the procedure, some good practice examples and a database tool for Human Resource Managers. Today, Vox is promoting more widespread use of this tool as a common documentation of informal and non-formal learning in the workplace.

In other countries, national working groups or committees have been set up to oversee the introduction of validation from a national perspective. For example, the National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI), which leads the development and maintenance of the NQF, convened a national advisory group in 2004 to devise a set of national principles for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education, in order to underpin the introduction of policy and procedures for validation.

The National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 not only to enhance regional cooperation, but also to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation<sup>2</sup>. The Commission is responsible for working out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from: Nilsen Mohn, T. , 2006, The Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning; benefits for individuals, enterprises and society, A presentation given to the Sixth ERDI expert seminar, 12 May 2006, the 2006 OECD Norway Country Background Report on Activity in Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning and the Final report from the Norwegian sub-project of REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education and Vox - Annual Status Report on Norwegian Adult Learning 2006: Basics!.

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

Regional validation centres have also been established in a number of countries. Our case study on the Danish Knowledge Centres describes the work of five regional Centres which provide support and information on competence assessment to various organisations working with immigrants. In Sweden, there are around ten validation centres which have been established by a local authority, a skills council or a local-authority association. These centres are often involved in the actual performance of validation and the co-ordination and development of validation measures. In Norway, as part of the national Validation Project, every county authority received funding to establish a system of recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Most regional authorities set up one or more ‘assessment centres’, which are usually located at upper secondary schools. These centres provide information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to secondary education. They are also responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure, including the training of assessors.

Finally, in several countries, ‘catalogues’ or directories of qualifications have been established, such as in Portugal, where in July 2007 the national catalogue of professional qualifications was launched (*Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações*) which includes 213 professional qualifications, covering 40 educational fields ([www.catalogo.anq.gov.pt](http://www.catalogo.anq.gov.pt)).

In France, non-formal and informal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally-recognised qualification, which are recorded in the national vocational certifications directory (RNCP). The RNCP was created in 2002, on the initiative of the state but with the participation of social partners. Its purpose is “*to catalogue all existing certificates in order to be able to establish bridges and equivalences between them, with a view to promoting employee mobility and preparing career plans*”.<sup>1</sup> A national agency has been established to oversee and document the RNCP, called the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle* (National Vocational Certification Commission), presented in the box below.

#### A National Certification Commission, France

The National Commission for Vocational Certification (CNCP) was created in January 2002 by the Social Modernisation Act, the same legislation that set in place the French concept of VINFL. The body had three key objectives:

- to establish and maintain a National Register of Vocational Qualifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*, RNCP);
- to oversee reform and updating of qualifications (diplomas and certificates) on the basis of developments in education and the labour market;
- to provide recommendations to organisations that deliver vocational qualifications and provide information about the relationship between different types of qualification.

The Commission is composed of 43 members: ministerial representatives, social partners, experts and representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and the Regions. It has also set up a specialized

<sup>1</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Third follow-up report 2005

Commission to examine requests to include qualifications in the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles. The body functions on the basis on a national secretariat and a network of regional “correspondents”.

More information about the Commission can be found at: <http://www.cncp.gouv.fr>

### 3.5 Validation in different educational sectors and subjects

Analysis of the country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory permits the identification of trends in the use of validation across the sphere of education and training sectors and subjects. Although there has been some progress towards the implementation of ‘universal’ validation methodologies which apply to all forms of learning and all types of qualifications (France, Denmark), it is evident that in most countries, validation is introduced in either vocational or adult education then gradually adopted in other sectors (e.g. general and higher).

A brief history of validation in **Norway** illustrates the gradual adoption of validation in education and training over time. The 1952 Law on vocational training allowed individuals to pass a crafts examination, provided they had sufficient practical work experience. This was followed by the 1976 Adult Education Act, which opened up the right for adults to have their knowledge and skills documented at all levels and areas within the public education system, independently of how these competences were acquired. However, little progress was made in terms of procedures and practical institutional arrangements. One of the objectives of the 1999 Competence Reform was therefore to establish improved legal frameworks as well as the practical procedures that would fulfil the intentions of the 1976 act. At the same time, the 1999 reform widened the concept of validation, by including competences acquired outside of the regular education system, with a view to strengthening the job prospects of low-skilled individuals. The 2002 amendment to the Education Act determined that adults born prior to 1978<sup>1</sup> have a statutory right to be accepted to upper secondary education, based on an assessment of their informal and non-formal learning. This was followed by two more Acts relating to vocational training and a number of other legislative moves relating to VINFL, culminating in the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges No. 15 of 1 April 2005 which contains two sections concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning, relating to admission and exemption in higher education.

In many other countries, the use of VINFL is most prominent in vocational and adult education and training. In **Denmark**, for example, with regards to existing practice, systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning stretch from general upper

<sup>1</sup> The Government will propose a change in this legal right from “born prior to” to “25 years or more” in spring 2008

secondary to vocational, adult education and tertiary education. But validation is most prominent in the field of adult vocational education and training. In **Sweden** as well, since the late 1990s, the concept of validation has been mainly used in the public education system for adults<sup>1</sup>. Other countries which are still at the early stages of developing VINFL methodologies tend to focus on these sectors, for example in Slovenia (the National Vocational Qualification, NVQ) and in Hungary, (where the main method for validating prior learning is the examinations that award state-recognised vocational qualifications).

It is interesting to note that in the example given above of the gradual implementation of validation in Norway over time, the last sector to take up VINFL was the Higher Education Sector. In other countries too, there is evidence of a resistance or mistrust within this sector to VINFL methodologies (with the exception of England, where the first mechanism to validate non-formal and informal learning originated from the Higher Education sector), although this is now changing. Since the Bergen Communiqué included recognition of prior learning as a priority area within the Bologna Process, evidence has been gathered through the Bologna Stocktaking Process which verifies this change in practices and attitudes (see our case study on validation in HE for further information on this issue).

In the **Netherlands** for example, research shows that even though many higher education institutions are considering introducing validation, actual implementation remains low. Where validation practices can be found, they also mostly take place in higher vocational institutes (*hogescholen*) and not in university education. Kink, Boon and Schlusmans (2003) assume that universities remain limited in their use of EVC because they are afraid of losing their quality status. Another reason mentioned by Schlusmans, Joosten-ten Brinke and van der Klink (2005) might be the fact that universities fear that EVC is not focused enough on knowledge acquisition, which forms one of the most important elements of university education. Vocational higher education institutions are far less focused on knowledge acquisition and focus more on the acquisition of skills and professional competences, which fits more closely with EVC. In university education competence-based approaches are not yet accepted on a broad scale and the focus is instead on knowledge transfer - little value is attached to specific competences<sup>2</sup>.

In Finland, evidence implies that the number of students whose informal or non-formal learning is officially recognised and consequently accredited during a university application process remains low. Exact information on the take-up is limited but data from the

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006; *Implementing the "education and training 2010" work programme, 2005 progress report, Sweden*, December 2005, European Commission Education and Culture

<sup>2</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

2002/2003 semester shows that 335 individuals applied through 'flexible student selection' (0.5 per cent of all applicants), of which 76 were accepted (0.3 per cent of all applicants)<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the flexible student selection to mainstream study programmes, universities also receive applications to other study schemes, for example, special master's degree programmes. The share of students who had their competences validated – mainly competences gained in the workplace – during an application process to the special study programmes was 7 per cent in 2001/2002<sup>2</sup>.

In Norway, adult students admitted on the basis of recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning constitute approximately 5 % of all new HE students annually, relatively more in health and social studies (12 %) and in educational studies (10 %).

Moreover, often where validation is implemented in HE, institutions are permitted a degree of autonomy in determining the methodologies and procedures they use, which can lead to a problem in terms of take-up, consistency and transparency. Our case study on VINFL in higher education shows that this is the case in Belgium, Estonia and Norway. In Finland, institutions have been free to determine to what extent they utilise the opportunities provided by the legislation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in universities.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the overall use of validation methods has varied from one university and faculty to another<sup>4</sup>. Traditionally teacher training faculties have been most active in this field (similar to other countries – see below). For example, the University of Lapland gives students of teacher training courses an exemption from the handicraft course if they can prove that they have developed the necessary competences through hobbies and other activities.

A background paper<sup>5</sup> produced for the Beflex Project<sup>6</sup> explains that, "unlike in France and the UK where APEL was first developed (some years ago) for entry, and in particular for entry to bachelors programmes, those universities that are now developing APEL [validation] arrangements seem to be starting with APEL for entry to masters and/or for part of a masters diploma rather than at the lower end of the diploma range". The paper suggests that the reason for this change may be one of the trends which has arisen

<sup>1</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

<sup>2</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

<sup>3</sup> Act 645/1997, Decree 115/1998 and Decree 794/2004

<sup>4</sup> Lehtikoinen et al (2007) Aiemmin suoritettujen opintojen ja aiemmin opitun tunnustaminen korkeakouluissa. Opetusministeriö

<sup>5</sup> Viron, Françoise de, The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Background Paper – 33<sup>rd</sup> EUCEN Conference, Ljubljana, 15-17 March 2007

<sup>6</sup> The Beflex Project aims to monitor the development of university lifelong learning (ULLL) in the reformed structure of higher education qualifications (the Bologna process), report to next meeting of the Bologna ministers in London in 2007, and promote ULLL as envisaged by their Bergen meeting in May 2005.

following the Bologna reforms; the development of new, professionally oriented, masters courses, and in particular masters targeted at adults with work/professional experience. The paper suggests that validation may be 'easier' to implement for courses which are specifically designed for people with certain work experience.

In terms of subjects, it is therefore not surprising that the Inventory highlights a certain focus on vocational subjects. For example, in France, validation is currently concentrated in certain sectors and for a small number of qualifications – over a quarter of the qualifications delivered in 2004 and 2005 related to professions in health and social care. In Romania, the most popular certificates awarded by the National Adult Training Board (based on a demonstration of the applicant's ability to meet the skills and competences within a national occupational standard) were for construction, social assistance, agriculture and commerce.

A similar pattern emerges in Finland, where most competence-based qualifications have been achieved in Social sciences, business and administration – equivalent to 27 per cent of all completed qualifications<sup>1</sup>. This is closely followed by qualifications in Technology, communications and transport (26%) and then Social services, health and sports (22%). The number of qualifications acquired through validation of informal and non-formal learning is low in the following fields (though the number is on the increase):

- Natural Sciences, natural resources and environment;
- Culture; and
- Education.

In Sweden, local and regional employment agencies commission validation from a municipality or validation centre. In a questionnaire (September 2005) completed by these agencies for the Swedish National Commission on Validation, the following sectors were indicated in which validation takes place most frequently: (1) production and manufacturing; (2) healthcare, (3) transport, (4) building and construction; (5) handicrafts; (6) hotel, restaurant and meal services; (7) installation; (8) management and maintenance; (9) business and administration; (10) computers, ICT and communication; (11) pedagogical work; and (12) buying, selling and marketing. According to the Swedish National Commission on Validation, no validation activities had been commissioned from it in culture, media, design, environment, national resources or security<sup>2</sup>.

A number of countries have also introduced validation methodologies to enable teaching professionals to gain qualifications, for example Denmark, Finland, Latvia, the

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

Netherlands, Portugal and the Slovak Republic. This is often in response to a shortage of qualified staff within the sector. The example below from Latvia shows how validation is used to enable individuals to obtain exemptions from the formal teaching qualifications.

#### Validation for teaching professionals, Latvia

In accordance with the “Law on Education” adopted in September 2003, the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science accepted an instruction on “The receiving of professional pedagogical education and the order of professional perfection”. According to the document, workers in the educational sector (except for higher educational institutions) can receive pedagogical education by further education or self-education. The instruction precisely defined an amount of time (contact hours) an applicant should spend for the acquisition of the course.

This is a one-year process consisting of different training modules. The process however starts off with a procedure to validate participants’ prior experience, skills and relevant activities in the field. This is done by candidates stating information about their relevant work experience as a teacher. The candidates have to prove the length of their work experience and also have to send their teaching material, teaching methodologies and any other information about relevant courses or activities in the field. Then the Special Certificate Commission (which is made up of representatives of the Ministry, vocational institutes and social partners) assesses which modular exemptions participants may get.

Participants are not likely to be exempt from all modules and they may have to do some projects or attend courses. Participants are then assessed by written exam and presentation. The Commission and the Ministry of Education have made an agreement with specific training institutions to carry out relevant courses.

Those who pass the final examinations then receive a nationally recognised certificate which is signed by the Ministry of Education. This however does not replace the official teacher qualification which can only be obtained by attending higher education institutes. But the certificate provides exemptions for those wanting to continue studying to become an officially qualified teacher.

The main reason for such an initiative is a lack of qualified staff engaged in the educational sector. Validation is used to stimulate the inflow of a new staff, to expand career opportunities and to raise the qualifications of working teachers. The certificate does not mean a salary increase for those who obtain it but provides them with an official certificate and thus the ‘right’ to work in schools. They also gain the opportunity to study further, to have some of their previous experience recognised and at the same time obtain exemptions for their further studies.

Finally, it is also interesting to note that in certain countries, validation has been applied to the acquisition of certificates to prove language competences. This is the case in Finland, Greece and Latvia for instance. The Finnish National Certificate of Language Proficiency in particular, serves as an example of widespread take-up of a validation methodology.

To obtain the Certificate, participants take a test aimed at adults to measure their practical language skills, regardless of how and where their linguistic proficiency has been acquired. The tests measure language skills in practical situations in which an adult could be required to speak, listen, write or read a foreign language. Certificates are awarded by the provider organising the test and the person assessing the candidate.

The National Board of Education developed the National Certificate in Language Proficiency test with help from its language examination committee, which has 9 members (most with language teaching experience) and has a 3-year mandate<sup>1</sup>. The committee monitors the tests at providers approved by the National Board of Education.

The Act on language tests was passed in 1994 and the first national certificates of language proficiency were granted in the same year. Some 22,000 people were granted a Certificate by the end of 2003<sup>2</sup>. The test can now be taken in nine different languages and there are over 100 educational institutions arranging tests. The following table displays the continuous increase in the popularity of the tests.

**Table 3.1 Number of National Certificates of Language Proficiency acquired since 1994**

Year	Certificates acquired	Year	Certificates acquired
1994	1,408	1999	2,209
1995	1,949	2000	2,487
1996	1,938	2001	2,275
1997	2,188	2002	2,467
1998	2,191	2003	2,865

*Source: Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University*

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University

### 3.6 Methodologies employed

The 2005 Inventory identified a typology of five main categories of validation approaches. These are:

- Tests and examinations
- Declarative methods
- The portfolio method
- Observation
- Simulation and evidences extracted from work

In this section, we consider each of these methodologies in turn and give examples of their use in the public sector.

First though, it is important to note that our research has identified a number of countries where no validation methods are prescribed at national level. Instead 'guidelines' are given regarding the principles a validation procedure should be based on. These guidelines often follow either three (e.g. Flanders, Belgium<sup>1</sup>, Norway) or five (e.g. France<sup>2</sup>, Netherlands) basic steps. In Norway for example, based on the conclusions from the national Validation Project<sup>3</sup>, it was proposed that the national system of VINFL should include a shared set of principles, anchored in custom-made legislation, as well as a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence and skills.

<sup>1</sup> 1) Identification, 2) Assessment, 3) Recognition

<sup>2</sup> 1) Individual is informed of the validation process, 2) Decision on the validity of the initial application, 3) Full application prepared (a portfolio), 4) Interview with a 'jury', 5) Final decision.

<sup>3</sup> *Realkompetanseprosjektet*, 1999 - 2002

Let us now consider Sweden as an example:

### National Guidelines for the Implementation of VINFL, Sweden

The National Swedish Commission on Validation has identified a list of elements in the validation process. This list does not imply that all elements must always be performed, or that they have to take place on a single occasion<sup>1</sup>.

The elements of a validation procedure and structure to be followed are<sup>2</sup>:

**General competence mapping:** The individual performs - either alone or together with a guide or official - a first exploration of knowledge and skills. The reason for validation is examined and a decision is made on whether to continue to the next phase or not. Interviews and self-assessment tools are used to provide a more diverse picture of the real skills possessed by the individual. The estimated time for this phase is 1-2 hours and should lead to a recommendation or formal statement.

**In-depth competence mapping:** Specialists (vocational teachers, occupational assessors, representatives of industry associations or a vocational committee) in the specific subject or occupational fields intended for validation should participate in this phase. Together with the individual, the specialist will agree on the level and status to which the knowledge and skills validated correspond. This phase will require 2-8 hours and consists mainly of various theoretical and practical elements resulting in a more detailed description of skills. Documents are to be issued in the form of a formal statement or a certificate.

**Competence assessment – statement of attainment:** The third phase can consist of an assessment of skills in relation to established skills descriptions or course objectives. The assessment is carried out by a vocational teacher or occupational assessor. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is implemented in the form of theoretical and/or practical elements. A certificate is normally issued at the end of this phase.

**Competence assessment by formal means – certificate, authorisation, examination etc.:** The fourth phase focuses on verification. The objective is to issue a final documentation in the form of a relevant legal document. There is a risk that the individual may not reach the level of knowledge required in the tests or exams. If this is the case, a certificate can be issued indicating the modules or elements that the individual passed during validation. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is to be performed by a quality-assured assessor.

The Commission indicates that each validation procedure should result in some form of documentation indicating<sup>3</sup>:

- The aim and objective;
- The model(s) used for validation;
- The method(s) used for validation;
- The supporting materials or tools on which the assessment - if any - was based;
- The validation provider's authority to issue documentation; and
- The method used for quality assurance of the process.

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>3</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

Thus, the details of the methodologies used for validation are not always determined at national level. The examples below include both national level and individual approaches to validation to illustrate the use of each different method.

### 3.6.1 Tests and examinations

These methodologies identify and validate non-formal and informal learning through or with the help of examinations. Thus, an individual often enters examinations from the formal education system and by passing the examination, his or her competences gained through non-formal and informal learning are validated. This process also formalises an individual's skills as the end-result is a formal and usually generally recognised diploma or certificate.

A number of examples of the use of test and examinations can be found in the 2007 European Inventory:

In **Austria**, the *Berufsausbildungsgesetz* (Vocational Training Act) and the 2002 amendments to the *Gewerbeordnung* (Trade Regulation Act) provide for access to the final examinations of vocational training courses, based on validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Two decrees have been introduced in the Flemish Community of **Belgium**, so that individuals who have acquired competences at work or elsewhere may be granted exemption from at least parts of formal education and training. By taking special examinations, adults can gain recognition for individual learning at work or elsewhere to obtain the same qualification as those having followed traditional pathways. This applies to adult education and higher education.

In the **Czech Republic**, a new Act<sup>1</sup> which entered into force in August 2007 creates a systemic framework for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning by offering the opportunity to acquire partial qualifications. Verification of partial qualifications is carried out an authorised 'person' (individual or organisation) appointed by an authorising body (relevant ministry), by contrasting the actual competences with the relevant qualification and assessment standards. The validation should be carried out by means of an examination (practical and, if appropriate, oral or written as well), the content of which is in line with the respective job requirements. The acquisition and demonstration of the competences are then confirmed through a certificate, which corresponds with the relevant partial qualification and is recognised both in the system of initial education and in the labour market.

<sup>1</sup> Act No. 179/2006 of 30 March 2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment of Some Other Acts (Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results)

Recognition of the results of non-formal education and informal learning is only based on the skills and knowledge proved within the examination, regardless of the way the applicant gained them. The system of recognition in the Czech Republic is neither tied to completion of any form of education nor to recognition (seeking the evidence) of competences (for instance by means of individual skills portfolio).

An important tool in **Germany** for assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the *Externen-Prüfung* (examination for external candidates, i.e. those not involved in a formal vocational training programme) which permits admission to final examinations under Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*) and Section 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (*Handwerksordnung*). Under this provision, individuals can be admitted to a final examination for a recognised apprenticeship trade requiring formal training if they provide evidence that they have '*been employed in the occupation for which they wish to take the examination for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training*'.

Evidence of the minimum period of employment can be waived wholly or in part if applicants can convincingly demonstrate, by producing certificates or by some other means, that they have acquired the necessary vocational proficiency for admission to the examination<sup>1</sup>. Foreign qualifications and periods of employment abroad may also be taken into account.

In **Lithuania**, the *equivalency examination* is the main method leading to the acceptance of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults. According to the Temporal Procedure,<sup>2</sup> a person over the age of 18 years, with at least one year of work experience can apply to have their competences acquired outside of formal education recognised. In September of each year he or she should register in a licensed vocational school which provides the programme chosen by the individual. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements, through the analysis of certificates on non-formal education and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the external students and schools agree on the timetable of appointed course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. If the results are positive, external students are allowed to take the final qualification exams together with the students from formal education. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with qualification certificates or the qualified worker diploma

<sup>1</sup>ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006. Cedefop.

<sup>2</sup> The Temporal Procedure for Recognition of Knowledge Gained through the Non-formal Adult Education or Informal Education and for Receiving of Formal Documentation for Evidence of Graduation of Higher Level Education, Vocational Training, some Level or Module of Vocational Training and Acquisition of Qualification, 2001, Ministry of Education and Science

Although the use of tests and examinations is often represents as a reliable method of validation, which can be consistently applied across all providers and settings, they may not be appropriate for all individuals. For individuals such as early school-leavers, who (have) experience(d) difficulties in a formal education environment, including taking tests and examinations, less 'formal' approaches, such as declarative methods or the use of a competence portfolio, might be more suitable.

### 3.6.2 Declarative Methods

Declarative approaches to validation are based on an individual's own identification and recording of their competences. Normally a third party counter-signs the declaration, which may take the form of a so-called "competence handbook", in order to verify the self-assessment.

The '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP), used in **Luxembourg**, serves as an example of a declarative method used in the public sector. The BIP has the specific aim of helping job-seekers to become more autonomous in their search for employment, in addition to providing a tool for evaluating their technical and social skills as well as competences. It was created in 2002 via the implementation of the National Action Plan for employment. The basis for the preparation of the BIP is via group work, in which the job-seekers are encouraged to propose and discuss their career plan, and whether it is compatible with the job market situation. At the same time, the candidate is questioned about what he/she believes are his/her personal competences, and whether they are compatible with their career plan. The BIP is prepared in the form of a 'log book', in which the candidate notes what he or she has drawn from each session of group work, and uses these notes to modify his or her occupational project and plan of action.

In **Germany**, the ProfilPASS<sup>1</sup> is a developmental instrument based on user self-assessment supported by professional guidance.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.profilpass-online.de/>

## A declarative methodology, ProfilPASS, Germany

The passport takes into account all learning settings in which learners may acquire competences during the course of their lives. It is based on the assumption that many individuals can only be guided towards knowledge of their competences and the value of them through critical reflection on their own lives. The ProfilPASS is structured according to 5 sections:

- (1) My life – an overview,
- (2) My fields of activity – documentation,
- (3) My competences – a balance sheet,
- (4) My objectives and next steps and
- (5) A section for collecting references, attestations and other documents.

Skills and competences are derived from these activities by a process of abstraction, and then assessed on a four-level scale:

- Level 1:** activities which can be carried out under another person's supervision or by following instructions;
- Level 2:** activities which can be carried out autonomously in familiar conditions;
- Level 3:** activities which can be carried out autonomously in a different context (other situation, conditions, location, work context);
- Level 4:** Activities which can be carried out autonomously in a different context, explained and demonstrated to others.

Skills at Level 1 or 2 are still referred to as skills. In contrast, skills at Level 3 or 4, i.e. those which can be transferred to other contexts, are referred to as competences. Referring to the skills and competences identified, a personal profile can be drawn up in Section (3) which is, at the same time, the departure point for the planning of future learning on the basis of developmental objectives, culminating in an action plan in Section (4).

A *ProfilPASS for young people* has now been developed which, following a pilot and evaluation, has been available nationally since May 2007. It is currently being rolled out as a target group-specific supplement to the *ProfilPASS* -system.

Declarative methods therefore rely on an individual's ability to provide a realistic assessment of their competences. In terms of validity and reliability, the strength of this method relies on clear guidelines and standards for the individual to use.

The competence portfolio method helps to overcome the risk of subjectivity which is evident in the use of declarative methods, as it introduces a mix of methods and instruments to assess the individual's competences and incorporates an assessment by a third party.

### 3.6.3 Portfolio method

Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments, employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways. In the most general of senses, competence portfolios tend to involve a self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria, interview(s) with a third party and / or an assessment centre.

An example is the *bilan de compétences* used in Luxembourg as a tool to explore the personal and professional skills of unemployed individuals, and the skills required by the labour market. The methodology for producing a '*bilan de compétences*' is via a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and observation of the individual being assessed. The assessments are conducted by third parties on behalf of the '*Service d'accompagnement personnalisé des demandeurs d'emploi (SAPDE)*' section of the National Employment Agency, ADEM.

In Denmark, the policy *Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System (2004)* recognises that the success of competence assessment or recognition of prior learning depends completely on the methods applied and the quality mechanisms in place to support the process. The policy stipulates that each competence assessment should include:

- **Guidance and Clarification** i.e. the educational institution providing information on their options, regulations, their obligations in the process etc;
- **Collection of documentation** e.g. documentation from employers, participation in seminars, training activities, liberal adult education activities, voluntary experience etc;
- **Competence assessment** i.e. reviewing the documents, structured interviews, observation, asking the learner to complete a practical task, tests etc.

This final competence assessment, following on from the documentation stage, thus shows that the recommended validation approach in Denmark is the competence portfolio method.

A similar methodology is recommended by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in Iceland, although it is divided into five stages, as outlined in the box below.

## A competence portfolio methodology, ETSC guidelines, Iceland

In 2007, the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in Iceland published a brochure documenting a common approach to validating non-formal and informal learning. This can be downloaded from their web site<sup>1</sup> and used in a range of educational settings, both formal and non-formal. The processes and procedures followed parallel the common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning and are split into five phases<sup>2</sup>, as described below.

1) **Information and feedback.** Before the validation is carried out, the individual is informed about the goals of the validation, the role of the assessors, possible outcomes and the rights of the individual in the process.

2) **Documentation.** The individual looks back on his/her life and documents the competences that he/she has acquired. The individual gathers appropriate documents, such as recommendations from employers, job descriptions, diplomas, certificates, samples and projects. The individual is given access to a counsellor who can provide guidance and support through the whole process.

3) **Analyses.** An interview between the individual and an assessor to decide how the individual's competence measures up to certain qualification requirements. The counsellor that took part in the documentation stage can also take part in the interview.

In some cases it is at this point that the individual fulfils the qualification requirements for a certain part or module and subsequently receives validation and recognition for his/her competence (thus moving straight to stage five of the process). If it is unclear whether the competence is sufficient, a confirmation process is carried out (stage four).

4) **Confirmation.** The confirmation of competences is carried out according to a confirmation plan, accepted by the assessor and counsellor. The needs of the individual should be taken into account, for example by offering more time, using visual examples, technical confirmations, in order for the individual to be able to show his/her competence. It is important to look for other means than the conventional tests to confirm validation and to give the individual the possibility to choose appropriate methods.

5) **Validation and acceptance of competence.** A module is considered validated when it has been documented officially in the name of the individual as finished or passed. It is important that validation is accepted by the stakeholders and that they are well informed of its procedures.

The five-step approach to validation employed in France serves as another example of the competence portfolio method. The five steps, as outlined in the 2002 Social Modernisation Act are:

1) information about the process of VAE;

<sup>1</sup> [www.frae.is](http://www.frae.is)

<sup>2</sup> ETSC, Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. Available at: [http://www.frae.is/files/{c575619e-c414-411d-be8b-8db0b708d781}\\_validation.pdf](http://www.frae.is/files/{c575619e-c414-411d-be8b-8db0b708d781}_validation.pdf)

- 2) decision on the validity (*recevabilité*) of the application (in terms of duration of experience related to the content of the qualification);
- 3) development of a portfolio or "dossier" by the candidate describing his or her experience. This may include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a simulated situation and other evidence. The candidates may be mentored and financing can be available at this stage in the process;
- 4) interview/dialogue with a 'jury' – at the request of the jury or the candidate;
- 5) deliberation and decision from the jury based on the documents produced and their own observations.<sup>1</sup>

Our case study on the role of the jury in the French validation process gives more detail on experiences to date in using this procedure and identifies some good practice and recommendations in relation to methodologies which employ an interview as part of the competence portfolio. It is clear that one of the main difficulties is to ensure consistency in the application of such an approach and that the success of such a methodology relies on the provision of training and comprehensive guidance to jury members, as well as the use of clear standards or reference frameworks for the qualifications in question.

#### 3.6.4 Observation

This methodology involves the extraction of evidence of competences while an individual is performing everyday tasks at work. Evidence extracted from work practices relies on observation by a third party for the judgement of the competence level acquired.

In **Slovenia**, the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) can be obtained through the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and work experiences, including observation of an individual at work combined with other elements. The validation process takes place as follows:

- 1) The first step is the submission of a personal application to an authorised and registered organisation by the National Examination Centre.
- 2) On the job assessment and certification of the individual is then carried out by a nominated commission (whose members must obtain a special licence from the National Examination Centre)

<sup>1</sup> Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

3) The NVQ may be obtained a) by certification - direct assessment of professional knowledge, skills and abilities determined in the catalogue or by recognition of a person's skills and knowledge on the basis of the individual's portfolio or b) in school - on the basis of documents acquired in educational programmes.

In **Norway**, a three-stage procedure is recommended for validation (information and guidance, followed by assessment, then documentation) in upper secondary education. Within this process, several methods and tools have been developed for the implementation of the assessment stage, one of which is 'vocational testing'. This is based on an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives of the adult are charted. This interview is followed by a second one by a professional specialist, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed.

It was found in Norway that vocational 'testing' provides adults with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. On the other hand, it also requires inter-departmental cooperation between the education system, the employment service and often also insurance and social security offices. As such, it can represent a relatively complex and sometimes costly method of implementing VINFL.

#### 3.6.5 Simulation and Evidences extracted from work

Colardyn and Bjornavold introduced two additional categories for the validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Simulation
- Evidences extracted from work (or other) practices.

According to Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004), simulation means that competences are not tested in real life (because, for various reasons, they cannot be), but that an individual is placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario in order to have their competences assessed. Validation methods falling into the category "evidences extracted from work (or other) practices" have in common that a candidate collects physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes. This may relate to work situations, voluntary activities, family or other settings. This evidence then forms the basis of a validation of competences by a third party.

Our case study on the use of validation as part of an integration policy for immigrants in Denmark serves as an example of 'simulation'. An excerpt from the case study to illustrate the use of 'simulation' alongside other methods is given in the box below. Unemployed migrants are placed in companies for a workplace assessment, in order to receive a 'competence card' which can be used to testify their skills when looking for another job.

## A simulation methodology, Knowledge Centres, Denmark

Our case study focused on the Knowledge Centre Mid-West. The main focus of this Centre was to bring competence assessment into real life conditions and assess skills and competences in the workplace, where the competences can be demonstrated and where they are normally used. The main reasons for such a choice were: the fact that the vast majority of the target group (immigrants) did not have any previous work experience and the view that the best way to assess a person's skills was to do that in the workplace. Moreover, since most of the immigrants did not have any previous education, assessment by educational institutions was not considered to be as relevant as an assessment by companies<sup>1</sup>.

The unemployed immigrants are referred by consultants at the job centres for a workplace competence assessment. After the assessment period is finished, the immigrant is issued with a 'competence card' which describes actual competences as they are observed. The competence card can be used as a recommendation when looking for another job (or being recommended by a job consultant to on-the-job training).

Assessment, through observation, is carried out in the workplace by a mentor. The process is facilitated by an online tool, which specifies which skills and competences are to be assessed for a particular job. The tool contains descriptions for each job and specifies the range of skills that ensure proper execution of tasks envisaged by a given job function. The development of standards was based on the existing national occupational standards. However, the process of constructing job descriptions went further by breaking down the skills and competences into functions.

During the three to four week assessment period, personal competences, professional, language, computer and basic skills are assessed in relation to the tasks performed. The reasons for prioritising these competences was the fact that the employers often perceive immigrant workers as lacking key personal competences needed in a Danish workplace<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the initial low or no level of education of the target groups, the types of jobs that are performed are those corresponding to an unskilled labourer level, such as cleaner. In some cases, the skills acquired can correspond to qualification levels and are usually complemented by vocational training in an education institution. Whenever the qualification serves the purpose of getting a person into employment, this option is chosen. This is especially relevant to the social services sector where the demand for labour, especially at lower skill levels, is high and offers a very effective bridge into employment for immigrants.

During the assessment period the employers can be compensated with a wage subsidy for a learner. In many cases learners are offered further training in the company, where companies can benefit from training subsidies and a learner is paid a minimum wage for their work.

The system is also useful for other target groups which lack professional experience. It receives considerable support from employers who are, first of all keen to take on new trainees and secondly, satisfied with the new standardised tools that minimise their time spent on giving feedback while at the same time allowing for comparability of the assessment results.

<sup>1</sup> Additionally, there are important financial considerations behind this choice – it is less expensive for job centres to refer a client to a workplace assessment than into an education institution.

<sup>2</sup> Mortensen I.Q. (2007). A Danish model for Assessing Competences of Immigrants at the Labour Market, conference material

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in Ireland has developed a procedure for the award of its qualifications through validation, which contains elements of what could be classified as ‘evidences extracted from work (or other) practices’. This procedure is described in the box below.

**Table 3.2 A declarative Methodology, FETAC, Ireland**

Stage	Criteria
<b>1. Award Identification/eligibility of the learner</b> - FETAC Guidelines available - Provider/Learner identify a FETAC award	The Award must be as listed in the FETAC Directory of Awards Eligibility of the learner is established following a quick scan of learning outcomes/standards for the award
<b>2. Matching of experience to Standards</b> - The provider/learner match the individually acquired knowledge, skill and competence to the national standards for an award. - A mentor may support the learner	The standards for the award must be available and the learners experiences must be clearly and accurately documented against the standards
<b>3. Gathering of Evidence</b> Evidence is gathered to prove the knowledge, skills and competences claimed by the learner to meet the learning outcomes of the award. The evidence will be collated into a Portfolio.	A portfolio/collection of evidence can conclude: - Curriculum Vitae - Certificates - Job Description (s) - References/testimonials - Products/Samples - Evidence from Courses attended - Work place assessment, test results - Interviews - Other
<b>4. Assessment of Evidence</b> An assessment and verification of the individual’s knowledge, skills and competences is conducted against the award standards	Assessment criteria for the standards of the FETAC award must be deemed to be met. The evidence in the Portfolio must be assessed in terms of Sufficiency, Validity, Authenticity, Reliability and Currency.
<b>5. Recommendation for an award</b> A recommendation is made based on the evidence presented	A recommendation is made as follows: (a) the learner meets the required standards for the award (b) the candidate almost meets the required standards but needs to provide additional evidence (c) The candidate has not provided adequate evidence to prove he/she meets the standards for the award.
<b>6. Monitoring</b> The recommended outcome is monitored by the provider and FETAC.	As per award requirement, the outcome of the assessment is monitored.

Source: RPL: Policy and Guidelines (draft). Published by FETAC

It appears from the 2007 European Inventory that simulation and evidences extracted from work, as well as declarative methods are less used in the public sector, while the more popular methodologies are tests/examinations and the competence portfolio.

### 3.7 Outputs/Outcomes and Impact

Statistics from countries with more experience of VINFL, e.g. Denmark, Finland, France, Norway and Portugal suggest that the number of individuals benefiting from validation is on the increase.

In **France**, at first validation did not receive a real welcome from those teachers who were given the responsibility to develop the method *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* or VAP.<sup>1</sup> There was strong opposition to this initiative because it was feared that it would decrease the value of the qualifications delivered - even now such fear still exists. Many people believe that only formal learning in a training centre can produce valid learning outcomes for individuals.<sup>2</sup> However, trust in the concept of validation gradually increased and today it can be said that the introduction of VAE in France has been relatively successful, in particular in terms of public opinion.<sup>3</sup> Since its creation in 2002, there has been a considerable increase in demand from individuals with no or few qualifications, seeking to take up this offer of a 'second chance' and to progress towards a higher level of qualifications. In fact in recent years, the number of requests for VAE has grown so much that public authorities have struggled to meet demand. A total of over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005; just over 10,700 qualifications were awarded in 2002, over 17,700 in 2003 and around 26,700 in 2005. It has been estimated that around 30,000 qualifications were awarded in 2006, of which around 4,000 are university degrees. The number of individuals able to gain certification for their skills through VAE is likely to continue to increase, provided the barriers to access are resolved, together with a formal recognition on the part of employers of its importance.

Alongside the system for VAE, the well-established concept of the *bilan de compétences* or skills audit continues to play an important role in France and more than 70,000 skills audits have now been carried out.<sup>4</sup> The skills audit acts as a formative guidance tool, rather than as a summative assessment and validation instrument and as such, remains a useful step for many individuals in order to assess their skills in advance of seeking VAE.

The competence-based qualification system (*Näyttötutkinto*) is the most established form of validation in **Finland** covering the whole adult education system. The popularity of

<sup>1</sup> In 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to higher education (HE).<sup>1</sup> The process, termed 'VAP 85' enables any person aged at least 20, who ceased their initial studies a minimum of two years ago, to apply for a place on a HE course. In 1992, further legislation enabled the concept of *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* ('VAP 92') to be used for exemptions for qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture (secondary and higher education).

<sup>2</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

<sup>3</sup> 'Education et Formation 2010', Rapport National France 2007

<sup>4</sup> Information taken from the website of the Fédération Nationale des CIBC, www.cibc.net, June 2007

competence-based examinations has increased rapidly since their introduction and they have continued to strengthen their position in the Finnish education system. Besides 52 vocational upper secondary qualifications, there are around 300 further vocational and specialist vocational qualifications on offer. Between 1997 and 2006, just under 365,000 individuals participated in the system, of which 199,000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82,000 were partly qualified. The system has increased significantly in popularity over the past decade, particularly among women. At the start of the system, over half of all participants were male. Over the past years women have constituted over half of all participants and women have a higher completion rate.

Further, the Computer Driving Licence (CDL) mentioned previously has been obtained by more than 144,000 people in Finland and over four hundred educational institutions in the country have been granted a permit from TIEKE to carry out tests and grant the certificate.

In **Norway**, the 1952 Law on vocational training allowed individuals to pass a crafts examination, provided they had sufficient practical work experience.<sup>1</sup> Interest in this flexible arrangement soared from the mid-1990s and onwards. At its peak in the period 1997-99, close to 14,000 candidates annually made use of this opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen above (section 3.5), further reforms in Norway, including the 2002 amendment to the Education Act, extended the opportunities for validation of competences. Between 2000 and 2005 approximately 60,000 persons went through a recognition (validation) procedure in relation to upper secondary level, of which approximately 80% were in vocational subjects.<sup>3</sup>

In **Portugal**, in recent years, in the scope of the SNCP<sup>4</sup> (the National Vocational Certification System), around 30 Specialised Technical Commissions (*Comissões Técnicas Especializadas, CTE*) have been or are in operation. Hundreds of thousands of workers have obtained certification, mostly in relation to pedagogical training for trainers (*formação pedagógica de formadores*), taxi drivers and personal services.

Other examples of initiatives which have had significant impacts in terms of the numbers of individuals accessing validation include:

- **Germany:** More than 25,000 *ProfilPASSes* and *ProfilPASSes* for young people have been awarded and 1700 advisers have been qualified by the initiative.

<sup>1</sup> Normally, two years of theoretical training and two years of practical apprenticeship are required to take a crafts examination.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Norway, [www.ssb.no](http://www.ssb.no)

<sup>3</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the SNCP is currently undergoing a reform

- **Latvia:** In 2001 12,460 people (6397 of whom were unemployed) received the state language certificate, which is awarded following an examination of language skills, regardless of how these were acquired. In 2002 this number was 10,051 (6,142 of whom were unemployed) and in 2003 it was 10,110 (5,321 unemployed).
- **Netherlands:** It is estimated that by 2002, approximately 6,000 persons within 500 organisations had followed an EVC (validation) procedure<sup>1</sup>. The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of validation among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures<sup>2</sup>. The Project Unit 'Learning & Working' of the Dutch government has set itself the goal to stimulate the development of an additional 20,000 EVC procedures by 1 October 2007
- **Romania:** Between 2003 and June 2007 the National Adult Training Board issued 6,050 certificates in 38 assessment centres<sup>3</sup>.
- **Slovenia:** By 2007, 15,271 NVQ certificates had been awarded, of which 3,961 certificates were issued in 2005 and 8,158 in 2006.<sup>4</sup>
- **Sweden:** In 2000, approximately 2300 persons had their competence, knowledge and skills validated and in 2005 this number increased to approximately 8000 persons within municipal adult education<sup>5</sup>.
- **UK:** Information on the number of beneficiaries is limited but the European Commission published in 2000 that in the UK some 28,000 students had benefited from methods to recognise prior learning – and it has been presumed that this figure relates to the vocational qualifications<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>2</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> NATB website

<sup>4</sup> Data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

<sup>5</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>6</sup> Freitag, W. K. (2007) Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Considerable progress has also been made in developing occupational profiles / standards and setting up national reference points for validation. In France, the national vocational certifications directory (RNCP) now contains over 4,100 'fiches' relating to vocational qualifications.<sup>1</sup> In Portugal, around 170 occupational profiles have now been approved and in Greece, a process of accrediting 66 occupational profiles by the end of 2008 is currently being rolled out.

In **Denmark**, it is interesting to note that the trend over the past couple of years has been contradictory to the trend in France and Finland. In 2004, 54,445 Individual Competence Clarifications (ICA) were recorded. This figure declined to 49,995 in 2005 and 24,421 in 2006. However, for the year 2007, it is estimated that 50,000 individuals will be assessed in 'basic skills' programmes. A similar pattern was observed at higher education level in **Norway**. The number of applicants 25 years and older seeking recognition of their formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission to a study programme was 6,000 in 2001 (the first year this was possible). The number of applicants decreased in the following years, to 2,700 in 2006.

It remains to be seen whether a similar pattern will emerge in other countries in the long-term, as initial interest and take-up in validation gradually levels off.

### 3.7.1 Benefits for individuals

Aside from the quantitative data which emerges from the European Inventory, it is also important to take into account the qualitative impact of validation. Our analysis of the validation initiatives included in the Inventory has highlighted a number of positive outcomes for individuals:

- Validation represents a 'second chance' for individuals to acquire new qualifications;
- VINFL can allow individuals to enhance their employability, to move more easily from inactivity into work and to stay employable for longer
- Validation promotes mobility - the development of VINFL systems means that the low-skilled have a wider choice of possible employment and education / training routes;
- Increased job satisfaction can result from the introduction of validation initiatives. Individuals gain improved self-esteem and develop better relationships with colleagues (because there is a more open atmosphere about who can do what). There is a mutual respect across professional profiles and departments, better employee-management relations (because employees feel that they are appreciated and "visible"), there are fewer conflicts and collaboration increases;

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour, 2007

- Validation of informal and non-formal learning can greatly contribute to the reinforcement of self-esteem and self-improvement of participants and has a positive effect on the definition/reconstruction of their personal and vocational plans;
- Validation of informal and non-formal learning can facilitate career progression, salary increases and improve employment conditions; employees also feel more positive about employers who want to take the time and effort for employee development through involvement in initiatives to validate informal and non-formal learning.
- Validation of informal and non-formal learning stimulates people's interest in further education and training;

Some examples of the use and benefits of validation can be drawn from the individual country chapters. In Finland for example, individuals completing competence-based qualifications or individual modules are usually adults aiming to improve their position in the labour market. Many of those who take part are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed. In an evaluation of the Norwegian Validation Project<sup>1</sup>, supervisors and assessors/specialists found that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has a positive effect on candidates, as it gives the candidates more self-respect for example.

It is estimated that almost 40% of the EVC-procedures in the Netherlands are aimed at providing individuals with a nationally recognised diploma; in approximately 30% of cases, concrete follow-up activities have been organised to further develop the individual's competences. The last 30% aims at the possibility of promotion, the selection of staff or a division of tasks<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Agenda (2003a): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS. In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003, pp.10-15*

In Portugal, the update to the 2004 study "Impact of recognition and certification of skills acquired through life" produced in 2007<sup>1</sup> gave a profile of reasons given by participants for making use of the national validation process (SNRVCC), as outlined in the table below:

Reason for participation in RVCC	Absolute Value	Percentage
Personal development	1379	66.1%
Increased employability	550	26.4%
Further studies	693	33.2%
Attractiveness of the system	96	4.6%
Career progression	749	35.9%
Other unspecified reasons	749	4.1%
Total	2087	100%

Source: CIDECE "Impact of recognition and certification of skills acquired through life: Update" (2007).

Respondents also gave other, affective reasons (socialising, sharing experiences and helping children with their homework) as well as self-esteem issues. The RVCC's contribution to increasing self-esteem and self-worth was considered 'important' or 'very important' by 96.6% of respondents. This survey therefore helps to show that validation is not just a tool for certification – it is also an opportunity to support individuals in their personal growth and towards the (re) construction and achievement of personal and vocational life plans.

<sup>1</sup> Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos (CIDECE), May 2007, The Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences: Update, published by the Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional (DGFV)

### 3.7.2 National benefits

VINFL can also bring benefits for society / the economy as a whole, for example by helping to reduce unemployment or supporting disadvantaged groups. The 'results' however are harder to measure and to directly attribute to the introduction of a validation methodology. We have already discussed the rationale for involvement in Section 3.2 and the national benefits of validation are of course closely linked to these. Analysis of the 2007 Inventory country chapters permits some of the perceived advantages at national level to be identified:

- Validation may have a role in reducing unemployment and combat mismatches in the labour market;
- The introduction of VINFL methodologies can stimulate an increased consideration of labour market needs – identification of the skills individuals possess, compared to the skills employers need, can lead to training provision in order to improve the skills match between supply and demand on the labour market
- VINFL can help to stimulate increased cooperation between different stakeholders in the private, public and third sectors – for example as education providers begin to introduce methods of recognising learning acquired outside of formal education and training;
- Validation helps to promote equality of opportunity and create a 'level playing field';
- Validation improves accessibility both within and between education and training sectors, the labour market and the third sector and can promote mobility (geographic and professional) of individuals;
- The efficiency of education and training systems can be improved by introducing VINFL;
- VINFL can help to address economic change (e.g. skills shortages);
- Disadvantaged groups can be supported through VINFL;
- In Higher Education, VINFL can help to combat a shortage of graduates and to attract new target groups.

However, despite of the high take-up rates and identified benefits for individuals and societies, some challenges have been encountered during the implementation of validation methodologies. Some of the challenges and responses to these are discussed in the next section. They provide useful lessons for countries which are in the process of developing their own approaches to VINFL.

## 3.8 Barriers to take-up

A number of challenges and barriers to access have been identified by countries with some experience in the implementation of VINFL. We explore some of these in this section.

### 3.8.1 Resources vs. demand for validation

In some countries, for example France and Portugal, problems have been identified in relation to the availability of resources (financial and human) within the existing systems for validation and in Italy, it is reported that there is a problem of lack of resources to fund the development of new initiatives in the area of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

A 2005 report relating to the French VAE system showed that the organisations and institutions responsible for implementing VAE were insufficiently equipped in terms of resources and expertise<sup>1</sup>. The division of responsibility across the various bodies involved was reported to require more precise definition and the need for increased financial support (e.g. state investment in a single point of access information platform) was emphasised.

In a 2004 evaluation of the Portuguese RVCC system, nearly half of all the RVCC centres (44 per cent) which took part stated that they were facing difficulties in the implementation of the system as a result of insufficient human resources.<sup>2</sup> Inadequate financial resources were stated as the second most prominent barrier by over a third of all the centres (38 per cent).

### 3.8.2 Insufficient training for staff responsible for VINFL

In certain countries, it is clear that take-up of validation is hindered by insufficient training and guidance provided to the staff involved. In the evaluation of the Norwegian Validation Project<sup>3</sup>, surveys among supervisors and assessors/specialists identified a major need for training – around 96% of supervisors and 85% of the assessors/specialists felt that they needed training in the future. In France, it is reported that assessors ('jury members') are generally more used to formal examination procedures, and in many cases have not

<sup>1</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> The Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos – CIDECE (2004) O Impacto do reconhecimento e certificação de competências adquiridas ao longo da vida (Impact of Recognition and Certification of Skills Acquired through Life). The Direcção Geral de Formação Vocacional - DGFV (General Directorate of Vocational Training)

<sup>3</sup> Agenda (2003a): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS. In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

received detailed training on how to implement such (validation) assessment methodologies.<sup>1</sup>

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) launched a pilot project in 2006 to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL. One of the findings of the project was that providers dealing with RPL for the first time require support and advice at all stages of the process. As such, two of the recommendations from the findings of this project<sup>2</sup> related to supporting staff and providers:

- To enhance the current draft guidelines to ensure providers are more clearly informed of RPL (validation) requirements and to review and amend the guidelines on an on-going basis;
- To put in place briefing sessions to further assist providers who can show competence and capacity to implement RPL policy and procedures.

### 3.8.3 Variation in provision

We have already seen that in countries where pilot initiatives have been encouraged, rather than the development of national policies/legislation (e.g. Sweden and the Netherlands) there have been problems to ensure parity in the quality of provision. In Italy, the individual validation pilot projects which can be found across the country vary considerably – each region tends to adopt its own model and 'language' for the validation of competences and its own system for training, qualification and certification. In Norway too, there is variation between the counties in the way they practice recognition of informal and non-formal learning, as well as variation between institutions within the higher education sector.

This can represent a considerable problem in terms of ensuring confidence in the VINFL system and buy-in from stakeholders. Where general criteria are provided, these need to be relevant to all sectors, providers and learners – otherwise it can prove difficult to apply validation procedures across the different sectors.

### 3.8.4 Lack of collaboration

Collaboration - within and across sectors – between all stakeholders (practitioners, policy makers etc.) can help to avoid the above-mentioned problem of variation in provision, as well as to ensure a VINFL system is designed in line with the needs of all relevant stakeholders, thus encouraging increased take-up. However, in some countries (e.g. Sweden, where one of the tasks of the National Commission on Validation has been is to enhance regional cooperation), a need for further collaboration has been identified.

<sup>1</sup> Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

<sup>2</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

In Norway for example, it has been found that there is a need for further cooperation between the educational sector and the labour market. In addition, the cooperation between the employment and welfare offices and the county offices responsible for the recognition of learning at the upper secondary level is reported to be underdeveloped – relatively few unemployed people use the opportunities offered to have their learning validated.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.8.5 Lack of buy-in from companies

The importance of forming partnerships with the private sector has been highlighted by stakeholders and evaluation reports from a number of countries with established validation systems. As an example, the first evaluation of the Finnish competence-based education system (2000) highlighted that while private enterprises were aware of the existence of the system, only a few had any concrete information or knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.8.6 Changing attitudes

In a number of countries, it is evident that there have been difficulties in overcoming traditional attitudes towards the importance of formal education – i.e. that formal qualifications have more ‘value’ than other types of learning. This has been the case, for example, in Lithuania, where one of the main obstacles to greater take-up of the validation initiatives is said to be the lack of tradition and culture towards lifelong learning. In Italy, formal qualifications are given considerable value and in Hungary, it has been found that there is unwillingness among training institutions, particularly among higher education providers, to recognise and validate qualifications and skills acquired outside their own programmes.<sup>3</sup>

In France too, a country with a long tradition of validation, at first there was strong opposition to VINFL because it was feared that it would decrease the value of the qualifications delivered - even now such fear still exists. Many people believe that only formal learning in a training centre can produce valid learning outcomes for individuals.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Yrjölä, P. (2000) Näyttötutkintojärjestelmän kokonaisarviointi. National Board of Education.

<sup>3</sup> National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.13

<sup>4</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

### 3.8.7 Procedural barriers

Individuals may perceive validation procedures to be complicated and lengthy – this may deter them from submitting an application. For example, the 2004 study "Impact of Recognition and Certification of Skills Acquired through Life"<sup>1</sup> in Portugal found that one of the main barriers facing the RVCC (validation) Centres was "*the nature of the process itself*" (29.4% of respondents).

Providers also may be unwilling to implement what they perceive to be lengthy, therefore costly processes and may lead to a fall in income for their institution, if fewer learners enrol on their formal courses. In Denmark for example, the recent OECD report on recognition of non-formal and informal learning identified a lack of incentive for institutions to take up validation (except in institutions that struggle to fill places) because they obtain a greater return from students completing a full programme.

### 3.8.8 Access to information

In a number of countries, it appears that individuals are not fully aware of the opportunities available to them through VINFL.

In Norway, it is reported that opportunities for validation are not widely known, particularly amongst people with low formal education. A comprehensive survey by the National Institute for Adult Learning, Vox entitled "*Awareness of legal rights to upper secondary education*"<sup>2</sup> conducted between 2003 and 2005 showed that of the 21,000 adults participating in upper secondary education, 85% did not know where to go for recognition of their informal or non-formal learning.

Experience from France also suggests that individuals encounter barriers to access to VAE. Poor information, difficulties in putting together a dossier and the costs involved were cited as the principle obstacles to individuals in studies carried out for the Ministry of Employment, published in 2006.<sup>3</sup> As a result, while requests for information regarding VAE have increased considerably, only a small number result in an actual application.<sup>4</sup> For example, studies have shown that 50 per cent of the 70,000 individuals who went to regional *Points Relais* for advice on VAE did not proceed any further than seeking advice.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos, CIDECE (Interdisciplinary Centre for Economic Studies), 2004, O Impacto do reconhecimento e certificação de competências adquiridas ao longo da vida, commissioned by the Direcção Geral de Formação Vocacional - DGFV (General Directorate of Vocational Training)

<sup>2</sup> Haugerud, V., Røstad, S (2004) *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget, sluttrapport*. Oslo: Vox

<sup>3</sup> Etude "la VAE dans les entreprises un atout collectif?" Etude des pratiques dans des TPE & PME-PMI – DGEFP (January 2006); no. 230 of the CEREQ newsletter "La VAE, quels candidats, pour quels diplômes?" (May 2006)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Labour, 27 June 2006, 'Validation des acquis de l'expérience: cinq mesures pragmatiques pour simplifier la procédure', available at [www.travail.gouv.fr](http://www.travail.gouv.fr)

### 3.8.9 Personal barriers

Well-established approaches for validation of informal and non-formal learning have traditionally been, and are primarily aimed at low-skilled individuals, especially in Finland, Denmark and Portugal. These individuals often experience a wide range of barriers to employment. Those who are in employment can suffer from low self esteem and poor educational background. They may therefore find it difficult to engage with initiatives dealing with skills development and validation.

To address this problem in Finland, the government introduced the *Noste* programme in 2003. *Noste* will continue until 2009 and is targeted at low skilled adults aged between 30 and 59. The Programme provides an opportunity to complete upper secondary level vocational qualifications (vocational upper secondary education and training, further or specialist vocational qualifications) or specific modules free of charge.

Some individuals prefer not to take up dispensations from training. This has been found to be the case in Finland and France, where individuals may choose to take up a formal training course rather than pursue an application for validation as they feel they do not have the appropriate theoretical knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.8.10 Gender and validation

Experiences from France and Finland show that individuals choosing to have their informal and non-formal competences recognised and accredited are predominantly women. Hence, in a number of Member States it remains a challenge to attract low-skilled males to have their skills and competences recognised. For example, in France only a third of applicants were men in 2005 (although this is increasing – in 2004 men accounted for only 10% of applicants)<sup>2</sup>. Statistics from Finland also imply that male participants have higher drop-out rates than women, and a higher share of male candidates than female candidates do not complete the validation process.

We have looked at some of the challenges that the countries with experience of validation are facing and we will now move on in our final section to discuss good practice which can be identified from these lessons learned.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop

<sup>2</sup> Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

## 3.9 Success Factors

### 3.9.1 Partnership-working and consultation

We have already discussed the importance of partnership working in the development of public sector validation methodologies, in order to ensure buy-in and take-up of initiatives developed. Partnership-working can enable learning and good practice to be shared and can also help to increase the visibility, credibility and impact of a project. It can thus help to overcome problems of lack of awareness and negative attitudes towards validation.

For instance, the Danish Adult Education Association observes that *old habits must be shaken up* and there must be greater cooperation between institutions. For this purpose, local, inter-institutional adult guidance counselling networks, regional adult guidance forums and a national Council for Adult Guidance will be established in Denmark.

From the information gathered on countries with some experience of VINFL, it is clear that an early involvement of social partners in policy formulation of validation initiatives is crucial to ensure coherence of measures and a degree of ownership (or 'buy-in'). Their involvement can also considerably contribute to the awareness of the initiative among private companies. An evaluation in Sweden of pilot schemes for validation of adult skills in different sectors from 2003-2005 recommended that validation must be carried out in close cooperation between the social partners and education and training institutes.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.9.2 Infrastructure to support legislation

While national legislation and policies provide a framework for the introduction of VINFL, it is essential that these are backed up by the necessary infrastructure, to ensure VINFL can be put into practice. This includes adequate financial and human resources, as well as appropriate training and guidance for staff involved.

For example, in Hungary, although the 2001 Act on Adult Education provided for the assessment of the level of prior learning and its consideration during training as a right of participants in adult education, in practice no regulation regarding the means of its implementation or control was linked to the legislation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, Refemet CEDEFOP

<sup>2</sup> National Report on the Progress in The Implementation of the Education And Training 2010 Work Programme

In France, a '*Plan VAE*' was set in place in September 2006, with the objective to remove barriers to the validation process. It is based on five key practical measures:

- a national information campaign based on two main services: the internet portal [www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr)<sup>1</sup>, which became operational in February 2007 and a helpline service "39 39", together with a communication campaign to inform the public of the right to VAE;
- simplified administration procedures, including one unique form for all VAE candidates, regardless of the qualification they are applying for;
- guaranteed payment of expenses for members of the assessment boards;
- payment of the costs of VAE for the unemployed;
- the implementation of a local policy for the development of VAE.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the national agency for job-seekers (ANPE) has developed tools to increase interest in gaining certification through VAE. The *Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois* or ROME (National repository of skills descriptions) will be linked to the RNCP in 2008, in order to improve the guidance on offer. Furthermore, considerable efforts are being made to raise awareness among private companies.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.9.3 Clear reference frameworks

We have discussed previously the link between standards or profiles and validation and the complementary nature of national qualifications frameworks to the introduction of VINFL. It is evident that clear reference frameworks are essential to ensure transferability, consistency and transparency in VINFL. Again, a recommendation based on the findings of the above-mentioned FETAC pilot project illustrates this point, as it was reported that the accurate and clear style and expression of learning outcomes in the awards standards is essential to ensure credibility of RPL (validation); the learning outcomes must be understandable. Learning outcomes that are vague and overly complex can mean that neither the provider nor the learner may be in a position to make accurate judgements.

### 3.9.4 Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Evaluation

Quality assurance procedures are essential to ensure that validation is applied consistently and fairly across all sectors and providers and to gain the confidence of stakeholders and users in any system. In the Netherlands, the experimentation with EVC has led to a great number and very diverse set of EVC examples which demonstrate what works and what does not work. However, the great diversity has also led to confusion among users concerning the differences in quality of all these EVC procedures. As a result, in 2006, the Dutch government, social partners and other stakeholders decided to start a broad

<sup>1</sup> This website, specifically dedicated to VAE, has contributions from all the ministries and other stakeholders involved.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

consultation process among all stakeholders to assist the development of a quality framework for the EVC procedure. This has led in the same year to the establishment of a “quality code” in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, as with all new initiatives, it is essential to ensure that monitoring and evaluation processes are in place in order to collect data to inform long-term planning, as well as to identify good practice and lessons learned. For example, the 2006 OECD country report on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Norway identified a significant lack of baseline data on issues related to quality assurance, which, according to the report, presents challenges to evaluations of efficient, beneficial and equitable recognition systems.

As mentioned above, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in Ireland launched a pilot project in 2006 to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL (validation). A recommendation based on the findings of the project was to gather and publish data on the number of learners accessing programmes, gaining exemptions and achieving full awards on the basis of RPL (validation).

<sup>1</sup> Notice that the universities are not included as a signed party in the agreement

### 3.10 Conclusions

There are a great many reasons for the introduction of validation of informal and non-formal learning initiatives in the public sector. VINFL can help, among other things, to combat skills shortages and unemployment, to increase mobility, promote equality of opportunity and encourage lifelong learning.

The introduction of VINFL within the public sector can result from a top-down stimulus (national policies or laws) or through bottom-up initiatives, devised in response to identified need. European policy and funding also play an important part in encouraging activity in the sphere of validation. Partnership-working and consultation have been demonstrated to be vital elements of the development process.

The update of the European Inventory has confirmed that wide-reaching developments have taken place throughout Europe in policies, methodologies and legislative frameworks concerning validation since the last Inventory of 2005. Developments have taken place across all of the countries to either strengthen existing systems for validation or introduce new legal and policy frameworks to support the development of VINFL.

It is possible to identify a number of trends in the implementation of VINFL to date. Validation is often initiated in either the vocational or adult education sector and vocational or professional subjects seem to have been more popular for VINFL applicants to date.

Examples can be found of the use of a number of validation approaches but the most predominant appear to be tests and examinations and the portfolio method. A number of countries do not prescribe in detail at national level the validation methodology which must be used, instead giving guidelines or principles which validation should align with.

Quantitative data collected from the countries within the 2007 Inventory shows suggest that the number of individuals benefiting from validation is on the increase. Numerous different outcomes for individuals who partake in validation can also be identified, such as increased employability, greater confidence and self-esteem, career progression and salary increases, as well as increased job satisfaction.

Experience to date has made it possible to identify lessons learned and good practice in the validation of informal and non-formal learning, which have been illustrated throughout this compendium and summarised in sections 1.8 and 1.9. It is hoped that these lessons and good practice will serve to inform the development of new and improvement of existing VINFL initiatives.

## 4.0 Private Sector Initiatives – A Compendium

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### 4.1 Introduction

This compendium forms part of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning<sup>2</sup>. The Inventory provides an up-to-date catalogue of good practices in validation and is an important reference for stakeholders. It is made up of 32 individual country chapters, six case studies, three ‘sectoral’ compendia (of which this is one) and an overall report of findings. The compendia (public, private and third sector) discuss key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches within the three different sectors. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation (in particular, practitioners), who will find the compendia have an eminently practical focus.

This Private Sector compendium examines the following issues in turn:

- Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Private Sector
- Private Sector VINFL in practice
- Rationale for involvement in validation initiatives
- Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives
- Methods employed
- Outputs / Outcomes and Impact
- Barriers to take-up
- Success Factors
- Conclusions

The findings within the 32 country chapters of the European Inventory have been analysed to inform the content of this compendium. Throughout, examples of initiatives have been taken from the country chapters<sup>3</sup>, to illustrate good practice and lessons learned in the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) in the private sector. The aim is to enhance the exchange of experiences and to enable different sectoral stakeholders to learn from tried and tested initiatives in their field without needing to refer to the detailed individual country chapters.

<sup>1</sup> Expert input provided by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/)

<sup>3</sup> Many examples are examined in more detail within the individual country chapters, all of which can be found on the European Inventory website

## 4.2 Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Private Sector

The 2005 Inventory noted that particular difficulties were encountered in gathering data on private sector activities and suggested that the scarcity of information might be a sign of lack of information / openness (e.g. as companies are reluctant to reveal their HR strategies) rather than lack of initiatives, an issue that the 2005 Inventory suggested be subject of further investigation in future editions of the Inventory. The individual country chapters of the 2007 Inventory focus in greater detail on validation in the private sector and each 2007 chapter gives a deeper overview of developments in the implementation of VINFL in the context of the workplace and employment, including activities carried out by individual companies, by social partners and collaborative activities supported by both of these actors, and / or other stakeholders. However, the lack of available data remains a problem in certain countries.

The country chapters of the 2007 Inventory reveal a great variety in the level of interest and activity in validation across the private sector. It appears that there is an increasing awareness in most of the countries of the importance of recognising individuals' skills and competences, although this is not always reflected in the implementation of validation practices.

In some countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) few (if any) examples of private sector initiatives were identified. For example, in Estonia, no specific instruments and methodologies have been approved for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning; a description of professional activities is mostly used in the form of a CV or statements from employers. In the Czech Republic, it was noted that although recognition of acquired non-formal and informal skills in the national labour market is considered important, no much formal validation or accreditation of these skills takes place.

In other countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Ireland) the private sector is very active in validation, either in delivering its own initiatives, or through working in partnership with (mainly) public sector actors. In Denmark, for instance, there has been a long tradition of VINFL in the private sector, with examples of usage dating back to the 1990s. In Finland, due to their integral role in the national competence-based qualification scheme, the involvement of social partners and individual companies in the validation of informal and non-formal learning is very strong.

### 4.3 Private Sector VINFL in practice

Individuals can gain a wide range of skills and competences as a result of their professional experience. To give an idea of the magnitude of this learning, a study commissioned by the German Ministry of Education and Training in 2003<sup>1</sup> showed that around 61% of all working people in Germany take part in one or several types of informal vocational learning. Self-directed learning via observation and practice in the workplace and via reading work-related texts, reference books or specialist journals was mentioned by 38% and 35% of those questioned. The third and fourth most frequent responses referred to on-the-job instruction or crash-course training by colleagues (25%) or supervisors (22%). Around one in six members of the German workforce takes part in work-related trade fairs or congresses, and about one in eight reported receiving on-the-job instruction or crash-course training from someone from outside their company.

VINFL aims to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired. It is a key instrument for the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. As such, it represents an important tool for recognising skills gained through professional activities and experience, as equal to those gained in a formal education setting. Further, validation can be used within the private sector to recognise skills and competences individuals might have developed in other settings (e.g. at home, through voluntary work or other third sector activities) which can be transferred to the workplace. Other benefits of validation are explored in more detail below, in the sections 'Rationale for Involvement' and 'Outputs / Outcomes and Impact'.

Within the country chapters of the 2007 Inventory, three different approaches to validation are evident in the private sector:

- validation *developed and delivered* by private sector stakeholders (individual companies and social partners) in relation to professional competences acquired through both non-formal and informal learning;
- *participation of private sector stakeholders* (including social partners) in public or third sector initiatives to validate informal and non-formal learning;
- validation of private sector activities (professional experience) through initiatives *delivered within other sectors* (generally, public initiatives). For example, under the French national system of VAE, professional activities are eligible within the three

<sup>1</sup> Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX: Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland, BMBF, 2006, p. 188.

years of experience required to undergo a validation procedure but assessment and certification is delivered, in general, by public education and training providers.

This compendium will focus mainly on the first two of the above scenarios (validation delivered by private sector organisations and their involvement in the development / delivery of other sectors' initiatives). Further information on the validation of private sector activities (professional experience) within public sector initiatives can be found in the equivalent Public Sector Compendium, in the overall final report and in the individual country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory.

#### **4.4 Rationale for Involvement in validation initiatives**

The research has identified some of the reasons for involvement of the main private sector stakeholders: Private Sector Companies, the Social Partners and Individual Beneficiaries. We will explore these in turn below.

##### **4.4.1 Private sector companies**

- *To recognise informal and non-formal learning in the workplace*

The workplace is an important setting for learning<sup>1</sup>. In Norway, a survey concluded that:

- employees regard their workplace as the most important venue for learning
- employers believe practice is the best way of learning.

We have already recognised that the skills and competences developed in the workplace deserve equal recognition to those developed through formal education. VINFL represents an important tool to facilitate this recognition.

Whilst much learning occurs in the workplace, its identification is problematic. The *VAI (Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs)* project, funded through the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, serves as an example. The project aims to identify, develop, test and fine-tune a methodology and a set of tools (the *VAI KIT*), suitable to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities existing within European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning.<sup>2</sup> Further details of this project can be found below.

- *To recognise informal and non-formal learning outside of the workplace*

<sup>1</sup> [www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf](http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf). In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from a Leonardo VPL-2 Case Study Grid

Life-wide skills and competences, for example developed in the home, through voluntary and community activities or membership of a sports or youth club, can be transferred to the workplace.<sup>1</sup> Some employers are beginning to employ VINFL to assess the relevance and make full use of these skills.

In Finland, for example, a growing number of companies are making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system. They are using the broader framework of this system to recognise skills and competences that their employees have acquired at work and in other parts of life (in formal, informal or non-formal settings). A range of different companies have been identified which are active in this field. The companies / organisations range from public to private employers and social enterprises, from large to small businesses and from traditional manufacturing businesses to companies competing in new markets. For example, Fortum Gas, a leading gas company in the Nordic area, has extensive experience in providing employees with an opportunity to obtain an official qualification that matches the key competences they have learnt in the work place (in the field of chemistry and management). Are Oy, a family-owned real estate / construction company employing in the region of 1,500 workers (mainly in Finland, but also in Russia, Estonia and Latvia) has trained a considerable share of its employees over the past decade through the apprenticeship and competence-based qualification scheme. Continuing training and validation of prior learning have become a key HR and business strategy for the company.

- *To identify training needs / skills gaps*

Some methodologies enable employers to identify skills gaps and thus to tailor company training around this information.

Formative assessments enable an individual to identify the skills and competences they possess and any further learning needs they might have to develop these further. For example, in Greece, Aluminium de Grèce SA<sup>2</sup> has established a 'Continuing Progress System' where employees record their own existing knowledge, skills and competences through team discussions and through personal assessment processes. In this way, each employee is closely involved in determining their own and their teams' future skills needs, helping to set out the necessary training which then takes place either in-house or outside the company.

<sup>1</sup> The Compendium on Validation in the Third Sector gives a more detailed observation of the validation of skills and competences individuals develop through participation in third sector activities and the methods used to validate these

<sup>2</sup> Based on information from the 'Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications', Fourth Follow up report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and on brief telephone discussion with the company's Education Dept

In a Danish study<sup>1</sup> of six enterprises that used 'Individual Competence Assessment' (IKA) to develop a corporate culture of lifelong learning, the employers noted that assigning tasks became easier on the basis of competencies rather than 'who makes the most noise'. They also felt that IKA allowed them to design training specifically according to their employees' needs and because it led to a new distribution of job assignments within the company, it resulted in less repetitive work for employees.<sup>2</sup>

- *To support career development*

By recognising an individual's skills and competences, VINFL also helps to determine their 'potential'. It can thus be used as a tool to support career development, by enabling the individual and their employer to understand their skills gaps (see previous point) and how their skills and competences are and could be used and improved.

In Denmark, social partners within the production and service sector have further developed (subscribe to) the philosophy of LEAN production, which has a core element of competence development for skilled and unskilled workers. There is also a national framework for LLL i.a. aiming to move workers away from basic competences and to achieve more specialised competences.<sup>3</sup>

- *To award qualifications*

Another set of private sector methodologies aims at issuing qualifications or certificates based on competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal training courses, enabling individuals to learn valuable, transferable skills and competences, can be delivered in-house by private companies, by the social partners or by private training providers.

For example, the *Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)* operates a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects such as word-processing, databases, spreadsheets etc, based on the Chamber's own examinations. These certificates enjoy recognition by the enterprises who are members of the Chamber, but also from other private companies and public organisations.

- *To gain recognition for professional experiences in the form of access to and / or exemptions / shortened duration of education and training courses*

<sup>1</sup> The Ramboll Management Study

<sup>2</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

<sup>3</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2005)

Validation of skills and competences developed at work can be used to facilitate access to education and training. Further, VINFL can also be used to grant exemptions and / or reduce the length of a formal education or training course.

For example, a collaborative project between four pharmaceutical companies and the Transport Training Board of Denmark offered an accelerated training programme for unskilled or semi skilled workers in the transportation field. Participants were allowed to complete the course in 4-12 months and importantly the school-based element lasted between 6-9 weeks, as opposed to the regular 50 weeks.<sup>1</sup>

- *In response to skills shortages/changes in skills needs*

We have already seen that VINFL can be particularly relevant for companies driven by technological innovation or affected by economic changes leading to skills shortages. By helping to support individuals in the recognition and development of their competences in working with new technologies, VINFL can overcome the problem of a lack of formal qualifications in certain sectors. It can also be a helpful tool to address economic changes such as skills shortages, or a downturn within a sector. Validation can help to identify people with the competences required and provides clear evidence of these competences.

The 'Investing in People' project, funded through the ESF Equal Programme, set up a validation initiative in response to a problem of unemployment in the Italian province of Macerata, resulting from the restructuring of private companies, particularly in the shoemaking industry. The introduction of VINFL to the area was felt to be an appropriate means of tackling some of the unemployment problems in the province relating to a skills mismatch<sup>2</sup> because the process identifies skills achieved through all types of learning i.e. formal, non-formal and informal, which may be unconscious to the individual but relevant to the labour market. This information could then be used to find new positions for the unemployed. VINFL therefore helped to address a change in the skills needs in the region. The project is examined in a detailed case study which forms part of the 2007 European Inventory and is available on the Inventory website.

- *To comply with mandatory certification requirements (e.g. EU or national legislation)*

In some industries and occupations, there are a growing number of regulatory requirements for individuals to have particular certificates or qualifications before being able to take up certain jobs. VINFL represents a way of attaining these qualifications by recognising an individual's informal and non-formal learning, on a par with formal education and training.

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the unemployed do not have the skills required by employers in the area

In Ireland, for example, it is noted that industries such as security, childcare, construction and hospitality, are generating demand for VINFL to enable existing workers to access newly required qualifications. This is in response to an interest in professionalising the workforce and more significantly for some, the need to meet new regulatory requirements for practice. In nursing too, the original requirement for entry into the profession has increased from diploma to degree level, which has created a need for VINFL. Now all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that supply nursing courses in Ireland use VINFL to allow nurses returning to the profession to have their knowledge and experience recognised.

#### 4.4.2 Social Partners

Social partners' involvement in the development of private sector VINFL initiatives may also be motivated by some of the reasons we have listed above. Additional reasons for their involvement can be identified, such as:

- *To ensure the sector is represented in the development of (national) initiatives*

By participating in the development of national VINFL initiatives, social partners can make sure that the 'voice' of the private sector is heard and that their needs are taken into account.

For example, in Norway, the mandate of the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) which took place between 1999 and 2002 was first geared towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning for individuals wanting to enter into education. The social partners called (successfully) to extend the mandate of the Project to include the development of validation tools for working life as well.

- *To ensure consistency / transferability in the development of initiatives*

It is important that VINFL initiatives, whether developed on a national, sectoral or at individual company level, are transferable, to enable individuals to fully benefit from them. Social partners can help to ensure consistency and transferability in the development of initiatives by negotiating on behalf of and between large numbers of employers in different economic sectors.

In Belgium, for example, social partners were involved at both cross-sectoral and sectoral level, in collaboration with the public actors, in the definition of systems of references within the framework of the validation of competencies.<sup>1</sup> Developing initiatives in this way, to link in with frameworks of qualifications or standards, helps to ensure an element of transferability and sustainability – individuals are able to achieve evidence of their

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Belgium, published by Cedefop

competences which is recognised on a sectoral or national level (thereby supporting mobility).

- *To help raise awareness / encourage wider take-up of VINFL within the private sector*

Social partners can help to disseminate the benefits of VINFL widely within the private sector. In France, social partners have collaborated with regional public bodies to raise awareness and provide information regarding VAE among their representatives. For example, information days have been held by the CRIS<sup>1</sup> (VINFL coordination centres) to inform and train representatives of the CFDT (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*) in the Centre and Loire regions.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Individual beneficiaries

It is clear that individuals can benefit greatly from taking part in a validation procedure (whether this is implemented in the private, public or third sector) but each person will have a different reason to make use of VINFL. Again, some of the reasons listed above in section 4.4.1 also apply to individual beneficiaries of validation, such as:

- *To get their informal and non-formal learning in the workplace recognised*
- *To get their informal and non-formal learning outside of the workplace recognised*
- *To identify their training needs / skills gaps*
- *To receive professional qualifications*
- *To gain recognition for professional experiences in the form of exemptions/shortened duration of education and training courses*
- *To support career development*
- *To comply with mandatory certification requirements (e.g. EU legislation)*

In Norway, for example, the social-partner based projects carried out under the national Validation Project aimed to be useful for the individual when applying for a new job in the labour market or when applying for admission to an educational institution. Throughout this compendium, our case study examples show how individuals have benefited from individual VINFL initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> *Cellule Régionale Interservices*

<sup>2</sup> *Les Entreprises et les acteurs socio-économiques face à la VAE, Actions, projets, animations des Cellules Régionales Inter-Services (CRIS), February 2006*

Another reason for individuals to take part in validation initiatives is to benefit from 'soft outcomes' such as improved confidence and self-esteem. These soft outcomes may then help an individual to gain access to formal education and/or employment, or simply to take on more variety or responsibility within their current role. These benefits to individuals are explored in more detail in the Section 'Outputs / Outcomes and Impact' below.

VINFL can also be particularly useful to disadvantaged groups, e.g. the unemployed, older workers and people with disabilities. For example, the *Jernvilje project* was carried out in Northern Jutland, Denmark, one of the regions most affected by unemployment in the traditional industries. Here, validation plays a key role in helping the unemployed return to the labour market. The project involves the Metal Union, Aalborg Technical College and local employment authorities. They use the above-mentioned individual competence assessment (IKA) methodology to identify the individual's competences, which allows the individual to re-qualify and re-enter the labour market. The assessment is carried out quickly, before the individual becomes unemployed for too long. In total 85% of participants in this project have re-entered the labour market.<sup>1</sup>

The example below of validation projects in Flanders, Belgium, which have been implemented by VOKANS, an organisation set up by two trade unions, demonstrates how disadvantaged groups can be supported using VINFL.

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

#### VINFL to support disadvantaged groups, VOKANS, Belgium

vzw VOKANS ('*Vormings- en opleidingskansen*' - Vocational Training and Education Opportunities), was set up in 1990. The trade unions ACV and ACW form the basis of this non-profit organisation.

vzw VOKANS has been recognized and subsidised for some considerable time now as a vocational training and employment organization; it pursues the objective of increasing and sustaining employment opportunities for job-seekers and employees. VOKANS is running or has already conducted a number of projects on the recognition of acquired skills.

The '*competentiespiegel*' ('skills mirror') is directed towards recognition of various forms of acquired knowledge, abilities and attitudes from a non-formal framework, specifically for low-skilled women with little in the way of work experience of relevance to the labour market. These women will consequently be better screened and more efficiently steered towards labour-market-oriented training courses and thence towards regular employment.

The 'E=MC2' project pursues the objective of offering the unemployed or other groups more concrete prospects of employability. The e-learning method proposed by the project is based on the VINFL perspective. Through the application of the existing VINFL methods, attempts are being made to achieve two development goals: first, the professional development of the individual and, second, developing supply among organisations on the labour market. The project is designed to increase the motivation of the beneficiaries and to enable them to develop new skills through e-learning (*e-learning van competenties - eVC*).<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.4.4 Sectoral trends

Initial analysis suggests that validation is more relevant / prominent among larger-sized companies, although a few examples of initiatives within small and medium-sized enterprises can also be drawn from our research.

In the new Member States in particular, the introduction of VINFL is generally led by larger companies, often those which are under foreign ownership. For example, in Hungary it is reported that companies which are currently working with VINFL are primarily West-European multinational companies which have introduced general international concepts amongst into their working practices across all countries. This is also reported to be the case in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic, among others.

It also emerges that certain sectors are more active in the implementation of VINFL. In Germany, awareness and demand for VINFL methodologies and procedures is said to be especially relevant for fields in which specific competencies are essential,<sup>2</sup> such as

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006. Cedefop.

mechatronics, IT and multimedia, electrical engineering and the metal-working occupations. In Lithuania, the following occupations and industries are highlighted: metalwork; working with machine-tools; the furniture industry, the food industry, electronics and the chemical and construction industries. It can thus be inferred that validation is particularly useful in industries which are dependent on the use of technologies – as these technologies evolve over time, employees must also adapt and learn new ways of working. The 2005 inventory explored areas of use of validation in the private sector and highlighted the importance of VINFL in 'traditional professions', where employees tend to be less qualified and employers find it difficult to release employees for training, as well as in 'new professions', where formal qualifications have not yet been established.

Our case study of validation in the Netherlands processing industry<sup>1</sup> outlines the use of validation in a sector which is undergoing significant change. Due to a movement to lower cost countries, technological change and an increased demand for made-to-measure goods, the demand for lower skilled labour in the processing industry is dropping while the demand for higher skilled labour is showing an increase. Validation is thus being employed within the industry to motivate workers to improve their skills.

*Radiocom*, the National Radio Communications Company in Romania, serves as a good example of the importance of validation to help a company adapt to technological innovation.

#### **Validation at *Radiocom*, the National Radio Communications Company, Romania<sup>2</sup>**

The certification of competences (knowledge and abilities) is considered to be a necessity in the radio communications industry. The communications sector is subject to fast transformations and evolutions and there is a need for individuals to maintain the level of competence required by market conditions and changes in modern technology.

*Radiocom* is keen to maintain a high professional standard and at the same time, for its employees to acquire new competences. In addition, the company also allocates a special moral and material importance to the certification and validation of competences. Thus, the company has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios. Assessments are then conducted by internal assessors (specialists in the field of the respective occupation) who are certified as assessors of competencies by the National Adult Training Board.

Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, *Radiocom* has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies. These certificates have national recognition and are treated similarly to the study certificates obtained through formal learning. Individuals who partake in the validation processes thus benefit from regular performance assessment, as well as career and salary progression. For the employer organisations, the benefits are: achievement of better relations in the workplace, reduced time of the personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced in the system and reduced time for personnel to learn, know, work and monitor equipment.

<sup>1</sup> Please see the Inventory website for the full version of this case study

<sup>2</sup> Information based on the text of an interview, supplied by a representative of the NATB (National Adult Training Board), Romania

## 4.5 Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives

In this section, we will explore the methods of development of VINFL which have been identified from the country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory. These can be divided into 'bottom-up' initiatives, 'top-down' initiatives and those which result from a stimulus at European level (through funding programmes such as Leonardo da Vinci and EQUAL). We will also refer to the role of social partners in developing initiatives and explore the importance of partnership-working and consultation, as well as linking to national standards and qualifications.

### 4.5.1 Bottom-up approaches

In many countries, individual companies and social partners are developing VINFL initiatives, in response to identified need at sectoral or company level. In Ireland, for example, employers and the social partners are reported to be taking a more active interest in validation and are key drivers in taking forward much of the development of VINFL in the country.

In the Netherlands too, the number of individual companies - particularly larger enterprises - that have set up EVC procedures for employees is gradually increasing. Many of these projects started as small pilots, eventually leading to full-scale integration of EVC in human resources policies, yet there is also room for further development. In Romania, the 2007 Inventory country chapter indicates there are individual companies that are interested in developing validation methodologies and the scattered initiatives currently in place are said to show the need and potential for better developed and more standardised VINFL methodologies. Indeed, there are companies that have utilised the certification system of the Romanian National Adult Training Board to assess and certify competences of employees that have been gained in informal and non-formal settings. For example, the Romanian Commercial Bank had an assessment centre for the validation of the competences specific for occupations within the banking field. The Romanian Crafts Foundation<sup>1</sup> also promotes professional certification of competences, acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Moreover, there is evidence that bottom-up initiatives can have a knock-on effect on other stakeholders and thus help to encourage wider take-up of VINFL. For example, in Slovenia, most companies in the pharmaceutical sector have followed the example set by *Krka*, the country's largest pharmaceutical company, which was the first to implement standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning recognised at the national level (see below for further details). *Koskisen Oy*, in Finland, which is also given as an example in more detail below, shows how a

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crafts.ro>

single company can influence others within the same industry to adopt validation methodologies.

#### 4.5.2 Social Partner involvement

Social partners can play a key role in helping to introduce and promote validation within the private sector. This can be through implementing their own initiatives, supporting individual company or public sector initiatives, or by promoting validation among relevant stakeholders. There are many reasons for this involvement, as validation can bring benefits to the social partners themselves, as outlined in our previous section 1.4.2.

In Slovenia, for example, the Chamber of Craft (OZS) has been a partner in the process of preparation of two occupational standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- for truck drivers
- for people responsible for logistics in international freight / international truck traffic.

These two certificates were developed to certify the knowledge of people already working in that field for many years, but who did not have any official recognition.

In Italy, the enterprise associations (such as the National Craft Confederation or SME associations) have been devoting efforts to translate important pilot experiences of analysis and identification of competences carried out in single corporate contexts into the wider industrial system. There have been pilot projects at national and transnational level and the challenge now is to diffuse best practices and capitalise on what has been learned, promoting more extensive and homogeneous actions. Social partners, as representative 'umbrella' bodies can help to coordinate these actions.

The Portuguese social partners make efforts to inform companies and workers about the national Network of Centres for Recognition and Validation of Lifelong Competences and Qualifications, in recognition that the system gives them the opportunity to make progress concerning both career and new training directions.<sup>1</sup> This scheme now falls under the national *New Opportunities Initiative*<sup>2</sup> - by 2007 over 57,000 adults were engaged in a validation procedure at a New Opportunities Centre.

<sup>1</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, January 2006, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

<sup>2</sup> The recent 'New Opportunities' Initiative (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*), established within the scope of the National Employment Plan and the Technological Plan in 2005, defines a comprehensive qualification strategy for the Portuguese population, taking as reference the generalisation of secondary education as a minimum education level.

By helping to introduce formal agreements such as Collective Labour Agreements (CAOs), social partners can encourage wider take-up of validation. In the Netherlands, the national EVC (validation) Knowledge Centre offers an overview of sectors where agreed CAOs include validation. Currently, these are: (1) retail in potatoes, vegetables and fruit; construction; (2) child care, (3) the metal industry (4) legal assistance and, (5) welfare and social services<sup>1</sup>. These EVC agreements are often financed by the Training Funds (O&O funds) which have been set up to support the educational initiatives of employees. In contrast, in sectors where no EVC agreements have been included in the CAOs, the employee is much more dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved<sup>2</sup> and fund validation.

Another example of a national-level social partner agreement to encourage take-up of VINFL can be found in France, where the first National Collective Agreement on Lifelong Learning dates back to 2003. It was amended two years later when conditions on how to implement VINFL were added. Furthermore, on 15 February 2007, a national agreement on the development of VINFL was signed by the French Minister-Delegate Gérard Larcher, with employers' organisations MEDEF, CGPME, UPA, UNAPL and 16 professional sectors. The signatories confirmed their commitment to validation, an essential tool for the recognition of competences. Between 2002 and 2005 111,200 validation actions benefiting workers within the framework of the schemes for individual training leave were financed. During the same period, organisations at sectoral level also created numerous vocational qualification certificates (CQPs) to recognise acquired skills and competences,<sup>3</sup> of which 425 in 2005.

Social partner agreements containing paragraphs on VINFL can also be found in Scandinavian countries.

#### 4.5.3 Top-down approaches

Where there are strong national policies or programmes in place to support VINFL, these can provide a stimulus for private sector stakeholders to become more involved in validation and to take it on in their own activities. This might be as a result of public sector funding to support private sector initiatives or through guidance and partnership-working in public sector programmes.

For example, in Norway, nine experimental projects targeting the labour market or working life were carried out under the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*), during the period 1999-2002. The Ministry of Education and Research was responsible for

<sup>1</sup> EVC en cao's, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: [www.kenniscentrum.nl](http://www.kenniscentrum.nl)

<sup>2</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

the Project, which was conducted by Vox, the National Institute for Adult Learning, in close cooperation with the social partners, the education sector and the third sector. The private sector projects were carried out by the social partners in different sectors, study associations and county administrations which cooperated with enterprises. Some projects were directed at specific sectors or industries, other projects were focused on a geographical area. During the Validation Project, internet-based tools were developed for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies, which are now known as 'competence passports'. The different Competence Passport tools developed are free for enterprises to use, unlike existing commercial tools for charting which work tasks an employee can do. For example, Vox has made a Competence Card available on their website<sup>1</sup>. Existing commercial tools for charting competence in work tasks are for use within an enterprise. The Competence Card tools can be used both within an enterprise and also by employees, when applying for a new job or when applying for admission to an educational institution on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning.

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) launched a pilot project in 2006 to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL. This project involved nine providers and participants included the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), the employer industry association for the construction industry. As part of its Performance Recognition and Enhancement Project (CIF/PREP) the CIF took part in the FETAC pilot project where it implemented an RPL process with employees (and owners) of small and medium sized companies in the construction sector. This project resulted in six construction company employees achieving FETAC awards on the basis of RPL for the first time in Ireland.

In Luxembourg, there are validation procedures in place for the formal apprenticeship schemes delivered by the professional chambers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. These apprenticeships are managed jointly by the Ministry of Education and the professional Chambers. Training takes place either through the Centre National de Formation Professionnelle Continue (CNFC), or in one of the technical Lycées.

National 'validation' bodies can help to encourage and inform the development of VINFL in the private sector too. In Iceland, for example, the work of the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has stimulated a number of industry projects carried out using methods to validate non-formal and informal learning, for example in the car mechanics and carpentry industries and the social work sector.

<sup>1</sup> [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no)

#### 4.5.4 Support at European level

A final stimulus for a number of transnational VINFL initiatives in the private sector is the availability of European funding for such work. Developing transnational projects on VINFL offers a major opportunity to test local/national validation methods and to disseminate methods and experiences at a larger scale. Our research identified a number of projects funded through, for example, the Leonardo da Vinci and EQUAL programmes.

In Greece, two projects took place within framework of the European Community EQUAL Initiative (under the first round of funding, from 2001 to 2005). These were “*Technomatheia*” promoting the distance accreditation of skills in SMEs and “*ENVI-E*” for the accreditation of professional qualifications in the environmental sector.

Another example is the *CAST (Competencies and skills in tourism)* project, a Leonardo project with two Spanish partners: BDF (*Balear de desarrollo y formación*) and the *Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma* (2003-2006). The aims of this project were to analyse what ICT professional competences are required in the tourist sector in Spain and other countries, what training in ICT is carried out and what training is needed. The end results of the projects were a methodology for the recognition, validation and accreditation of competences in the work place in tourism and a handbook for the harmonisation of professional competences in the sector. The project employed an accreditation methodology using a web tool (*CREDICAST*) and an ‘ePortfolio’.<sup>1</sup>

The *VAI* project, which is examined in more detail below, was funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the Investing in People project, which is the subject of a case study within the 2007 Inventory, was funded by the EQUAL programme. Many other examples can be found throughout this compendium and the individual country chapters.

The EuroguideVAL project<sup>2</sup> which is developing occupational standards, training standards and training materials for professionals working in the field of validation, is also funded by the Leonardo programme. The partnership has undertaken research into professional practice in guidance and counselling, assessment and certification related to non-formal and informal learning in each country concerned (Estonia, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The results of this research have been used to identify the competences, knowledge and methodological approaches used by professionals working in these areas. The project aims to define a common European framework of competences for the initial and continuing training of these professionals.

<sup>1</sup> Contribution of BDF and information retrieved from the web. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.castsite.net/descrpcion.asp?idioma=2&conexion=>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euroguideval.org/choix.html>

European funding clearly represents an important stimulus for the development of VINFL projects in the private sector, since it offers a chance to pilot new ideas, before making any form of long-term commitment. This is important to help private sector stakeholders to overcome barriers to validation such as those listed below in this compendium.

Further details of EU-funded projects relating to validation can be found on the Cedefop Virtual Community website.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.5.5 Partnership-working, consultation and feedback

All three of the above methods of development demonstrate the importance of working in partnership and consultation with relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure buy-in and take-up of initiatives developed. Partnership-working can enable learning and good practice to be shared and can also help to increase the visibility, credibility and impact of a project.

A key issue is how to work in partnership in practice. The example below describes how the company *Freescale Semiconductor* worked in partnership with the regional *Points-Relais-Conseil* (regional VINFL information points) in France.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### VAE in the company 'Freescale Semiconductor Toulouse'

In Toulouse, the PRCs (*Points-Relais-Conseil*) worked with Freescale Semiconductor to implement a project to provide information about VAE in the context of lifelong learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* – the French national validation system) on both a collective and individual basis for its employees. The project's priority target group was the 880 employees working as operatives but the communication campaign implemented as part of the project had the potential to reach out to the entire Freescale Semiconducteur Toulouse workforce, which totals 1900 people.

Following an internal communication campaign run by the company's Human Resources department from January to March 2005, the PRC developed two information tools relating to VAE within the strategy for lifelong learning at Freescale: one for managers and a second for employees. In June 2005, four information meetings were organised by the PRC and held at the Freescale Toulouse studio (one on a Saturday and one in the evening, in order to allow all employees the opportunity to attend), which were attended by 225 people. 11 on-site visits then enabled 48 Freescale employees to access information on an individual basis. Around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through the French national system of VINFL.

These activities were funded by the FONGECIF Midi-Pyrénées<sup>1</sup> and Freescale.

Evaluation of initiatives is also crucial to ensure the learning and good practice can be shared and developed. A good example of this is the organisation *FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvaartstukken* (Service in labour market issues) in the Netherlands.

### Evaluation to inform VINFL, FCB, Netherlands

*FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvaartstukken* was set up by the social partners MOgroep, ABVAKABO FNV and CNV Publieke Zaak to support the welfare and social service sectors, youth care and child care services to function optimally in a changing labour market and society.

In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC<sup>2</sup>-procedures in the childcare sector to gain better insight:

- into the quality of EVC-procedures;
- into differences among EVC-providers; and
- to offer employers and employees experience with EVC-procedures.

FCB has undertaken an in-depth evaluation of the organised EVC-procedures to shed light on the motivations and satisfaction of the EVC-candidates, the quality of the procedures, and other aspects in order to make recommendations for the future use of EVC in the sector. A useful outcome of their evaluation for example, is the fact that considerable differences among EVC-providers have been identified, especially in the field of valuing experience. The identification of these differences through an evaluation enables experiences and learning to be shared among those actors involved and beyond. At

<sup>1</sup> FONGECIF: Fonds paritaire interprofessionnel régional agréé pour la Gestion du Congé Individuel de Formation et du congé bilan de compétences.

<sup>2</sup> *Erkenning Verworven Competenties*- Recognition of Acquired Skills

the moment, the practice of evaluating EVC-procedures and making recommendations for the future is not yet usual practice in the Netherlands<sup>1</sup>.

FCB continues to evaluate EVC-procedures, now in the Welfare and social service and Youth care sector, aiming to improve the quality of EVC-procedures. FCB also tries to stimulate the use of EVC-procedures by offering co-financing through the European Social Fund."<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.5.6 Links to formal standards and qualifications

Examples can be drawn from the 2007 Inventory country chapters of initiatives which have endeavoured to develop their own occupational or competence profiles, without linking into national systems. Others have been developed to link in with national frameworks of qualifications or standards, which should help to ensure an element of transferability and sustainability for the projects.

The 2007 European Inventory reveals some examples of projects to develop occupational or competence profiles for the private sector. In Greece, the Leonardo project EPO, *European Postmen*, which started in 2004 is co-ordinated by the Hellenic Post Office and involves Greece Continuing Training Centres as well as the Vocational Education and Training Organisation.<sup>3</sup> The project aims to develop a common competence profile for European postmen involving 15 units and for two different skills levels.

<sup>1</sup> *Evaluation EVC-procedures Leidsters Kinderopvang en Peuterspeelzalen 2004-2006*, FCB. Retrieved 18 August:

<http://www.fcbwjk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatie%20rapport%20evc%20ko%20psz.doc>

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by KVB by email 28/08/2007

<sup>3</sup> This is an independent organisation that belongs to the Ministry of Education.

The Value of Work is another example of a transnational project to develop competence standards:

#### Developing Competence Standards, The Value of Work, Iceland

In Iceland, the Education and Training Service Centre received a grant from the Leonardo Da Vinci programme for a pilot project entitled "The Value of Work". The project aims to develop methods to validate the actual skills of individuals in the labour market. Partner countries are Denmark, England, Cyprus, Slovenia and Sweden.

In Iceland, Denmark, and Cyprus the pilot project will be applied to bank employees. Standards of competences will be developed for the validation of skills among bank employees. A handbook will be available containing a description of the various elements of skills, and methods and instruments to assess employees' skills will be developed. Emphasis will be put on the general applicability of the project to other areas and the methodology will be transferred to other sectors in Slovenia and Sweden.

*Krka* – mentioned previously in this compendium - in Slovenia, is an example of a company which has developed a validation method to enable its employees to gain a nationally-recognised qualification.

#### Nationally-recognised qualifications awarded through VINFL, Krka, Slovenia

Krka is Slovenia's largest pharmaceutical company. Along with in-house training, courses and workshops and training on the job, Krka was the first company to develop and start implementing six standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level.

Partners in the process of developing the system were the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (which provided the basic documents and implemented the law regarding the NVQ), Novartis, the second pharmaceuticals company in Slovenia (who helped to prepare and agree the content of the standards, together with CPI), the trade union confederation (a national level partner), the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and the Chamber of Commerce (a national-level partner).

These qualifications have been officially accepted by the Minister responsible for labour. As a result, NVQs at Krka can not only be obtained by completing in-house training and attending in-house lectures (some 150-200) but crucially also by carrying out practical on the job training and then meeting the official standards in written and practical tests.

Having built a strong network with the other Slovene firms from the pharmaceutical sector, Krka has been designated as the only institution which can assess and certify the NVQ for these six standards. To date, more than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Education and Training Centre, Krka.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system in Slovenia. These firms are mostly located in the capital city, Ljubljana, but also in other large towns such as Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto, Nova Gorica (where the main actor is the Technical school

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of Krka, October 2007

centre) and Murska Sobota.

All fields of activity are represented. The two largest companies are Krka (pharmaceuticals) and Elektro Slovenija –Eles (the only electric power transmission company in Slovenia). Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation to become certification centres.

The introduction of profiles or standards based on competences or learning outcomes is recognised as a challenging process. For actors in the private sector, whose expertise may not lie in the education and training, it is therefore to be recommended that the development of competence or occupational profiles is carried out in partnership or with a high level of support and if possible, to link in with national frameworks. The example below of the Lithuanian company Achema outlines the barriers faced by projects which are developed independently, in terms of take-up and transfer of the methodologies developed.

#### Linking with national standards, Achema, Lithuania

The stock company Achema is the largest nitrogen fertilisers company in Lithuania and the largest factory that is involved in this type of activity within the Baltic countries. It has over 1,500 employees.

According to the company's representative, human resources are seen as one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness. The company is actively engaged in developing its own system for human resource development where assessment of competences, skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning plays a very important role.

At the moment, the company is developing a system of competence requirements for every type of work activity performed within the company, which means that the specific competence requirements will be assigned to each role within the company. In turn this will be later linked to the occupational standards currently being developed at the national level. It is expected that the system will clarify, facilitate and render transparent the present process of competence assessment and encourage employees to take up lifelong learning.

The main competences the company is validating are those acquired through work experience. Special attention and encouragement is provided for the employees wanting to learn or validate their knowledge in foreign languages. These are matched with the award of pay increases.

Among the main validation methods used are observation and collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations performed by the direct line manager or formal examinations. The latter usually follows formal training in the company's training centre. Indeed, many positions within the company require a certificate, which can be obtained for example by attending one of the training courses of the company – and validation of informal and non-formal learning is a part of this system. The assessment is usually performed by the experts of the company's training centre and successful assessment of relevant skills and competences lead to the award of a company-recognised certificate.

The initiative was developed by the company's training centre with constant review and improvement via indirect input of the beneficiaries – provision of feedback by those who participated in the training as well as their managers is encouraged at the end of every training course as well as regular assessment in the longer term.

As the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by the company individually,

the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies even of a similar kind. Therefore despite many benefits associated with the delivery and recognising informal/non-formal learning, for example, fairer rewards and better matching between individuals and skills needs as well as better structuring of job profiles, there are still quite a lot of obstacles, both internal and external to greater take-up of the initiative by the employees within Achema and by other companies. For example: the development of assessment and validation methodologies are only affordable by large companies, employees themselves lack motivation as the certificates are only recognised within one company and there is a lack of a systematic approach which results in scattered learning initiatives rather than a comprehensive and complete process.

Yet, it has been noted that the application of agreed assessment standards forms the basis of reliable validation systems. For those countries where these challenges have been overcome and competence-based standards or learning outcomes have been introduced, it is possible to see that the development can help to facilitate the introduction of VINFL, by ensuring that assessments are consistent across all sectors and providers.

Further discussion on the complexities and tensions associated with the introduction of standards or learning outcomes can be found in the Public Sector Compendium of the 2007 European Inventory.

## 4.6 Methods employed

A number of methods are currently in use in the private sector. The example of *Radiocom*, given earlier, illustrates this. The company “*has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios*”. We have seen that private sector initiatives can be developed for a wide range of reasons and it therefore is likely that a range of methods must also be employed, in order to meet these needs, address different circumstances and ensure the desired outcomes and results for all stakeholders involved. This variety has to be balanced against the need for convergence of multiple methods and tools, in order to spur active use of validation in enterprises, which cannot allow themselves many trial-and-error initiatives in the field of validation. In particular, European validation projects can contribute to a certain convergence of methods and tools.

It seems that declarative and portfolio methods are the most prevalent (as in the third sector) although the research has also uncovered some examples of the use of tests / examinations. We now examine some examples of the use of these three methods within the private sector, which have been taken from the European Inventory individual country chapters.

### 4.6.1 Tests and Examinations

Tests and examinations can be used to validate informal and non-formal learning in order to award qualifications (that may or may not be integrated in national standards). In The Czech Republic for example, a system of certification of training training of has been developed since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing. Participants who do not wish to undertake the courses can apply to CIMA and the examination commission and participate directly in the exams if their expertise gained through non-formal and informal learning is considered to be sufficient.

The Finnish company Koskisen Oy offers in-house training, which together with work experience provides employees with an opportunity to attain one of a range of nationally recognised competence-based qualifications (various wood production and management qualifications). All the participants require 1-2 years of work experience. The skills are assessed by a team that consists of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives and the assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. See Section 1.8 for further details of this initiative.

In Turkey, TESK<sup>1</sup> (The Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen) uses examinations to award certificates of knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning, as outlined in the box below:

#### Tests and Examinations, TESK, Turkey

One important role of the Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen (TESK) is to implement and manage vocational/ occupational training activities in apprenticeship centres located in many small industry clusters. These activities of vocational education and training are carried out jointly with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of National Education. TESK evaluates and certifies the knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning (mainly work experience) of individuals in professions which are not covered by the apprenticeship training system (as defined by the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training).

The Confederation awards the following certificates;

- The TESK certificate of assistant-mastership;
- The TESK certificate of mastership; and
- The TESK certificate of tradesmanship.

Individuals who started working after 1993 in professions not covered by the apprenticeship training can attend examinations three times a year at the chambers of professions that are branch organisations of TESK. Those who successfully complete this examination can receive one of the above-mentioned certificates. The examination commission consists, under the presidency of the head of the relevant chamber, of:

- Two members designated by the related chamber of profession.
- One member from the Chamber's Professional Training Consultancy Unit.
- A teacher designated by the Professional Training Center of the Ministry of National Education that provides apprenticeship training services.

The examination for the 'Tradesmanship Certificate' can only be taken in a written form, while the examinations for the certificates of assistant-mastership and mastership include both written and practical assessments.

The certificates issued by TESK are replaced with their equivalent certificates by the Ministry of National Education, if that profession is taken into the coverage of apprenticeship training practice of the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training.

#### 4.6.2 Declarative Methods

There are some examples of private sector initiatives which are based on 'declarative methods'. These are based on an individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, which are verified by a third party. Declarative methods may involve a self-assessment against given criteria or none at all.

1 <http://www.tesk.org.tr/>

In Sweden, for example, the Non-manual Workers' Union developed an interactive tool for members to identify and organise existing competences and to identify competences that need to be developed through further studies<sup>1</sup>.

A more detailed example of a project using a declarative method was found in Norway, where a pilot project was developed in the agriculture sector, to support farmers to document their non-formal and informal learning.

#### **Declarative Method of Validation, The Agriculture Sector, Norway**

The Norwegian State Agricultural Administration supported a pilot project between 2004 and 2006 for the documentation of competences developed by agriculture sector workers (farmers). The national associations of farmers and small farmers cooperated with partners in Nordland county (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service) to deliver this initiative.

The national associations developed a course in how to document farmers' competences, to be used in study groups of 6-8 individuals. Schemes for CV and Competence Passport (professional competence including economics and ICT, personal/social competences, managerial competences) were part of the course material. In four meetings, the farmers discussed their varied work tasks and learned how to assess their competence and document it, how to find partners to validate and sign the Competence Passport (i.e. Agriculture Guidance Service staff) and discussed possible needs for further education.

<sup>1</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

The following project, developed by the *Arbeiterkammer Tirol* (Tyrol Chamber of Labour) in Austria, demonstrates how a declarative method used in the private sector assesses an individual's learning in all areas of their life.

#### Validation of life-wide learning, Arbeiterkammer Tirol, Austria

The Chamber's think tank, the Zukunftszentrum ("Centre for the Future"<sup>1</sup>), has, with the support of the regional government, developed a 'competence statement'. This methodology, which was developed in conjunction with business and organisational behaviour psychologists, is a six-step process completed over three weeks to identify the skills and knowledge a person has gained through non-formal and informal learning. A personal coach supports and guides the individual throughout this process. Participation is supported by the regional government with participant contribution limited to 190 euros.

As a first step, the coach provides information about content, aims and usefulness of the competence statement and the individual begins to reflect on the important experiences in their life. The second stage is the creation, by the participant, of an all-encompassing profile of their life including family, schooling, vocational training, work and leisure. A discussion with the personal coach helps the individual, thirdly, to become aware of important learning experiences, recognition of abilities and of the importance of different stages in their life. Fourthly, the individual writes their CV at home referring to certificates as well as competencies. The fifth stage is a self-assessment: how does the individual see themselves, how do others see them? What is important to them for their future? Both questions and answers are discussed with the personal coach. In the final and sixth stage, further steps and objectives for the future are defined. The end product of this process is a written 'competence statement' showing a person's main skills and abilities.

The Centre's competence statement is widely applied. Participation is open to all members of the Chamber of Labour (that is, all employees including apprentices). During the pilot phase, some 1400 participants received a competence statement. The second phase was launched in early 2006.

<sup>1</sup>See <http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/>

Declarative methods can also be used to conduct a formative assessment of the beneficiary - to help employers/employees to identify skills gaps and training needs. The example below shows how a validation procedure can be used to form a 'Development Plan' for workers in SMEs.

### VAI, Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs<sup>1</sup>

The VAI partnership is led by EBLA, a bilateral body involving SME associations and Trade Unions<sup>2</sup>. The project, which commenced in 2006, aims to identify, develop, test and fine-tune a methodology and a set of tools (the 'VAI KIT'), suitable to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities existing within European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning. The purpose of this is to create the best possible conditions for SME managers to support the creation of new learning opportunities – internal or external to companies – in a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective and to valorise individual efforts in lifelong learning.

The VAI project responds to the need expressed by consultants, learning facilitators, SME managers and heads of companies to create tools and methodologies to support SMEs and workers to increase their knowledge base, also recognising the experiences and related competences developed in non formal (e.g. on the job) and informal learning contexts (e.g. leisure activities). Furthermore, the VAI approach also aims to provide new solutions which allow evidence to be given for all existing learning processes within SMEs.

The project provides different tools and methodologies to assess informal learning. The assessment process is explained in a guide on how to describe individual learning pathways and acquired competences. A comprehensive list of criteria is provided and for individual learning recognition, there is an individual 'acquis chart', based on the European CV.

The key outcome of the process, called the 'Development Plan', affects both the individual and the company. In this process the role of the learning facilitator (FAI) is pivotal, representing the 'trait d'union' between the organisation and the employee. The FAI utilises different tools (from the VAI Model) to support the identification, evaluation and valorisation of competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

The VAI methodology considers three groups of competences: basic, relational and technical competences. The elements that are validated focus on the learning contexts/modalities concerning personal life and work/professional life.

The VAI Model follows four steps:

#### Information

1. Inform and explain to the management and the employees that knowledge can occur through non formal and informal learning methods.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from a Leonardo VPL-2 Case Study Grid

<sup>2</sup> Other members are FEDERLAZIO and CAN (associations of SMEs and micro enterprises), FORMARE, ERFAP and SMILE (training agencies, belonging to SMEs associations and/or Trade Unions), EXA TEAM (an SME with expertise in designing and managing European funded projects), SEDA (a technological partner), CRIA (a Spanish consulting firm, with strong expertise in local development and enterprise creation), CEEFIA (a French training agency, with consolidated expertise in competencies development), IAGO (a UK-based consulting firm with expertise in local development and European funded project management) and CKP: an organisation in the Czech Republic active in local development and social enterprise creation.

2. Explain the benefits generated by the implementation of non formal and informal learning methods.

### Identification

1. Identify existing non formal and informal learning practices in the company.
2. Identify non formal and informal learning practices that could be implemented in the company.

### Evaluation

1. Organise the results of the evaluation step.
2. Analyse the non formal and informal learning in the company which takes place at an individual level and/or a global level.

### Valorisation

1. Design the development plans for the company and the employees
2. Valorisation of the non formal and informal learning practices inside the company.
3. Valorisation of the competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

All kinds of knowledge, skills and experiences are validated through an original grid for the identification of informal/non formal learning practices that employees already implement within or outside the company. The "User Guide for the Assessment Tool" is available at: <http://www.progettovai.org>.

The tools and methods used to identify and value competences are a) the VAI Tools and 2) the Curriculum Vitae:

- a) VAI offers two types of tools to help managers, heads of companies, employees to acquire awareness of non-formal and informal learning processes and opportunities:

Information tools, which guide the VAI assessment process:

- o Explanation of the VAI methodology and phases
- o Explanation of the concepts used
- o Inventory of best practices in informal learning
- o Case studies and informative presentations

Assessment tools: to assess learning:

- o Informal learning assessment tool
- o Guide on how to describe your own learning pathway and knowledge competencies
- o List of criteria for individual learning recognition
- o Individual *acquis* chart

- b) European Curriculum Vitae, through which individuals can record their own knowledge, competences and know-how acquired during professional experience or daily life, therefore in non formal and informal contexts, too.

The results of the validation procedure are felt to be:

For the *organisation*: the investigation and experimentation of possible conditions for SMEs managers and heads of companies to support the valuation and recognition of different learning opportunities – within and outside the company – in a lifelong and lifewide learning perspective, so to valorise individual efforts in lifelong learning, improving motivation and effectiveness of work practices.

For the *individuals*: the recognition and valorisation of individual competences acquired in non formal and informal context allows to promote equal opportunities in the access to labour market and in strengthening employability for all.

We have also identified a number of projects which have made use of the ICT in order to develop tools and programmes for use within a validation procedure. In Norway, for example, internet-based tools were developed during the national Validation Project for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies. Most of these digital tools start with self-assessment of the kind of work tasks the employee has performed and responsibilities he/she has held in the enterprise. This self-assessment is then subject to discussion, evaluation and ultimately validation and signed by the employer as a Competence Passport, to be combined with a CV. These tools are therefore used to facilitate a declarative method.

### 4.6.3 The portfolio method

The 2005 Inventory gives the following definition of the portfolio method:

*"Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways. In the most general of senses, competence portfolios tend to involve a self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria, interview(s) with a third party and / or an assessment centre."*

Our case study of the use of validation within the processing industry in the Netherlands is a good example of a portfolio method. The validation procedure used involves five phases:

1. Information and Quick-Scan
2. Preparation of Portfolio
3. Practical Assessment
4. Transfer Assessment
5. Validation Statement

The quick scan and portfolio are prepared by the individual beneficiary. Steps three and four involve assessments by both internal (the practical at step three) and external (the transfer assessment at step four) assessors, thus ensuring that the method does not rely only on the individual's judgement of their own competences and abilities. More detail of this procedure can be found in the full version of our case study, on the Inventory website.

The *Chambre des Employés Privés*, in Luxembourg, uses the portfolio method to award certificates in vocational subjects, as explained in the box below:

#### The Portfolio method, Validation at the *Chambre des employés privés (CEPL)*, Luxembourg

The CEPL offers evening courses to adults in a variety of vocational subjects, including ICT and administration, accounting and management, law and sales. The courses are delivered by the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC) and on completion of six modules students are issued an official diploma from the Ministry of Education (although this diploma does not constitute a formal state qualification).

Since January 2007 candidates have been entitled to apply for *validation des acquis* (validation of skills and competences) in order to obtain these certificates. Candidates must have a minimum of three years' relevant experience in relation to the desired certificate. The methodology for the validation process is outlined below:

- 1) Candidates submit a dossier to the LLLC, made up of relevant documentation to use as evidence in the validation process. The LLLC must authorise the validation process, based on this dossier.
- 2) Approved dossiers are submitted to a jury, made up of professionals and stakeholders from the LLLC evening classes. The jury's decision is based on an analysis of the candidate's experience in relation to the skills and knowledge required to obtain the certificate. The candidate's education and continuing professional training may also be taken into account.
- 3) The jury may request an interview with the candidate or an additional test (written, oral or practical).
- 4) The jury may grant the diploma in full or in part. Candidates who receive validation for a number of modules within a certificate should take the remaining examinations within a period of five years in order to be awarded the certificate in full.

The validation process costs 150 € in total per certificate. A small number of candidates have made use of the validation process since its introduction at the beginning of this year (2007).

More information can be found at [www.cepl.lu](http://www.cepl.lu), under *Formation Continue*.

The portfolio method can also be 'formative'. Our case study on the Investing in People project in Italy is an example. Here, we have taken excerpts from the case study to illustrate the use of the portfolio method as a formative assessment. It is important to note that we have not given detail of all stages of the procedure here – additional steps, involve further assessment of the individual's competences by internal and external assessors.

The method used in the project consists of a number of activities and processes, which include the completion of a portfolio and the creation of a personal plan:

- **Completing the portfolio.** The portfolio is entitled "*Individual Dossier Skills and Training Booklet*". It commences by informing the employee of the validation process and the purpose of validation. It then proceeds to document their formal educational qualifications (achieved both inside and outside of the workplace) and their non-

formal/informal experience (achieved through the employees' work activities/experiences, any voluntary sector experience they may have and any knowledge or experiences they may have acquired through their hobbies/ life).

Employees complete the portfolio with the help of their tutor (the Process Supervisor). They identify all of their training and work experience and include evidence of their competencies. This 'evidence' can take a number of forms. For example, a declaration from a previous employer, certification of prior vocational training, pictures of themselves working voluntarily videos etc. Employees also complete a questionnaire on their behavioural competencies at this point. This is a self-evaluation questionnaire that assesses such characteristics as motivation, leadership skills, determination etc using a French software package called 'performance'. The findings are only shared with the employees' tutor and not the management.<sup>1</sup>

- **Creating a personal development plan.** On the basis of the assessment stage, the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the beneficiary all work together to produce a 'Personal Development Plan'. This plan defines a career strategy for the worker based on his/her competencies and the companies' own requirements.

The Personal Development Plan, which is also known as the 'Individual Development Plan' consists of an assessment table identifying whether the employee seems 'qualified', 'unqualified', 'partially qualified' or 'unsuitable' in each of his/her job areas. It proceeds to offer a summary of the employee and provides a list of the skills that are 'possessed', 'need improvement' or 'need to be developed'. Its conclusion is a 'training forecast' which has been collectively drawn up by the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the workers and which specifies the training that each employee needs<sup>2</sup>.

More detail on the Investing in People project can be found in the full case study, available from the European Inventory website.

The project below, supported by funding from the Leonardo da Vinci programme, is a detailed example of a validation initiative which made use of electronic tools.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the project tutor also completes the questionnaire on behalf of the employee and the results are then compared. This exercise is thought to be valuable but it is again not shared with the company management.

<sup>2</sup> Investing in People IT-G2-MAR-013 Individual Development Plan

## Use of electronic tools, Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills (AKS), Norway<sup>1</sup>

The AKS project took place over the period 2003-2004 and was funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme. It was a follow-up to a project carried out by ELBUS (the national centre for electro technical vocational education in Norway) during the national Validation Project. The project's scope of work was to develop the validation, assessment and transferability of formal, non formal and informal learning in the electro-technical industry throughout Europe. The lead partners were the two Norwegian organisations OREE (advisory council for vocational training in the electro technical centre) and ELBUS. The other partner countries were Denmark, Greece, Sweden and the UK.

The project group developed a methodology to enable electro-technical or other enterprises to document and assess accumulated knowledge and skills of an employee or potential employee. This methodology is explained in a handbook, and is supported by a web/electronic-based tool to aid the process. All five partner country languages are present in both the methodology and the tool and the tool was piloted in several different European electro-technical pilot companies.

The 'assessment' stage of the methodology involves a conversation with the employer, based on what the individual has recorded about him/herself. This conversation should follow clearly defined guidelines and will be strictly confidential between the individual and the employer. To aid this development dialogue the project partners developed an 'Ability to take action ' questionnaire. The main objective of this assessment is to develop the basis of a personal development plan involving measures that the employer is able to initiate or support.

Subsequent steps in the validation process are:

- Information
- Individual assessment
- Development interview

The difference between an ordinary appraisal interview and a development interview is that the development interview only has focus at the employee's competences and potential. The Development interview was found to be a great challenge for those who took part in this advisory counselling. At the same time this guidance was a great success. In many companies, it was the first time that the employees had been offered anything like a development interview.

100 individuals were involved in the project from Norway, five from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.

The mapping tool is web-based whilst the CV and the 'Ability to take action' forms are available electronically through the AKS web site.<sup>2</sup>

The AKS project was one of three to receive the first ever Leonardo da Vinci award launched by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

<sup>1</sup> [www.aks-international.com](http://www.aks-international.com)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aks-international.com/>

## 4.7 Outputs / Outcomes and Impact

### 4.7.1 Quantitative data

For some of the private sector validation initiatives we have identified, it is possible to quantify their outputs in terms of, for example, certificates awarded or portfolios completed. The table below gives an overview of data we have found for the projects included in this compendium:

Private sector validation initiatives – quantitative data
<b>Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills (AKS), transnational</b>
100 individuals were involved in the project from Norway, five from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.
<b>Arbeiterkammer Tirol, Austria</b>
During the pilot phase, some 1400 participants received a competence statement.
<b>Construction Industry Federation, Ireland</b>
Six construction company employees achieved FETAC awards on the basis of RPL for the first time in Ireland.
<b>FCB, Netherlands</b>
In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC-procedures in the child care sector
<b>Freescale Semiconductor, France</b>
Around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through the French national system of VINFL.
<b>Investing in People, Italy</b>
Investing in People was set up to validate the skills and experience of 30 employees across the three companies and, by December 2007, it will have achieved this. The majority of these employees were over 45 years of age, with 15/20% of beneficiaries being disabled.
<b>Jernvilje project, Northern Jutland, Denmark</b>
85% of participants in this project have re-entered the labour market.
<b>Koskisen Oy, Finland</b>
During the past 10 years some 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employees) have been able to validate the skills and learning they have acquired at work and have obtained an official qualification.
<b>Krka, Slovenia</b>
More than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Krka Education and Training Centre. The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system. Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation to become certification centres.
<b>Radiocom, Romania</b>
Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies

It is clear that these initiatives have had a limited impact to date in terms of the numbers of beneficiaries supported. However, it is important to remember that many of the projects we have looked at and provided data on take-up were pilot projects, often supported by European funding to develop innovative methodologies and tools. It remains to be seen whether these projects, and others like them, will be sustained in the future and create a wider impact.

Further, it is important to remember that the impact of such initiatives also depends on the quality of the 'soft outcomes' they produce and other 'results', such as facilitating access to formal education and training or employment.

#### 4.7.2 Benefits for individual companies

In the section 'Rationale for involvement' we have seen that individual companies become involved in the development and implementation of VINFL for a number of reasons. The project examples given throughout this compendium serve to illustrate how companies can benefit from validation in a number of ways.

For example, validation enables a company to make better use of employees' skills and competences, often enabling a company to save time and money in the long run. VINFL helps to make informed decisions in order to match the right person to the right job, which can lead to increased motivation among employees, increased productivity, and an improved profile for the company.

In the Czech Republic, in fact, various surveys among employers have shown that they actually prefer skills acquired informally (communication skills, leadership skills, team spirit, etc.) over formal qualifications.

In Spain, our country report notes that a number of large companies, for example the Institute of Theatre of Barcelona (*Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona*) and the Technological Institute of Castilla y León have shown good practice in developing policies of ongoing assessment of their human resources. It is suggested that this has helped not only to identify gaps and define competence development activities, but also to make the most of human capital and to increase efficiency.<sup>1</sup>

The example of *Radiocom* in Romania, showed that for employers affected by technological innovation, the benefits of validation can be a reduction in the time required for personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced and to learn how to work and monitor equipment.

<sup>1</sup> Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

Finally, a company representative of the Lithuanian company *Achema* noted that human resources is one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness. Validation, as a method of supporting and developing individuals to realise their full potential, represents a valuable tool for firms in today's competitive, knowledge-based economy.

#### 4.7.3 Benefits for individual beneficiaries

As indicated previously in this document, individuals can gain 'soft outputs' from participating in a validation procedure, such as increased motivation, confidence and self-esteem and a better understanding of one's own abilities. Such outcomes are much harder to measure but can have a significant impact on society and the economy, by facilitating individuals' career development or enabling them to access education and training or employment.

A Danish study<sup>1</sup> found that from the employees' perspective, there is often a feeling that companies want to help them develop, and that through identifying 'who can do what' the skills and strengths of employees were openly appreciated, which improved employee relations, and generally increased self-esteem and enabled employees to feel more valued. As an example, our case study of the Investing in People project in Italy found that the employers involved gained insight into the skills inherent within their organisation and an understanding of where the skill gaps lie, which led to better-targeted training. The employees were empowered by the knowledge that they have learned certain skills through a number of different life situations, both in work and outside of work. They should be able to use this information to progress their career. Importantly, they accessed further training with the company without having to repeat anything that they already knew about. This bespoke training was a key output of this project.

As well as soft outputs, individuals can benefit from tangible outcomes such as certificates to recognise their competences, (formal) qualifications and regular performance assessment, leading to career and salary progression (as in the case of *Radiocom*). The Norwegian project working with farmers presented previously noted that they could benefit not only from development as a farmer but that VINFL could also help to plan future new production (i.e. in niche markets) or to meet demands for quality assurance and documentation in relation to the markets.

#### 4.7.4 Results

The 'results' of validation are again hard to measure. These are the secondary effects of the introduction of VINFL – for example individuals gaining access to employment or

<sup>1</sup> Ramboll Management Study

improved career prospects some of which have been covered to some extent already. We have seen the results validation can also bring to individual companies – increased efficiency savings, for example, and the use of validation to address technological or economic change. The use of VINFL in the private sector can also bring results for society / the economy as a whole, by helping to reduce unemployment or supporting disadvantaged groups.

In Finland, *Koskisen Oy* has been developing training and assessment methods in order to recognise and, at the same time, broaden the skill levels of its employees since the early nineties. Their initiative has not only benefited the employees and the company itself but it has had a wider impact on the industry sector. The experience from *Koskisen Oy* is presented in the box below<sup>1</sup>, as an illustration of the results which can be generated by validation initiatives.

#### Results of validation, Koskisen Oy, Finland

*Koskisen Oy* is a manufacturing company in the field of wood production. During the past 10 years some 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employees) have been able to validate the skills and the learning they have acquired at work and have obtained an official qualification.

The company offers 'in-house' training, which together with work experience provides employees with an opportunity to attain one of a range of nationally recognised competence-based qualifications (e.g. various wood production and management qualifications).

The skills are assessed by a team that consists of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives. The assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. All the participants are required to possess 1-2 years of work experience.

The validation and certification has had significant individual, company and industry level effects:

- Individual benefits (employees):
  - Improved self-confidence.
  - Broadened and improved skill-base.
  - Greater understanding and adoption of work processes and tasks.
  - Opportunities for higher pay and grants.
- Benefits to the company:
  - Multi-skilled, motivated, committed, adaptable employees.
  - The company has succeeded to transform itself from a basic manufacturing enterprise into a high value-added production company – the highly skilled workforce has been the fundamental base.
  - Transformation towards a team-working culture – staff members increasingly work together and are able to replace one another during absences.
  - Move towards a more equal, less hierarchical employee structure due to increased skill levels and awareness of these.
  - National level recognition for its human resources policies.
  - Excellent working environment and low staff turnover levels (turnover levels have reduced by 35% in ten years [which is likely to be linked to the individual benefits mentioned above]).
  - A number of national certificates / awards (e.g. award for good employer, best apprenticeship scheme provider of the year, best place to work 2004 '*Suomen parhaat työnantajat 2004*' - 2nd

<sup>1</sup> Source: Interview with Esa Kallinen from *Koskisen Oy*.

- position and the only awarded manufacturing company)
  - In spite of the major role of education and training, the productivity levels have always remained high. During the early training periods, the productivity of each participating employee slightly falls but in the longer term significantly improves as a result of new skills and motivation.
- Wider effects:
  - Has helped to raise the status and credibility of the wood production industry.
  - The largest companies in the same industry (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) have now also introduced similar procedures.

## 4.8 Barriers to take-up

Our research has identified several barriers to the take-up of validation in the private sector. These are examined in turn below:

- **Fear of the implications in terms of contractual / salary demands**

As we have seen, validation can bring many benefits to both employers and employees. However, both parties may also fear negative consequences of the implementation of VINFL, in terms of contractual or salary implications. In Norway, for example, employers' confederations showed some scepticism about the use of validation tools in the work place – they feared that employees who had undergone a validation process would demand a salary increase.<sup>1</sup> Employees too may be sceptical about how the documentation might be used by the employers in times of downsizing and fear the consequences of 'failing' a VINFL process.

In Denmark, a study of six companies<sup>2</sup> which implemented 'Individual Competence Assessment' (IKA) uncovered the perceived benefits and disadvantages to the employees as well as the employers. Employers noted that they felt they must act on the assessment by offering targeted training, or their employees would have a negative impression of the process. They also found that employees can be fearful of competence assessment, which leads to greater hostility between employees and management. The study identified one negative consequence of the project for employees, which was that it fully identifies those that are not achieving within the organisation, which can make them vulnerable.<sup>3</sup>

- **Difficulty to transfer / apply validation methodologies (e.g lack of standards/definitions such as learning outcomes/ occupational profiles)**

In countries where there is no national reference framework for standards and methodologies, difficulties may be encountered in developing VINFL initiatives which can be transferred to other companies and/or sectors.

<sup>1</sup> Skule, S., in Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

<sup>2</sup> 'The Ramboll Management Study'

<sup>3</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

The example above of the VINFL procedure developed by Achema in Lithuania demonstrates the difficulties which can be encountered in ensuring the transferability of private sector methodologies. In this case, as the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by Achema individually, the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies, even of a similar kind. This reduces the incentives for employees to participate.

- **VINFL not considered a private sector responsibility**

In some countries, private sector stakeholders may be reluctant to get involved in development and delivery of VINFL because they feel that such activities are the responsibility of the public sector. In Hungary, for example, our country report suggests there seems to be a general expectation on the sectoral level that initiatives will be taken by the government and national bodies (ministries).

- **Unwillingness to share experiences/policies**

As noted in the European Inventory 2005, the lack of available data on validation initiatives within the private sector may have been a sign of the reluctance within the sector to share ideas and methodologies. Often, companies are unwilling to share information on their human resources and training policies, which can prevent the development of common methods of assessment and certification, as well as good practice and lessons learned.

- **Hostility towards 'newly' obtained qualifications**

In certain countries, some mistrust or hostility towards VINFL is evident, due to the traditional belief in the value and importance of formal educational qualifications. For example, such mistrust has been expressed in France by members of professional associations and employees in the formal education system. The value traditionally attached to formal diplomas in France and the importance for the individual of having credible, transferable qualifications meant that there was only limited development of standards and certification.

## 4.9 Success Factors

Our examination of VINFL within the private sector enables us to conclude with a list of good practice recommendations. Although the methods used in the private sector appear generally to be further developed than those in the third sector, these recommendations are similar to those made in the third sector compendium. It is thus clear that learning can be transferred across, as well as within sectors.

- *Developing methodologies which are competence-based, or linked to learning outcomes (where possible, linking with nationally-recognised standards/profiles)*

Methodologies which describe the competences/skills an individual has developed, rather than simply the time they have spent, or the role they have held, are more transferable. Where these methodologies are linked to nationally-recognised standards or profiles, they bring significant benefits in terms of transferability (e.g. for beneficiaries, it is better to receive a certificate of competences which is recognised by other employers).

- *Partnership-working and consultation*

Working in partnership to develop VINFL initiatives can help to ensure consistency and transferability. Working with public sector partners can also ensure that private sector initiatives are developed in line with any national standards and procedures. Consultation with relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries and social partners, helps to ensure that validation initiatives are developed in line with demand and tailored to individual and sectoral needs.

- *Seeking support / buy-in from relevant stakeholders*

A clear vision and declaration of the benefits to all stakeholders of an initiative can help to secure buy-in and support. Support and buy-in from stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, stakeholders, other private sector companies) can help to ensure the success and sustainability of any new initiative. It can also help when seeking (financial) backing. For example, we have seen that Collective Labour Agreements can encourage wider take-up and financial support for a validation initiative.

- *Learning from others and sharing experiences*

It is important for all stakeholders involved to encourage monitoring and evaluation of existing projects, as well as the sharing of learning and good practice to inform further the development of quality initiatives.

- *Incorporating quality assurance methods*

It is important to ensure that quality assurance procedures are in place to verify consistency and equality of treatment across all assessments. Quality assurance procedures also give an initiative 'credibility' among stakeholders and users.

#### **4.10 Conclusions**

This compendium has given an overview of key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches to VINFL within the private sector. It is based on the research carried out to produce the 32 country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. Examples have been given throughout to illustrate the range of initiatives which are currently in use and the lessons which can be learned from these.

Despite some difficulties in obtaining data, it is possible to see that there is an increasing awareness of the benefits of introducing VINFL in the private sector. VINFL can above all be used as a recruitment tool, to inform the development of in-house training and to support career development (among other uses). Experience to date is helping to form an understanding among individual companies and social partners of the issues which must be taken into account when introducing more VINFL to the sector, such as the importance of partnership-working and linking to national standards and/or qualifications.

Validation can bring many positive outcomes for both private companies and their employees. It forms a vital element in the transformation of primarily internal labour markets into external ones with more entrances for people with a variety of backgrounds. It now remains for all stakeholders to work together in order to improve the quality and transferability of validation in the private sector, to overcome barriers to take-up and encourage more organisations and individuals to get involved. Good practice and lessons learned can be drawn from existing initiatives and it is crucial to monitor and evaluate these initiatives, then to share learning and experience both nationally and transnationally.

## 5.0 Third Sector Initiatives – A Compendium

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### 5.1 Introduction

This compendium forms part of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning<sup>1</sup>. The Inventory provides an up-to-date catalogue of good practices in validation and is an important reference for stakeholders. It is made up of 32 individual country chapters, six case studies, three 'sectoral' compendia (of which this is one) and an overall report of findings. The compendia (public, private and third sector) discuss key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches within the three different sectors. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation (in particular practitioners), who will find the compendia have an eminently practical focus.

This Third Sector compendium examines the following issues in turn:

- Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Third Sector
- Rationale for involvement in validation initiatives
- Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives
- Methods employed
- Outputs / Outcomes and Impact
- Barriers to take-up
- Success Factors
- Conclusions

The findings within the 32 country chapters of the European Inventory have been analysed to inform the content of this compendium. Throughout, examples of initiatives have been taken from the country chapters<sup>2</sup>, to illustrate good practice and lessons learned in the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) in the third sector. The aim is to enhance the exchange of experiences and to enable different sectoral stakeholders to learn from tried and tested initiatives in their field without needing to refer to the detailed individual country chapters.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/)

<sup>2</sup> Many examples are examined in more detail within the individual country chapters, all of which can be found on the European Inventory website

## 5.2 Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Third Sector

### 5.2.1 What is the third sector?

Terminology and definitions for the third sector are complex at both national and European level. The term '**third sector**' has a variety of definitions and is subject to some debate. For example, in the UK, the Government defines the third sector as "*non-governmental organisations that are value-driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives*"<sup>1</sup>. It includes within this definition the following types of organization:

- Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), consisting of charities (registered and unregistered) and of non-charitable VCOs
- Social enterprises
- Cooperatives and mutuals

A related term used in some countries and also by EU institutions is 'civil society'. The European Union website, Europa, notes that in the same way as the third sector, "*There is no commonly accepted or legal definition of the term 'civil society organisation'*".<sup>2</sup> A definition adopted by the EU is:

*"a range of organisations which include: the labour-market players (i.e. trade unions and employers federations - the "social partners"); organisations representing social and economic players, which are not social partners in the strict sense of the term (for instance, consumer organisations); NGOs (non-governmental organisations), which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organisations, human rights organisations, charitable organisations, educational and training organisations, etc.; CBOs (community-based organisations), i.e. organisations set up within society at grassroots level which pursue member-oriented objectives, e.g. youth organisations, family associations and all organisations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life; and religious communities."*<sup>3</sup>

The third sector initiatives referred to in the country chapters of the European Inventory refer to organisations which would be considered, in that country, to be 'third sector'. We have not included labour-market organisations. Their involvement is referred to in the 'Private Sector' section of each chapter. Thus, broadly, our analysis covers the work of non-profit organisations such as:

<sup>1</sup> HM Treasury, 2007, The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: Final Report, Available at: <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> The European Commission and Civil Society, [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_society/apgen\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_society/apgen_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Commission Communication: General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission, COM(2002)704

- Voluntary organisations
- Community-based organisations
- Charitable organisations
- Member-based organisations (youth organisations in particular).

Initial analysis suggests that validation is particularly relevant / prominent for three particular 'types' of third sector organisations. These are voluntary organisations, youth organisations and also education and training providers which are considered to be part of the 'third sector'. They are generally providers of non-formal and above all informal education. Validation initiatives within youth organisations can be found for example in the Netherlands, Finland and Luxembourg and within volunteering associations in Croatia, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Scotland. Examples of VINFL delivered by non-formal education and training providers can be found in Belgium, Finland and Denmark, among others.

There are also some community organisations and charities which are active in the field of validation. As an example, partners in the *Sylfaen Cymunedol* community development project in Wales have developed a portfolio method of accrediting informal and non-formal learning for participants in its programme. We explore this in further detail below.

The third sector provides great opportunities for individuals to gain skills and competences, through a variety of activities. For example, volunteer work, membership of a club or group (e.g. sports, youth organisations) or as a paid member of staff (validation offers an alternative method for third sector organisations to support career development of individuals and thereby increased 'professionalism' within the sector).

Individuals can gain a wide range of skills through their involvement in third sector organisations - a few examples are given in the table below:

Independence	Self-discipline
Communication skills	Creativity
ICT skills	Team-working skills
Language skills	Environmental protection
Leadership	Organisation and problem-solving skills

VINFL aims to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired and is a key instrument for the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. As such, it represents a key tool for recognising skills and competences gained through third sector activities and experience, as equal to those gained in a formal education or professional setting. Further, validation activities within the third sector help to recognise the valuable contribution these organisations, and the individuals involved in them, make to our societies and economies.

## 5.2.2 Third sector stakeholders

Stakeholders in the development of VINFL for the third sector include:

**Third sector organisations:** may be interested and / or involved in the development of validation initiatives. Also, peer organisations which may not have a history of involvement represent a ‘mainstreaming’<sup>1</sup> target audience for sharing learning and experience.

**Third sector umbrella / representative bodies or fora:** may be interested and / or involved in the development of validation initiatives. These organisations may be able to represent a sub-sector or group of organisations with a common message and can ensure consistency and transferability in the development of VINFL initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> Mainstreaming can be defined as: *"the sharing and transferring of good practice, lessons learned and innovative areas of projects or programmes"*.

**National Ministries / policy makers:** where there is no involvement of policy-makers in the development of an initiative, these represent a target audience for dissemination and mainstreaming activities.

**National Validation bodies (where these exist):** they can provide support and guidance in the development of initiatives and help to transfer good practice and lessons learned.

**Potential beneficiaries:** it is important to know what the beneficiaries want from VINFL and which methods will work best for them. Consultation with potential users of a validation initiative is essential to ensure that it is designed in response to demand and tailored to the needs of the target group.

**Education and Training Providers:** represent potential partners in the development of initiatives and/or target audiences for dissemination and mainstreaming. They can offer valuable expertise and their buy-in can mean that validation methodologies can be used to facilitate access to education and training opportunities and further employment for individual beneficiaries.

**Employers:** also represent potential partners in the development of initiatives and/or target audiences for dissemination and mainstreaming. They can offer valuable expertise and their buy-in can mean that validation methodologies can be used to facilitate access to education and training opportunities for individual beneficiaries.

### 5.2.3 VINFL in the Third Sector

The final main report of the 2005 European Inventory concluded that public and voluntary sector organisations were particularly prominent in leading the debate on methods to validate non-formal and informal learning. The report also identified that voluntary sector organisations are mainly “users and developers” of validation methodologies rather than being involved in the regulation of this area.

The individual country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory focus in greater detail on validation in the third sector. Within the chapters, three different approaches to this issue are evident:

- validation delivered by third sector organisations in relation to **non-formal learning** (we have found many examples of third sector organisations which deliver non-formal learning courses, such as liberal adult education in Finland);
- validation delivered by third sector organisations in relation to **informal learning** (competences acquired through participation in activities such as voluntary and community work, membership of youth groups, sports clubs etc);

- validation of third sector activities taken into account in **initiatives delivered within other sectors** (generally, public initiatives). For example, under the French national system of VAE, voluntary (unpaid) activities are eligible within the three years of experience required to undergo a validation procedure but assessment and certification is delivered, in general, by formal education and training providers.

This compendium will focus on the first two of the above scenarios (validation delivered by third sector organisations). Further information on public sector initiatives can be found in the equivalent Public Sector Compendium, in the overall final report and in the individual country chapters.

The 2007 Inventory country chapters reveal that there is a great variety in the level of interest and activity in validation across the third sector. In some countries (e.g. Estonia, Hungary, Latvia) few (if any) examples of third sector initiatives were identified, whereas in others (e.g. Germany, Finland, the Netherlands) the third sector was found to be very active, either in delivering their own validation initiatives, or working in partnership with public and/or private actors. This Compendium will identify good practice and lessons learned from across the 32 countries, with the aim of contributing to the exchange of learning and experiences among interested stakeholders.

## 5.3 Rationale for involvement

As stated above, initial analysis suggests that validation is particularly relevant / prominent for three particular 'types' of third sector organisations. These are voluntary organisations, youth organisations and education and training providers which are considered to be part of the 'third sector' (generally, providers of non-formal education). Examples of initiatives led by charities and community organisations can also be drawn from our research. The research has identified some of the reasons for involvement of the different third sector stakeholders in validation. We will explore these in turn below.

### 5.3.1 Third sector organisations – why get involved?

- *To gain recognition for non-formal and informal learning within third sector*

We have identified many examples of education and training provided by third sector organisations. In several countries, it is evident that this type of education and training is recognised and respected.

For example, in Italy, training provided by the third sector, especially by Catholic associations, is highly prevalent and valued. Italian-based charities, such as the *Red Cross*, have developed validation methods for their training courses. The attendance certificate for these courses, for instance in first aid, can result in additional credits for jobs in the health service.<sup>1</sup>

In Finland too, liberal adult education (non-certificate-orientated learning) has a strong foot-hold in society, thus the way in which formal education institutes and employers take into consideration learning which has taken place within the non-formal education sphere is of both great interest and importance to a range of different stakeholders.

Thus, it is evident that a lot of valuable learning is facilitated by third sector organisations. VINFL represents a tool to recognise this learning and the skills and competences individual participants develop as a result.

- *To gain recognition for voluntary/community/youth activities*

As indicated above, a high volume of skills and competences are developed through third sector activities and experiences. Validation represents an opportunity to capture and record these and enhance their transferability to other sectors. It is argued by third sector organisations that these skills and competences vary greatly but all deserve recognition, on a par with formal and professional learning experiences.

<sup>1</sup> VPL, WP3: National Review, Italy. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=78](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=78)

The wide variety of third sector learning opportunities includes, for example, working within voluntary groups, supporting projects to improve the local community / environment, youth work activities, membership of sporting clubs etc. These activities clearly help individuals to develop a range of competences such as communication skills, team working and problem-solving skills. Validation can be used to capture these skills and represents evidence which can be used to ensure their recognition in other environments.

- *As a recruitment tool*

Validation represents a useful tool during the recruitment process – of staff, volunteers, members or learners for example.

The Lithuanian *Child Line* charity (as well as other telephone help services in Lithuania) uses a validation method to carry out an initial assessment of an individual's competences acquired in different settings (for example, family, community life, individual experience etc.) and through non-formal and informal learning. This assessment is very important in order to determine their suitability for the roles involved, since volunteers are not required to have any specific / formal qualification in order to start work within the organisation - instead they are required to have "suitable" personal features and competences that correspond to the service field checked through validation methods.

VINFL therefore represents a method of recognising skills which may not be recorded through formal certificates and is particularly useful during the recruitment process, to determine whether an individual possesses the skills required to fulfil a certain role.

- *To support the career development of their volunteers/employees*

Time and resource constraints may mean that career development opportunities are restricted within the third sector, as in other sectors. VINFL therefore represents a chance to capture the progress of an individual and reward their development appropriately.

*Volunteer Development Scotland* is a voluntary sector learning and training provider, which provides a short one-day course to volunteer organisations on developing volunteer portfolios. The portfolios can be developed to assist volunteer organisations in the training and development of volunteers. Validation is highlighted as a means of assessing experience and training to provide evidence for use in further or higher education or in employment.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in this case, a portfolio detailing the competences an individual has acquired through volunteer work can be used to assess their progress and achievements, and to support their further development in line with these.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2006) Scottish Contribution to UK Report on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

- *To improve the 'image' / professionalism of the sector*

Validation of the skills and competences acquired through involvement in third sector activities represents an opportunity to gain recognition and 'credibility', within the sector, as well as by the public and private sector. It can also help to encourage quality and professionalism within the third sector, by introducing methods of capturing and providing evidence of the skills and competences acquired through third sector activities.

In Poland, the Non-Governmental Organisations' Trainers' Association (STOP) implements a jointly developed certification system aimed at increasing professionalism of the occupation of trainers for NGOs.

#### **STOP, certification for NGO trainers, Poland<sup>1</sup>**

STOP, the Non-Governmental Organisations' Trainers' Association in Poland, decided to provide competence standards for its NGO trainers, supported by a certification system. In so doing, STOP hopes to ensure quality of service provision by its members and by those means it hopes to increase the trust and motivation of NGOs in training.

A description of the competences of a STOP trainer has been developed, with a list of minimum entrance competence requirements. STOP trainers are expected to:

- be able to identify training needs
- prepare training and evaluate its results
- apply active learning methods
- implement training in accordance with the specific needs and situation of the group.

The system has elaborated a three-stage procedure of certification. It distinguishes two degrees of certificates, where a higher amount of actually taught hours (practical experience) is required for the higher degree.

The concept is based on sharing competences and evaluation by supervisors on the basis of actual training delivery. A set of required documents, along with the assessment by the supervisor is submitted to the Certification Commission of STOP, which takes the final decision.

If awarded, the certificate is valid for five years. During the first three months after obtaining the certificate the trainer has to provide feedback on the experience and from clients.

<sup>1</sup> <http://free.ngo.pl/stop/>

- *To facilitate access to formal education and/or employment*

VINFL can be used to enable an individual to gain access to or credit for formal education. It can also be used as a stepping stone towards employment.

The example below, from Finland, shows how partnership-working facilitated the development of a validation method which can be used to gain an exemption from a formal training course.

#### **Handicrafts and arts in Mid-Finland (*Käsi- ja taideteollinen yhteistyö Keski-Suomessa*)**

The Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School (*Keski-Suomen käsi- ja taideteollisen oppilaitos*) and the Institute representing employees in the Jyväskylä region (*Jyväskylän kaupungin työväenopiston*) have had a method in place for the validation of non-formal learning since 1992. These two educational (formal and non-formal) establishments have worked together to ensure that the students of the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School can access official validation for the studies that they have completed at the Institute representing employees in the Jyväskylä region. In other words, a successful completion of one of the textile courses of this third sector Institute leads to an exemption at the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School.

This has been established by close collaboration between these two establishments. The textile courses at the Institute were created in consultation with staff from the art school. A director of the school has also personally attended some of the courses of the Institute to learn about their content and to assess complementarity between their own courses and those of the Institute.

Today the students of the Institute receive a certificate upon a successful completion of one of their courses, which are officially recognised by the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School.

Thus, validation can be used to formally recognise skills which have been developed in the third sector, converting these skills into evidence (a certificate) which is recognised and accepted by other organisations and in other sectors. This can help an individual to take up further opportunities, such as in education / training or employment.

- *To integrate particular target groups*

Some third sector organisations play an important role in working with disadvantaged groups. VINFL can provide for the social and economic integration of disadvantaged groups (such as immigrants, older workers or disengaged young people) by demonstrating to them and to the outside world their abilities and achievements, as demonstrated in the example given below.

## Progress GB, using VINFL to help refugees, UK

'Progress GB' is a development partnership funded by the ESF EQUAL programme. Its lead partner is NIACE<sup>1</sup>, a non-governmental organisation working in the field of adult learning. The purpose of the Progress-GB Development Partnership is to pilot and disseminate innovative approaches that will support employers to overcome skill shortages, by promoting inclusive work practices, and to address the needs of refugee and migrant workers to develop and adapt their skills for the UK labour market through a range of lifelong learning opportunities.

People who come to the UK from other countries can encounter considerable difficulties in gaining recognition for their existing skills, experience and qualifications. As part of the Progress GB project, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham has developed new models to support recognition through skills auditing, work experience, top-up training, and developing migrants' awareness of the UK labour market.

Refugees are offered an assessment by an advisor, who discusses the programme and audits candidates' language and skills levels. They are then directed either to a vocational orientation programme, which identifies gaps in ability and further appropriate training, or to a vocational language programme. In some vocational areas (for example business administration, health care, construction, general maintenance and social research), skills can be accredited whilst on the orientation programme. Different pathways are accredited with different bodies but these include: NOCN (National Open College Network) up to Level 3, NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level 2 and the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) accreditation for construction. Once they are work-ready, refugees are offered a supervised work experience placement, where a mentor is assigned to help them integrate into the workplace. Throughout the process, refugees are offered ongoing assistance with looking for a job or becoming self-employed, and may leave the programme at any time to take up paid employment.<sup>2</sup>

### - *To ensure the sector is represented in the development of (national) initiatives*

In countries where a national system of validation is under development, it is important for all relevant stakeholders to be able to participate in this process.

In Ireland, *Comhairle*, now the *Citizens Information Board*, took part in the 2006 FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) pilot project (a project launched in 2006 to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL), which enabled the Board to gain experience of the national validation process and recognise emerging issues with the implementation of VINFL. The project involved 9 providers, including former awarding bodies, a college of further education, a sector industry body, a voluntary organisation, a community education provider and two private providers. Hence, although small scale, it aimed to be representative of further education and training.

The evaluation of this pilot has recently been published, in 2007. As a participant in the project, *Comhairle* was able to gain experience of the RPL process and recognise

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from 'Overcoming Barriers', a dissemination leaflet for Progress GB, available at: <http://www.equal-works.com/ProductHome.aspx?ety=2eeca14b-594c-42b0-885d-39c555eaf280>

emerging issues with the implementation of RPL. One of *Comhairle*'s reasons for involvement in the project was to be able to develop VINFL in line with their own training and development services – as one of the nine providers involved, *Comhairle* would have been able to give input on the needs and experiences of the third sector and ensure that these were captured alongside those of other providers in the evaluation report.

- *In response to national/European policy initiatives (e.g. lifelong learning strategies, Youth Programme common objectives)*

Increasingly, the importance of implementing measures to facilitate validation of informal and non-formal learning is referred to in national and European policies. Some third sector organisations recognise their role in the delivery of such policies and undertake their own validation initiatives with these in mind.

For example, the *attestation de compétences* developed in Luxembourg for validation of youth voluntary work is said to be a response to both European and national recommendations with regards lifelong learning. The need for a validation process to recognise skills and competences developed through voluntary work was seen as a vital component of lifelong learning.

Thus, through validation, third sector organisations are able to contribute to the achievement of the common national or European goals.

### 5.3.2 Individual beneficiaries

Some of the reasons for involvement in validation initiatives listed above also apply to the individual beneficiaries of validation initiatives, such as:

- *To gain recognition for non-formal training provided within third sector*
- *To gain recognition for voluntary/community/youth activities*
- *To gain access to formal education and/or employment*

Another reason for individuals to take part in validation initiatives is to benefit from its 'soft outcomes' such as improved confidence and self-esteem. These soft outcomes may then help an individual to gain access to formal education and/or employment, or simply to take on more variety or responsibilities within their current role. These benefits to individuals are explored in more detail in the 'Outputs / Outcomes and Impact' section below.

## 5.4 Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives

### 5.4.1 Bottom-up approaches

As stated in the 2005 Inventory, third sector organisations are mainly “users and developers” of validation methodologies, rather than being involved in regulation. The country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory reveal examples of ‘bottom-up’ initiatives which have been developed by third sector organisations, individually or collectively, in response to identified needs.

Thus, steps towards the introduction of VINFL may be made by third sector organisations without their explicit awareness that their activities would be deemed as ‘validation’. The Inventory has revealed a number of cases, where third sector organisations are employing relatively ‘simple’ methodologies for assessment and validation of an individual’s participation in their activities (e.g. recording only duration of service, post held and activities undertaken, rather than competences developed and at what level), which are as yet not linked in to formal qualifications and standards systems.

For example, in Germany, there are several ‘pass’ initiatives in the voluntary sector, such as the *Hamburger Freiwilligenbuch* (Hamburg voluntary booklet). They describe the tasks that the ‘pass’ owner has performed and the duration, which are both certified by a third person or organisation. However, there are no standards for describing the tasks and often there is wide variety and inconsistencies in the descriptions provided<sup>1</sup>.

These initial activities demonstrate the potential within the third sector for the introduction of more ‘refined’ VINFL procedures and verify an identified need for such procedures.

Our research has shown that umbrella organisations play a very important role in the development and implementation of VINFL within the third sector. There are a number of examples of umbrella organisations or sectoral fora taking the lead on the development of validation policies and methodologies which can apply across a particular sector or type of learning.

For example, in Belgium, a working group was established in 2005, led by SoCiuS (the support service for social and cultural adult education) and FOV (Federation of Organisations active in the popular (non-formal) adult education scene), to develop a vision around EVC<sup>2</sup> in socio-cultural work. In the same year, a strategy on EVC was developed by the socio-cultural sector, including the policy areas of Youth (represented by *Steunpunt Jeugd*) and Sport (represented by the *Vlaamse Sportfederatie* VSF). In this

<sup>1</sup> BMBF 2004, p. 73

<sup>2</sup> In Flanders, as in the Netherlands, the concept of validation of informal and non-formal learning is generally referred to under the heading of *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties* or EVC (Recognition of Acquired Competences or Recognition of Acquired Skills, RAS)

vision, the term 'recognition' or 'assessment' is taken to mean *“the assessment of the listed skills that are supported by documentary evidence. Such assessment happens on the basis of (a) reference framework(s), also known as (a) standard(s). Such assessment may be done by the individual himself or herself, by means of a self-evaluation. The latter is especially the case when EVC has a formative function<sup>1</sup>.*

The Danish Adult Education Association, a non-profit umbrella association, has a *Realkompetenceforum<sup>2</sup>* for input, mutual learning and coordinating ongoing work in its member organisations. National and international actors and experts are invited to the Forum meetings, where experiences across the different sectors are discussed. The Forum meetings have been held with short intervals since August 2004 and are widely supported by the participants.

Working in collaboration, with coordination through an umbrella organisation or forum can encourage consistency across a sector. For example, the Dutch umbrella organisation *Movisie<sup>3</sup>* started several validation projects in 2001, which have now led to a finalised validation procedure for Dutch volunteer organisations. The EVC<sup>4</sup> (validation) certificate which the volunteer receives after finishing the procedure includes a maximum of 12 competences. These competences have been determined through consultation with volunteer organisations and are also based on validation procedures from other fields (education and the labour market)<sup>5</sup>.

In Croatia, a volunteering booklet was developed through a 'bottom-up' initiative led by a network of volunteer centres. All of the regional centres in the network issue and promote the same type of volunteer booklet, introduced by Association MI, the volunteer centre in Split. As they state on their website, the volunteer booklet is their original product which started life as an internal way of rewarding and recognising work of their volunteers. Eventually, it gained interest among other non-governmental organisations and institutions and is now more widely used.

We have already noted that third sector organisations may become involved in the development of (national) VINFL initiatives in order to ensure the sector itself is adequately represented. As a collective, third sector organisations may find that they are able to have a greater influence on the development of validation in their country. For example, in Italy, a co-ordination Forum (Third Sector Forum<sup>6</sup>) has been established to represent all

<sup>1</sup> By 'formative function' the socio-cultural sector understands the advantages (social integration, social involvement, active citizenship) and personal development of EVC. This is distinguished from the summative function, which refers more to the economic and educational advantages of EVC.

<sup>2</sup> An English description of the Forum can be seen on <http://www.nordvux.net/object/5983/validationobject.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> The Netherlands centre for social development, <http://www.movisie.nl/>

<sup>4</sup> *Erkennung Verworven Competenties* - Recognition of Acquired Skills

<sup>5</sup> *Herkennen van competencies*, MOVISIE & CIVIQ. Retrieved 18 August: <http://www.civiq.nl/emc.asp?pagelId=2104>

<sup>6</sup> [www.forumterzosettore.it](http://www.forumterzosettore.it)

Voluntary Associations. In 2000 the Forum signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education stating *“the possibility of a certification of training credits acquired through association activities, with a specific attention to the definition of competences acquired by young people (also in distance learning), in voluntary activities, in social and cultural enterprises and associations”*.

#### 5.4.2 Top-down approaches

There are also some examples of ‘top-down’ initiatives or procedures which have resulted from a stimulus at national policy level (although these are less frequent in the third sector than in the public or private sectors). For example, the Norwegian "National Validation Project" carried out between 1999 and 2002 supported the development of a number of validation projects in the third sector. As we have already seen, participation in public sector initiatives represents an opportunity for third sector organisations to influence their development and ensure that the ‘voice’ of the third sector is heard and taken into account.

National policies and/or legislation recognising the value of competences acquired through third sector experience can help to encourage more validation activities within the sector. For example, in France, in 2000 the Ministry of Youth and Sports modified a previous law of 1984 related to the organisation and promotion of physical and sport activities. Following the 2000 amendment of the law qualifications required for teaching and training in a professional perspective in the field of Youth and Sports can now be validated through professional or voluntary experience.

In Croatia, an Act on Volunteering adopted in 2007 created a starting point for the development of validation initiatives, since it established an obligation on the part of the volunteer organisation ‘employer’ to issue a written confirmation of volunteer work experience. This provision within the law serves as a good example of the impact third sector organisations can have when they work together. The provision is the result of initiatives from the third sector, especially the Croatian network of volunteer centres. They had advocated for the introduction of a volunteer booklet that would serve as a publicly validated document to testify to the experience that a volunteer acquired through higher volunteer work. They proposed that the volunteer organisation ‘employer’ would be responsible for recording the period of work, type of work done as well as any education and training in which the volunteer had taken part. Although the volunteer booklet was not legislated through the Act as such, it is specified that the employer is obliged to issue the volunteer a written confirmation of work, which must include the following information: time period spent volunteering, short description of activities, and education and training provided. Article 34 of the Act also specifies that an employer may issue booklets, cards or other forms of documents for this purpose. In this sense, the Act now provides minimal legal requirements regarding recording volunteer experience.

### 5.4.3 Support from EU institutions

A final stimulus for a number of transnational VINFL initiatives is the availability of European funding for such work. Our research identified a number of projects funded through, for example, the Leonardo da Vinci and EQUAL programmes.

For example, the project '*Assessing Voluntary Experiences (AVE) in a professional perspective*'<sup>1</sup> was supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The project ran from 2003 until 2006 and involved partners from seven countries (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the UK). The main results of the project were a tool (a portfolio of skills and competences for volunteers) and method (a guide to accompany this portfolio). The Progress GB project mentioned above, is another example of a project developed using European (EQUAL) funding.

The EU also provides support for the development of VINFL through providing information (e.g. the European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning) and guidance (e.g. the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning).

### 5.4.4 Partnership-working and consultation

All three of the above methods of development demonstrate the importance of working in partnership and consultation with relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure buy-in and take-up of initiatives developed.

A good example of a project which recognised the importance of stakeholder involvement and buy-in is the *attestation de competences* which is currently being piloted in Luxembourg for the validation of skills and competences acquired by young people through voluntary work.<sup>2</sup> Third sector organisations have worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth to develop this project. After an initial proposal was developed, a consultation with employers was carried out to gather their views. The *attestation, de competences* which is now being used for the pilot was amended in line with their feedback, thus helping to ensure buy-in from the start from relevant stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> <http://mapage.noos.fr/leonardo.vaeb/eeuropeassociations.gb.htm>

<sup>2</sup> More information can be found (in French) at: <http://www.snj.public.lu/publications/publications-diverses/index.html>

## 5.5 Methods employed

Our research suggests that declarative and portfolio methods<sup>1</sup> are the most prevalent methodologies used within the third sector. This section provides a definition of the types of methods used in the third sector, examines the merits and disadvantages of the different methods used, then discusses the importance of linking methods to formal standards and qualifications.

### 5.5.1 Declarative methods

Declarative methods are based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences. Normally, a third party counter-signs the declaration, which may take the form of a so-called "competence handbook", in order to verify the self-assessment. Declarative methods may involve a self-assessment against given criteria or none at all. This validation process is simple and relatively inexpensive. Its main purpose is normally the *identification* of skills gained through non-formal and informal learning.

Examples of the use of declarative methods can be found in the Netherlands, where the National Scout Association developed a portfolio for volunteers in 1997, and in France, where the UNCU (National Union for University Clubs) has supported the use of a notebook to record voluntary skills since 1998.

In Germany, we have already mentioned that there are several 'pass' initiatives in the voluntary sector. Some, such as the *Hamburger Freiwilligenbuch* (Hamburg voluntary booklet) simply describe the tasks that the pass owner has performed and the duration, which are both certified by a third person or organisation - there are no standards for describing the tasks. Others describe the competences developed, such as the *Nachweismappe Ehrenamt* (certificate booklet for honorary posts) which includes competences like "ability to work in a team", "motivation", "working independently". The *Deutsches Jugendinstitut* devised a *Kompetenzbilanz*<sup>2</sup> or "competence record" for young people which shows a higher degree of complexity. It derives fields of experiences from family-related activities, that encompass questions like "What have I learned from this?" and "Which competences have I acquired by this activity?" These competences are assessed on a five level scale, from level 1: "I am very good at it", to level 5: "I am not good at it."

<sup>1</sup> For definitions of the five main categories of validation approaches, please refer to the European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning, 2005

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dji.de/familienkompetenzen/DasInstrument.pdf>

A declarative method has been used in Belgium for this digital portfolio developed by the Flemish Youth Service, *Jeugd en Stad*.

#### Competence Sticks, Belgium

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the youth service *Jeugd en Stad* (JES) used a grant from the European Social Fund (Objective 3, focal point 4) to develop a project called "C sticks" ("competence sticks"). C Sticks are digital portfolios which help young people to identify, access and develop the key competences they have learned through volunteering and to help them to understand how to use these competences in the labour market.

The target groups for the project were young people aged 18-25, volunteers in urban district youth work, young job-seekers and JES workers.

40 beneficiaries took part in the pilot project and developed their own digital portfolio on a usb drive. This enabled them to collect information about themselves and their skills through different media (pictures, videos, images) and to update their portfolio very easily. A second phase of the project was planned, involving more people and an older target group.<sup>1</sup>

In Norway too, both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal learning in the sector often are based on the purposes on individuals' own efforts – a self-declaration with minimum input from assessors. Individual organisations are responsible for guidance, yet individuals draw up their own CV and identify and describe their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a self-assessment of the skills identified and describes these. The Personal Competence Document, described in the box below, is an example of an electronic tool which has been developed for this purpose.

#### The Personal Competence Document (PCD), Norway<sup>2</sup>

The Personal Competence Document is a system for mapping and documenting competences, based on self-evaluation. The main objective of the PCD system is to stimulate users to map, describe and document the activities they are or have been involved in and the competences they have developed, with a focus on non-formal learning and voluntary activities. The secondary objective is to raise awareness of the multitude of competences developed in the voluntary sector so that these can be taken into account in both the education system and in working life.

The PCD focuses on the competence development aspect of all learning activities in the member organisations. It reminds and underlines to member organisations of the fact that all learning activities may form important parts of an individual's competences that may be relevant for work or further education.

The PCD contains:

- Instructions and guidance

<sup>1</sup> Youth Action for Peace, 2007, YAP Mag, Vol. 3 June 2007, available at [http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!\\_june2007.pdf](http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!_june2007.pdf) and Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by T. Nilsen Mohn, Vox- Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning

## The Personal Competence Document (PCD), Norway<sup>2</sup>

- Forms to document the "totality" of competences and competences linked to single activities
- Examples
- A dictionary of voluntary activities

The likely value and effect of undertaking the PCD process for individuals is: an improved overview of one's own competence-generating activities, increased motivation and self-esteem and increased ability to put one's competences into words. Creating an overview of an individual's competences may make it easier to see what competences are 'missing'. The use of the PCD may therefore make it easier to decide "where to go" - what learning activities to start with/continue with, what kind of work to look for etc.

The PCD is available on the internet at: [www.vofo.no](http://www.vofo.no) (in Norwegian only).

### 5.5.2 Portfolio methods

Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments, employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways. In the most general of senses, competence portfolios tend to involve a self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria, interview(s) with a third party and / or an assessment centre. The portfolio method tends to be process-orientated. The additional assessment stage (e.g. interview, assessment centre) reduces the problem of subjectivity found with declarative methods, which rely on an individual to assess their own achievements and competences.

Examples of the use of the portfolio method by third sector organisations can be found in Luxembourg and the UK.

In Luxembourg, the pilot *attestation de competences* certificate for youth voluntary work is awarded using the following process:

- An interview is carried out with the young person requesting an attestation in order to discuss the evidence they can provide and the type of attestation they should request.
- An adult member of the organisation drafts an attestation for the young person, using the appropriate template. This is then discussed with the young person.
- The attestation is submitted to the National Youth Service with an accompanying letter from the organisation. The *Commission d'Attestation* then considers the dossier and forwards it, with their recommendations, to the Ministry of Youth.
- Approved dossiers are co-signed by the Ministry of Youth.

The interview stage used in this case provides an opportunity for the young person to receive guidance in the validation process. They can be supported in choosing the right certification to apply for (in this case, three different certificates can be obtained, according to the role and responsibilities the young person has held; leadership, training or project management) and a more reliable assessment can be made as a result of collaboration between the young person and the adult member of the organisation.

A portfolio method is also used in the UK, to accredit training provided by a community development project. A particular strength of this project is that the accreditation of the learning is based on the national framework for qualifications (the CQFW), which means that the learners are able to earn 'credits' which are formally recognised.

#### Sylfaen Cymunedol, Wales – Learner portfolios

Sylfaen Cymunedol is a community development project, which aims to influence change in communities. It achieves this through engaging community development activists in relevant learning and development programmes.

Initially the learning programmes provided by Sylfaen Cymunedol were not recognised. The charity started to look for ways of accrediting their training largely because they wanted their learners to gain confidence and encourage them to proceed with further learning and development. The CQFW (Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales), via the Open College Network, offered them an opportunity to do this by providing a flexible means of "*accrediting learning wherever and however it took place*". They found that they could assign credit values to all of their units of learning, for example confidence- building, introduction to community development, working with young people etc in a way that they could not with the traditional NVQ system.

In order to achieve credit, the learners have to complete a 'portfolio', which consists of a number of 'task sheets'. For example, learners may be expected to carry out a community audit and evidence their learning by taking photographs, writing up a short report etc. An Internal and External Verifier proceed to review the portfolios before credits are awarded. This assures quality and provides the learner with an opportunity to transfer their credit to other forms of learning.

The research also identified a number of initiatives which relate to non-formal training provided by third sector organisations, which is then certified in some way. Examples of this certification of participation can be found in Finland (among others).

In Flanders, Belgium, organisations in socio-cultural adult education can, at their own discretion, issue a certificate to their members for a completed course of training. Within youth work, attestations for vocational training are delivered by the Flemish government (the Youth Department). The recognition and assessment of skills in the Sports sector is

the remit of the sports agency BLOSO (*Intern Verzelfstandigd Agentschap met rechtspersoonlijkheid*).<sup>1</sup>

### Certificates for non-formal learning, socio-cultural adult education in Belgium

Organisations in socio-cultural adult education can issue a certificate to their members for a completed course of training (these certificates can be downloaded from the SoCiuS website).<sup>2</sup>

At present responsibility for whether and how such 'assessment' is conducted lies with the providers of the training course themselves. To give a clearer structure to EVC in socio-cultural education, SoCiuS has developed a vision text which proposes making use of two sorts of evidence: the learning certificate and the skills certificate.

The **learning certificate** "*is a piece of documentary evidence of experience in education and vocational training. It is a form that is issued by the entity organizing the activity after completion of a training, study day, course...*" It is therefore a proof of participation by the person in question. The learning certificate also states the educational objectives of the training activity. To increase the recognition of such a certificate SoCiuS provides a common format for organisations in this sector. There are currently no strict conditions to be satisfied for issuing learning certificates.

A **skills certificate** shows that a coherent whole of skills has in fact been acquired. In order to obtain a skills certificate an assessment must therefore be conducted. The awarding body guarantees that the skills are in fact present and controls the quality of the process and the applied standards. The same format is used for a skills certificate as for the learning certificate, supplemented with a description of the skills and the level at which they were acquired.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>3</sup> SoCiuS 2006a, in Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

### 5.5.3 Merits and disadvantages of the methods used

Declarative and portfolio methods may be more prevalent than 'hard assessment' (tests/panel interviews) due to the nature of learning in the third sector and time and resources constraints often faced by third sector organisations. Declarative methods rely mainly on the individual's own efforts and therefore represent a cost-effective method of delivering VINFL. Moreover, the target beneficiaries within this sector, as in others (volunteers, young people etc) may prefer such self-evaluation techniques to 'hard assessment' (tests/panel interviews) methods.

The portfolio method too offers a flexible, cost-effective method of validation for the third sector. Individuals participating in third sector activities may do so in addition to other commitments such as paid work and the portfolio method represents a flexible way of recording skills and competences in their own time and at their own pace.

In addition, the portfolio method tries to address the questions of validity, reliability and authenticity by combining a variety of methods as well as "internal" self-assessment with external assessment. This reduces the lack of reliability of the assessment compared to declarative methods.

However, the disadvantages of using these two methods may be that they lack reliability in the assessment of an individual's competences and learning outcomes and that it is difficult to link them to formal education systems and qualifications frameworks. Using declarative methods in particular, relies on the individual to carry out a self-assessment, which raises issues in terms of, for example, quality control. We have seen that the use of an additional 'quality control' stage in the portfolio method (e.g. an interview, assessment centre) helps to overcome this problem. The use of standard criteria for assessment, where possible linked to formal standards or qualifications frameworks, can also help to ensure greater reliability of the validation method.

Where competences or learning outcomes are not fully defined, or linked to national standards or definitions used in formal education, this can limit the transferability and take-up of an initiative. In Belgium, one of the reasons given by socio-cultural education organisations for their limited use of learning certificates was that the formulation of learning objectives is not clear. In Denmark, the Adult Education Association (DAEA) notes that *"it will be a departure from previous practice for adult education to engage in systematic task of clarification and documentation of real competences. It will require a coordinated cooperation within the liberal adult education and with other sectors"*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prior Learning, What is new?, Taken from the world wide web on 30 August 2007. Available at: <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/whatisnew.aspx>

However, although we have emphasised the importance of linking in with stakeholders and formal education systems, the research also shows the importance for third sector organisations of being able to develop their own validation processes and procedures, which fit in with the organisations' ethos and way of working, as well as the needs of their target beneficiaries.

SoCiuS, the Belgian support service for social and cultural adult education, emphasises that there are fundamental differences with regards the recognition of skills in socio-cultural adult education, compared with the policy areas Education and Work. In socio-cultural adult education, the actors involved prefer to develop their own instruments and procedures and for vocational training providers to choose the way in which they will or will not develop their training and whether they wish to recognise the acquired skills. This freedom is seen as crucial.<sup>1</sup>

In 2003 Jukka Määttä carried out a large-scale study on validation of learning gained within the liberal adult education system in Finland<sup>2</sup>. He also concluded that any development work in this field must respect the autonomy and independence of the many educational providers from the third sector, and the target groups that they cater for.

Thus, declarative and portfolio methods may be chosen by third sector organisations as the most convenient way of delivering VINFL for them and their beneficiaries. If these systems can be designed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and developed to link in with formal education systems or qualifications frameworks and /or employers' needs, they may represent a solution to suit all stakeholders mentioned in the list above.

#### 5.5.4 Links to formal standards and qualifications

An understanding of learning outcomes<sup>3</sup> is vital for the validation process and our research has identified the importance of developing validation methodologies which link in with national frameworks of qualifications or standards, or at least use common 'descriptors' for the learning outcomes of participation in third sector activities.

For example, in Finland, the Ministry of Education suggested that in order to further develop methods for the validation of non-formal learning within liberal adult education provision, the providers of non-formal education needed to describe the content of their courses better. A large-scale 2003 study on validation of learning within the liberal adult education system also recommended a more detailed documentation of (non-formal)

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Jukka Määttä (2003) Tunnusta ja tunnista opittu! Vapaan sivistystyön opitun tunnustaminen formaalissa oppilaitoksissa Selvitys muodoista, käytänteistä, yhteistyösuhteista ja ongelmista.

<sup>3</sup> The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process

course contents and methodologies and that liberal adult education providers should issue certificates more systematically.<sup>1</sup>

In Luxembourg, the pilot project mentioned above involved close collaboration with the Ministry of Education (a Ministry representative is involved in the pilot group for the system), which has enabled the initiative to be aligned with the state system for validation of formal professional qualifications.

An example of a project which has successfully used a validation process based on third sector experience for access to and award of formal education qualifications is the 'Graduating Experience' project led by LUMSA University in Italy.

### Graduating Experience, a pilot validation project in the Italian University System<sup>2</sup>

This pilot project was launched in 2001 at LUMSA university in Italy. Its main goal was to develop a method of validation of prior learning (formal and informal) in order to obtain a university degree.

The validation procedure was launched for only two degrees: Educators and Managers of the Third Sector. These are relatively "new" professions that are based on bottom-up practices; very often, workers acquire competences, skills and qualifications through a learning-by-doing process. For educators and for people working in the Third Sector, visibility of knowledge was indeed top priority.

However, it was also felt that the university had an opportunity to switch to a new approach to teaching/learning and its social value: from a one-way, teacher-to-student process, to an interactive process in which the acquisition of a university degree is the result of a virtuous circle between academic learning, working experience, practical skills and training. Through its involvement in another project, the university already had a number of networks among social enterprises and social workers. In the validation process, they acted as the main stakeholders for the design, feasibility, and effectiveness of courses.

Students wanting to enrol in an Italian university must have a five-year secondary school degree. For the Graduating Experience project, students were invited to follow three steps:

- 1) Prepare a detailed curriculum [a portfolio] detailing former education, professional experience, vocational training or any type of formal or informal learning that he/she feels relevant. Students were urged to give a very detailed description of experience, and to supply certifications, if any.
- 2) Participate in an interview with the validation Committee set up at the School of Education, in which prior personal experience is assessed. The Committee would open a personal file and quantify it in ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). This is the "knowledge capital" by which knowledge is made visible and formally recognised for enrolment.
- 3) Prepare a "study plan" for the degree, which brings together the "knowledge capital" of the student and the list of disciplines and examinations required for that degree by the Ministry of Education. In this way, the "study plan" is a merging between informal and formal frames of reference. Every single "study plan" is approved by the Faculty Committee of the School.

Over the two years of the project, students enrolled in the procedure were mostly people over 30, with five or more years of working experience and a strong motivation for personal and professional improvement. A

<sup>1</sup> Jukka Määttä (2003) Tunnusta ja tunnista opittu! Vapaan sivistystyön opitun tunnustaminen formaalissa oppilaitoksissa Selvitys muodoista, käytänteistä, yhteistyösuhteista ja ongelmista.

<sup>2</sup> Corradi, C., Graduating Experience, A Practice of APEL in the Italian University System

number of them already held a university degree which was non-specific for their field, but most of them had none. Some students had attended a university and passed examinations, and then dropped out without completing their degree; for others this was their first academic experience. Many were bound for mobility between different jobs or working places.

The development of learning outcomes, which is discussed in more detail in the public sector compendium of the 2007 Inventory, is recognised as a complex process for educationalists<sup>1</sup>, thus for actors in the third sector, with perhaps less expertise in education and training, it presents a significant challenge. It is thus to be recommended that third sector actors work in partnership or seek expert advice when developing this element of their validation methodologies.

## 5.6 Outputs / Outcomes and Impact

### 5.6.1 Quantitative data

Very little quantitative data has been found regarding the scale and impact of third sector validation initiatives. However, for some of the third sector validation initiatives we have identified, it is possible to quantify their outputs in terms of, for example, certificates awarded or portfolios completed. The table below gives an overview of the data we have found.

Third sector validation initiatives – quantitative data
<b>Ireland, Comhairle involvement in FETAC pilot project, 2006</b>
<b>6 learners</b> within <i>Comhairle</i> achieved FETAC minor awards at level 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications.
<b>Belgium, 'C Sticks' for young volunteers</b>
<b>40 beneficiaries</b> took part in the pilot project and developed their own digital portfolio on a USB drive. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Belgium, Learning and Skills Certificates</b>
An overview of the use of the learning and skills certificates for socio-cultural adult education was published in October 2005. It showed that learning certificates were issued for <b>429 (11%) of 3,800 registered activities</b> . <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adam, S., Using Learning Outcomes: A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels, University of Westminster, June 2004

<sup>2</sup> Youth Action for Peace, 2007, YAP Mag, Vol. 3 June 2007, available at [http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!\\_june2007.pdf](http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!_june2007.pdf) and Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<b>Finland, The Recreational Activity Study Book</b>
The Finnish Youth Academy has a <b>written agreement with 250 formal educational institutions</b> on how to value and credit the entries in the book. Over <b>80,000 Study Books</b> have been distributed so far. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Germany, Qualipass<sup>3</sup></b>
By July 2006 200,000 young people had a <i>Qualipass</i> .

It is clear that there is a wide range in the scale of the initiatives. Among initiatives clearly identifying outputs, the Finnish recreational activity study book evidently has the largest impact in terms of quantitative outputs. However, it is important to remember that the impact of such initiatives also depends on the quality of the 'soft outcomes' they produce and the 'results', such as facilitating access to formal education and training or employment.

#### 5.6.2 'Soft' outputs for individual beneficiaries

As indicated previously in this document, individuals can gain 'soft outputs' from participating in a validation procedure, such as increased motivation, confidence and self-esteem and an understanding of one's own abilities. Such outcomes are difficult to measure but can have a significant impact on society and the economy, by facilitating an individuals' pathway towards education/training and/or employment, or improving their understanding of and contribution to active citizenship.

In addition, individuals can benefit further from the validation which we have outlined above. Certificates and portfolios can represent valuable 'proof' of their skills and competences. In Italy, for example, some youth associations have experience in the recognition of learning through study visits in foreign countries, which have been validated as university credits. In Finland, an overwhelming majority of respondents to a survey on validation in liberal adult education stated that they were aware of formal educational establishments which provided full or partial course exemptions for those who had successfully completed courses through non-formal learning.

For others, it is simply beneficial to have a record of one's activities, experiences and abilities. For example, in Finland, the Youth Academy carries out biannual surveys on how

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Nuorten Akatemia ([www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)), September 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See Germany Chapter of the full Inventory for further detail

the Study Book is actually used and how the product could be developed. The main results from the surveys have been to find out that, although some young people have used the book when applying for admission into further education or a job, most of the study book users are somewhat 'passive' in their use of the book. The most important function for the Study Book users seems to be that the book is a black-on-white documentary of what has taken place in their youth.

### 5.6.3 Results

The 'results' of the third sector VINFL initiatives are the secondary effects of the introduction of VINFL – for example individuals gaining access to education or employment. The wider results can also bring benefits to the third sector organisations and to the society / economy as a whole. Examples of the wider impact VINFL can have on stakeholders include:

#### **Individual beneficiaries:**

- Access to education / training – through recognition of experience and competences for admission or exemption
- Access to employment – following recognition / certification of transferable skills/competences which an individual has developed through voluntary or community work, membership of a third sector organisation or non-formal education / training
- Career development – taking on new roles/responsibilities, as a result of recognition of what an individual is capable of
- Improved quality of life, e.g. resulting from increased self-esteem, or increased income

#### **Third sector organisations:**

- Improved recruitment – better match between individuals and roles
- Effective assessment methods to inform 'career development' of individuals – leading to increased 'job' satisfaction (e.g. for volunteers)
- Improved profile and image of organisation and sector as a whole
- Improved quality of life, e.g. resulting from increased self-esteem, or increased income
- Attracting more people to 'join in'

Other results are closely linked to the reasons given in the 'rationale for involvement' sector earlier. These include:

- Optimum use of the skills and competences available within the third sector workforce – 'matching the right person to the right job'
- 'Revitalising' the sector – encouraging more people to join in third sector activities
- Improved quality / professionalism of third sector activities – improving the 'image' of the sector.

The initiatives we have identified are relatively recent, which makes it hard to determine the 'results' they have achieved so far. In order to ensure that the wider impact of VINFL in the third sector is recognised, research and evaluation projects to capture and measure the outcomes and impact, as well as identify good practice and lessons learned, will be crucial in the future.

## **5.7 Barriers to take-up**

Our research has identified several barriers to the take-up of validation in the third sector. These are examined in turn below:

- *Fear of the administrative 'burden' and costs involved*

The lack of suitably qualified/specialist staff within third sector organisations may prevent an initiative from being developed to its full potential. Moreover, third sector organisations may suffer from both resource and time constraints, which can make it difficult to cope with additional demands from individuals seeking validation of their skills and competences. In Belgium, the learning certificates developed for the socio-cultural adult education sector are not used more widely for a number of reasons, including the associated administrative burden. It may be that there is a lack of suitably qualified/specialist staff within the organisation to deal with requests for validation.

- *Difficulty to transfer / apply validation methodologies to third sector activities (e.g lack of standards/definitions such as learning outcomes/ occupational profiles)*

Validation methodologies often make use of use standards or profiles based on learning outcomes or competences. Third sector organisations may find it difficult to apply VINFL due to a lack of standards / profiles or fixed structures in their activities.

We have already seen that in Finland, the Ministry of Education has suggested that the providers of non-formal education need to describe the content of their courses better. The educational institutions involved in another Finnish Recreational Activity Study Book system, have not always found it easy to use in recognising and valuing previous learning experiences of young people. This has mostly to do with the fact that the book is structured according to the nature of voluntary free-time activities rather than according to the curricula of different formal educational institutions. It is suggested that a more competence-based approach would suit the initiative better.

In Belgium, the main concern within socio-cultural adult education is that the recognition of acquired skills involving training work is excessively geared towards the award of diplomas. This is understood to mean that training courses is highly structured and formalised, with clear objectives and assessment. Stakeholders from socio-cultural education fear that the emphasis is therefore placed on the acquisition of diplomas, rather than the acquisition of skills, whereas they prefer to focus on lifewide learning and the development of social, cultural and communications skills.<sup>1</sup>

- *Moral / ethical issues*

It is possible to identify some third sector organisations which display an element of mistrust towards the introduction of VINFL within the sector. They fear that validation creates a new incentive to take part in third sector activity (i.e. to gain certificates / qualifications) which is not in line with the aims / ethos of the sector (i.e. to give one's own time/skills for the benefit of others).

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

In Finland, the Recreational Activity Study Book has been designed specifically with this consideration in mind, as explained in the box below:

#### Finland, The Recreational Activity Study Book

The Recreational Activity Study Book system is aimed at the documentation – and recognition – of qualifications and competences acquired by participating in youth voluntary activities. Its greatest focus is placed on competences. That is because the study book system is centred on the individual learner. In the study book, emphasis is put on the development of each young person's personality rather than the actual qualifications of the skills required in particular job requirements. The underlying idea is that by participating in youth voluntary or recreational activities, young people do have a chance to acquire key competences with regard to personal development, such as social, communicative etc. competences.

The Study Book has no criteria for the measurement of learning outcomes or performance, nor are there any public examinations held to assess the competences acquired by the young people.

It is argued that one of the reasons for the openness and flexibility of the study book system is the appreciation of the voluntary nature of youth informal and non-formal learning. By formalising the system, the basic motivation for participation in youth activities, i.e. the joy of being, doing and learning together, would be endangered. Thus, the system does not aim for direct accreditation in formal education in any way. It is of great importance that the voluntary nature of participating and learning in voluntary youth activities, whether organised or not, will not be endangered.

Youth Academy tries to encourage the representatives of the formal education system to recognise and value the learning and competences young people acquire outside school, as well as to cooperate more with organisations offering young people meaningful learning environments. But the issue is always approached from an individual learner's point of view, not from the point of view of the formal educational system, for example.

It has been a strong strategic – and even ideological – decision by the Academy and its member organisations that the Recreational Activity Study Book should be structured upon activities, not competences. This has to do with a more general question in youth work and youth policy about the extent to which youth work focuses on the employability of young people. The answer to that question has been – at least this far – that youth work focuses on the development of the individual, not merely on employability issues.

## 5.8 Success Factors

Our examination of VINFL within the third sector thus enables us conclude with an exploration of success factors which can be identified from experiences to date. Existing initiatives could serve as candidates for good practice with a view to adapt them to meet the needs of a different context or target group. It seems important to learn from work that has been carried out so far and to take this into account in the development of new initiatives.

Good practice recommendations for VINFL within the third sector are:

- *Developing methodologies which are competence-based, or linked to learning outcomes (where possible, linking with nationally-recognised standards/profiles)*

Using methods which describe the competences/skills an individual has developed, rather than simply the time they have spent, or the role they have held, can help to achieve more take-up and buy-in from stakeholders such as employers and formal education and training providers. Where there is a link to national standards and or qualification frameworks, this can help to improve the transferability to other sectors.

- *Partnership-working and consultation*

Working in partnership to develop VINFL initiatives can help to ensure consistency and transferability across the (sub-) sector. Working with public sector partners can also ensure that third sector initiatives are developed in line with national standards and procedures.

Consultation with relevant stakeholders, both within the third sector and in other sectors (e.g. policy makers, employers), helps to ensure that validation initiatives are developed in line with their demand and tailored to individual needs.

- *Seeking support / buy-in from relevant stakeholders, e.g. umbrella bodies, policy makers*

Support and buy-in from stakeholders can help to ensure the success sustainability of any new initiative. It is important to do this at an early stage – when the initiative is being developed. The example of the *Attestation de Compétences* developed in Luxembourg illustrates this well – employers were asked for their feedback on the draft version, which was amended in line with their views. This means that employers are more likely to recognised the value of the certificate, e.g. in their recruitment procedures.

- *Ensuring an element of 'freedom' or flexibility in the methodologies used – respecting the needs and wishes of the providers and target groups*

It is important to recognise and respect the diversity of organisations and individuals working within the third sector. Organisations should have an element of freedom in the methodologies they choose to employ and individuals should also benefit from flexible methodologies, which fit with their needs, abilities and lifestyles.

- *Learning from others and sharing experiences*

In a sector which is more likely to suffer from time and resource constraints, it is important to avoid 're-inventing the wheel'. As explained above, it is important for third sector organisations to learn from each other in order to build their VINFL initiatives on the basis of success factors and lessons learned.

## **5.9 Conclusions**

This compendium has given an overview of key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches to VINFL within the third sector. Examples have been taken from the individual country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory to illustrate the range of initiatives which are currently in use and the lessons which can be learned from these.

There is increasing recognition of the need for a validation process to recognise skills and competences developed through third sector activity as a vital component of the concept of lifelong learning. At the same time, experience to date is helping to form an understanding of the issues which must be taken into account when strengthening VINFL in the sector, such as the importance of partnership-working and ensuring methods incorporate an element of flexibility for both providers and beneficiaries.

Evidence collected for the European Inventory shows that currently, declarative and competence portfolio methods are prevalent in the third sector. These methods present advantages (flexible, cost-effective, less 'professional' input required, more suited to target beneficiaries than 'hard assessment' methods) but also disadvantages (issues regarding quality control and reliability of self-assessment methods). In the future, it remains to be seen if more complex methods are devised and the extent to which these are linked to formal standards and frameworks.

Good practice and lessons learned can be drawn from existing initiatives and the importance of sharing learning and experiences cannot be stressed enough. Our research has shown the importance of stakeholders working together in order to improve the quality and transferability of initiatives, to overcome barriers to take-up and encourage more organisations and individuals to get involved. At the same time, it is evident that research and evaluation are vital to measure the outputs and impact of these initiatives and help to identify key messages for dissemination among the actors involved.



## 6.0 Belgium<sup>1</sup>

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By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 6.1 Introduction

The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning is now well-established on the public policy agenda in Belgium, where initiatives have been developed in recent years in the context of a wider drive to improve access to Lifelong Learning. Responsibility for lifelong learning is shared between the Communities (Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking), the Regions (Flemish Region or Flanders and Walloon Region or Wallonia) and the social partners. As such, the Belgian Federal government plays little role in the detailed development and implementation of policies in the field. The overview of developments set out in this report reflects this division of responsibility.

### 6.2 Public Sector

#### 6.2.1 Public Sector Initiatives at Federal Level

As noted in the introduction, responsibility for education and training policy in Belgium lies with the Communities (based on language) at sub-national level. Where the recognition of skills impinges on employment policy, there is a shared competence with the Federal Government. Federal legislation may therefore intervene if the issue of validation affects the relation between the employee and the employer. For example, Federal Government must decide which categories of employees have the right to follow a validation procedure during working hours and the frequency with which this may occur. The Federal Government also makes decisions regarding access to regulated occupations and determines the conditions necessary to that end.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1985, provided certain basic conditions are met, private-sector employees have had a right to paid training leave (*Congé-Education Payé/ Betaald Educatief Verlof*) of up to 180 hours per academic year to undertake work-related training. The upper limit for remuneration for such training leave is currently fixed at €1,960 in a given year<sup>3</sup>. The training must be related to the individual's job and fulfil a number of other criteria set down by the relevant legislation. Public sector employees have a similar right to training leave,

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Belgium chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Simon Roy

<sup>2</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>3</sup> For year 2003-04 – See <http://www.meta.fgov.be/ph/phb/frhb00.htm>

although subject to different rules and in their case referred to as *Congé Formation / Opleidingsverlof*.

A Federal law on the *bilan de compétences* (individual record of achievement) was passed in December 2001 and, following the approval of implementation legislation, officially entered into force in September 2002. This legislation grants every worker a right to a *bilan de compétences* and to be assessed to identify and validate skills gained outside the formal education system<sup>1</sup>.

At the end of 2006 a decree was introduced (the *Arrêté Royal du 10/11/2006*) which integrates the validation of competences into the right to paid training leave.

## 6.2.2 Public Sector Initiatives in the Flemish Community

### 6.2.2.1 Policy Context

The question of validation of non-formal and informal learning has become a significant and high priority policy issue in Flanders. In Flanders, as in the Netherlands, the concept is generally referred to under the heading of *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties* or EVC (Recognition of Acquired Competences or Recognition of Acquired Skills, RAS).<sup>2</sup> Policy in this field has been closely linked to the Flemish government's drive to develop an integrated approach to provision of lifelong learning, as set out in July 2000 in the Action Plan: *Een Leven Lang Leren in Goede Banen* (Lifelong Learning on the Right Track).

On the basis of the Action Plan, a working group was established to investigate the best means to implement EVC. This group included a team of academics<sup>3</sup>, representatives of the Flemish Departments for Education, Employment, Culture and Economics, along with the Flemish Employment and Training Service (VDAB)<sup>4</sup>, the SME support service (VIZO)<sup>5</sup>, the Flemish social partners and the "Economic and Social" and "Education" Councils<sup>6</sup>. The outcome was an advisory paper<sup>7</sup> containing a range of recommendations in order to operationalise the hitherto relatively vague concept of EVC. One of the recommendations that was immediately implemented, was to start with pilot projects that would build on prior experience with EVC.

In January 2003, the first five pilot projects were launched to test the principles set out in the advisory note. These pilot projects, addressing a range of different target groups, were

<sup>1</sup> compétences « buissonnières »

<sup>2</sup> For consistency, we will continue to use the term EVC throughout this section to refer to initiatives in the sphere of validation

<sup>3</sup> Teams from the University of Antwerp and the HIVA as part of the VIONA Labour Market Research Partnership

<sup>4</sup> *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding* <http://www.vdab.be/vdab/>

<sup>5</sup> *Vlaams Instituut voor het Zelfstandig Ondernemen*.

<sup>6</sup> Respectively the *Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* (SERV) and the *Vlaamse Onderwijsraad* (VLOR)

<sup>7</sup> *Ruim Baan voor Competenties, Advies voor een Model van (H)erkenning van Verworven Competenties in Vlaanderen: Beleidsconcept en aanzetten tot Operationalisering*

co-ordinated by the “EVC project group” within the training policy organisation (DIVA<sup>1</sup>), which had recently been established.

The first round of five pilot projects in the field of EVC were carried out from January to December 2003. A second round of four projects started in December 2003 and finished in December 2004. The projects were:

#### First Round

- EVC in out of school childcare
- EVC in Teacher Training
- EVC for newcomers (immigrants). Measuring Competencies for Electronic Technicians and Maintenance Electricians
- Development, Testing and Evaluation of an EVC procedure for Tour Guides
- Skills for people with low qualification levels

#### Second Round

- Language skills in French and English (see below)
- EVC for Nursing Staff (4th Grade)
- EVC for “volunteers”
- EVC for the hospitality sector

In April 2004, the Flemish government recognised non-formal and informal learning via the Decree on 'Titles of Professional Competence', which later became known as experience certificates. Employees or job-seekers in the Flemish community can acquire an 'experience diploma' if they demonstrate that they have learned or acquired certain skills required to exercise an occupation.<sup>2</sup>

The two current Ministers with particular responsibility for the development of EVC policy and practice are Frank Vandenbroucke (Vice-Prime Minister of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Employment and for Education and Vocational Training) and Bert Anciaux (Flemish Minister for Culture, Youth, Sport and Brussels). They have signalled a clear commitment to develop further the recognition of informal and non-formal learning across the various policy areas and in consultation with all involved partners.<sup>3</sup>

Structured thinking about lifelong learning and skills acquired earlier or elsewhere thus began around the year 2000. An exploratory phase, looking at the general advantages and disadvantages of the recognition of acquired skills, was then followed by a phase of policy

<sup>1</sup> Dienst Informatie Vorming en Afstemming

<sup>2</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Belgium, published by Cedefop

<sup>3</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

intentions and action plans. Today, the results of the subsequent phase of pilot projects and initiatives in different policy areas and at different levels are now taking shape. This section will now give a brief overview of the general approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning adopted in Dutch-speaking Belgium, followed by a more detailed examination of the methodologies in place within the different tranches of the public sector.

#### 6.2.2.2 *The Flemish Concept of Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning*

The Flemish model of EVC has two aspects, as set out in the EVC advisory note<sup>1</sup>:

Recognition and transfer of competencies (summative function): the formal recognition of an individual's existing competencies, including those gained outside of formal education and training settings, is seen to have a significant "economic and social effect", in that it facilitates access to education and training and mobility within the labour market. This summative function would also allow competence gained in a formal setting, but outside the formal Belgian education system (abroad, for example), to be more easily "converted" into recognised Belgian qualifications.<sup>2</sup>

Career and Personal Guidance (formative function): the ultimate aim of this formative aspect of EVC is a system of lifelong career path guidance<sup>3</sup>, which is accessible for all citizens. This is distinct from firm-based Human Resources Management or training plans (which may have a direct link with an individual's terms and conditions of employment) and can be viewed as a personal "lifelong learning strategy".

In practical terms, EVC in Flanders comprises three main elements or stages<sup>4</sup>:

- Identification (Herkenning): the recognition of non-formal and informal learning will often start through career advice, through which an initial "portfolio" of an individual's competencies may be drawn up. This portfolio forms the basis for further advice and eventual recognition of competencies.
- Assessment (Beoordeling): assessment of competencies can result from referral from the identification phase or from an individual's own initiative. The assessment is based on professional standards set by the Social and Economic Council or SERV<sup>5</sup> or fixed training standards and may entail written or practical tests, interviews and/or evidence of acquired skills (other certificates or examples of work etc.).
- Recognition (Erkenning): the formal recognition of competencies (potentially in the form of an experience certificate) can theoretically be undertaken by any organisation that satisfies official regulations.

<sup>1</sup> *Ruim Baan voor Competenties 2002*

<sup>2</sup> There is an official institution in Flanders (as in other European countries) that recognises qualifications people have gained in other countries. EVC could potentially make the procedure easier and shorter.

<sup>3</sup> levensloopbaanbegeleiding

<sup>4</sup> From *Oproep tot het indienen van voorstellen voor Pilotprojecten Erkenning Verworven Competenties 2003*, MinVG

<sup>5</sup> *Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*

### 6.2.2.3 *EVC – objectives*

The stated aim of EVC in the Flemish Community is to help individuals to achieve personal development and increased integration into the labour market and society in general. Experience certificates enable individuals to gain recognition for their professional competences and for deprived groups in particular, the certificates help to re-establish confidence in the individual's own abilities and to enable them to progress their career.<sup>1</sup>

The Flemish model of EVC is designed to be of equal relevance to a wide range of target groups, including not only those in mainstream employment and job seekers, but also the self employed, unqualified school leavers, immigrants and others. The guiding principles of the approach are non-discrimination, equal opportunities and societal integration.

Experience certificates contribute to increasing a higher level of employment and to easing tensions on the labour market. They can allow individuals to enhance their employability, to move more easily from inactivity into work and to stay employable for longer. Experience certificates thus contribute to the attainment of a higher degree of employment and ease the tensions on the labour market. For employers, the certificates bring increased transparency and enable the matching of required skills with the talents of individuals. When new employees are being recruited, the experience certificates provide immediate confirmation of their professional competences. For existing employees, experience certificates may also prove to be useful for the optimum deployment and utilisation of talents within the company and for the development of a strategic training policy. The organisation of shorter training paths is cost-saving and it increases the chances of success. The experience certificate therefore further encourages companies to use a skills approach as a point of departure for their human resources policy.<sup>2</sup>

### 6.2.2.4 *EVC – Methodology in detail*

The decree of 30 April 2004 regarding the acquisition of a title of professional competence outlined an initial framework with regard to procedures and responsibilities. The Flemish government was attributed key decision-making responsibilities, with support from the SERV and the Education Council (VLOR). For example, the SERV delivers annual advice to the Flemish government regarding the selection of experience certificates, taking into account the following criteria:

- bottleneck occupations
- the presence of an occupational profile
- pilot experience with the assessment of acquired skills

<sup>1</sup> Education Department, Ministry of the Flemish Community (2005), Implementing the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, National report 2006 of the Flemish Community (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Vandenbroucke, 2004, in Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

- the need for a balanced mix of sectors and levels of skills<sup>1</sup>
- the extent of support by the sectoral partners.<sup>2</sup>

The 'experience certificate' or 'title of professional competence' is an official recognised certificate issued by the Flemish government. The certificate confirms that an individual has acquired specific professional skills. For every experience certificate, specific standards are drawn up for each occupation by SERV. These occupation standards consist of the professional competence profiles that describe what may be expected of a practitioner of a given profession. Currently, there are procedures in place for the delivery of experience certificates for bus drivers, coach drivers, outside-school-hours child care workers, call centre operators, industrial painters and tower crane operators, although this list is constantly being updated with new occupations. Since early 2007, there are now also test centres for barbers and hairdressers, hairstylist parlour managers, removals packers and removals carriers. In 2006, the first two experience certificates were issued to two call centre operators.<sup>3</sup>

In order to obtain an experience certificate, an individual must approach an accredited assessment authority (test centre). All public and private training providers can apply for accreditation as an assessment authority. Accredited assessment agencies have the following mission:

- to create an assessment methodology and develop one or more assessment tools, based on the nationally determined standard and directives for assessment;
- to offer guidance, on request, in the listing of skills and the compilation of a talents passport;
- to assess the applicant's acquired skills through analysis of the talents passport, a practical test and (if desired) a theoretical test;
- to give feedback on the applicant's assessment result and, if necessary, formulate advice for a course of training or additional work experience;
- to formulate and send advice for the conferment of a title by the recognition agency. This advice contains a report on the assessment.

To guarantee fair treatment of individuals and transparent assessment, the assessment authorities must comply with nationally determined standards and assessment directives.

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Education Department, Ministry of the Flemish Community (2005), Implementing the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, National report 2006 of the Flemish Community (Belgium)

<sup>3</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

Recognition agencies have the following responsibilities:

- to determine a format for the experience certificates
- to confer and award the experience certificates on the basis of the advice from the accredited assessment agency.
- data management - identification data assessment results;
- the low-threshold installation and management of a databank with formats for the talents passport, titles, standards, guidelines etc
- awareness-raising among potential applicants
- awareness-raising among interested parties such as employers, education establishments and providers of training courses;
- monitoring.

The recognition agency must be a government authority.

#### 6.2.2.5 *Formal Education and Training – Exemptions*

Two decrees have been introduced in the Flemish Community, so that individuals who have acquired competences at work or elsewhere may be granted exemption from at least parts of formal education and training. By taking special examinations, adults can gain recognition for individual learning at work or elsewhere to obtain the same qualification as those having followed traditional pathways. This applies to adult education and higher education. Next to these decrees, there is also an existing EVC-procedure for obtaining a diploma secondary education: the system of the central examination commission (*Centrale Examencommissie*) of the Flemish Community.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2.2.6 *EVC in Adult Education*

In 1999, a decree was introduced to allow a reduction of study periods to be granted for adult education courses, if relevant work experience was proven. More recently, the Flemish Government has approved a new decree relating to adult education. This decree places considerable emphasis on the validation of skills, both in terms of dispensations and of the certification of skills acquired elsewhere.

The decree outlines a clear mission in adult education with regards the assessment and certification of competences acquired elsewhere. Distinction is made between the following actions:

- The measuring and testing of skills acquired earlier (SAE) as a function of the dispensations applied by the centres. The student has the right to minimise the length of a course of studies as much as possible and should therefore be released from those components of the course for which his or her skills are already sufficiently established.

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by Mr Wilfried Boomgaert, Ministry of Education and Training, Flemish Community of Belgium

- The assessment of professional skills. The decree of 21 April 2004 relating to the Title of Professional Competence or experience certificate provides that Adult Education Centres may act as assessment bodies. This task is included in the new decree on adult education, subject to the centres' adherence to the provisions of the abovementioned decree and the implementing order on that decree of 23 April 2004.
- The certification of skills acquired via distance learning courses. The centres could have the educational powers for organising the relevant training evaluations and awarding certificates.
- The possibility of developing over the longer term a more standardized certification of SAE for non-vocationally-oriented qualifications, for instance in connection with languages.

The validation of skills acquired elsewhere in the context of dispensations from course components is the responsibility of the director of a centre. In the interests of the students and the centres, efforts must be made to ensure as much uniformity as possible between the measuring of skills acquired elsewhere and the granting of dispensations. Provision has therefore been made at regional level for closer cooperation and alignment (procedures, instruments, assessment).<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2.2.7 *Validation in Higher Education*

The 2004 decree on flexible learning created a legal framework for the validation of prior learning and/or professional experience for:

- Access to higher education programmes
- Decreasing study duration.

The decree meant that the pursuit of studies was no longer determined on the basis of passing examinations but on the acquisition of proofs of credit for the separate course components.

One of the results of the earlier Decree on the structure of higher education (2003) was the official recognition of cooperation between a university and one or more '*hogescholen*', which is known as 'association'. The aim of these associations is to become cooperating entities on education and research, and the development of fine arts, as well as to harmonise fields of study and create bridges between bachelor's and master's studies.

Following the 2004 decree on flexible learning, each of the above 'associations' was obliged to install an agency for the validation of prior learning. The methodology applied for the validation of prior learning was as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders In (Belgium)

- Applicants present a portfolio which details their prior learning experience
- The association's 'validation agency' assesses the application, taking into account the learning outcomes of the programme applied for
- A Proof of Competence (POC) certificate is issued

A study conducted with two higher education associations (association KULeuven and association UGent)<sup>1</sup> regarding their experience in implementing EVC found that in general, the number of EVC student applications remained restricted. The study attributed this to the fact that students were unfamiliar with EVC, that procedure, information and publicity about EVC was not yet widely distributed within the organisations and that a number of questions remained unsolved about the cost and benefits of the EVC procedure. The study noted that most students that had undertaken the EVC procedure reported positive experiences but some were disillusioned because of the heavy workload involved.

The law determines that EVC assessors in higher education must be evaluation experts and are not permitted to combine the assessment activity with the actual guidance and support of the applicant. Students are entitled to request support during their EVC application and for feedback at the end of the procedure. Basic information is available from the associations' websites and also on the website of the Flemish department of Education. In the case of the two associations in the above study (KULeuven and UGent) they can also refer to the guides on EVC prepared by the institutions, or the relevant information incorporated into the institutions' general study guides. Students also have access to competence maps (where available) for the curriculum they pursue. A general brochure on EVC is currently being prepared by the Department of Education.

In terms of costs, this is determined at basic level by the legislation. Institutions can ask for a basic fee to cover administrative costs and for an additional amount which is related to the number of competences to be identified during the assessment phase.

The challenge for the assessment procedures in higher education is in the first place a harmonisation of the different methods and standards used by the associations. At the present moment they vary according to the associations - the aforementioned study notes that in practice, there are large inter-institutional differences between, but also within institutions. This means that students eligible for a proficiency certificate for acquired skills

<sup>1</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

and for a reduction of study duration will have the impression that they can 'shop around' between the various associations.<sup>1</sup>

In 2006, the Decree on the establishment of measures for restructuring and flexibility in higher education simplified and improved the procedures for recognition of prior learning. The outcomes (access to higher education programmes, shortening of study duration) and the basic methodology outlined above remain the same. The system of appeals against the decisions of the validation agency has also been improved.

However, there remain several issues to be addressed. We have already noted that there are significant differences in the procedures in place which may lead to students 'shopping around'. A critical issue for many institutions is that not all curricula have been fully developed in terms of competences. For the associations, the time investment of staff is high and no additional resources have been made available by the Department of Education so the extra work has to be taken up by existing staff. It is felt that EVC is promoted on the one hand but not financially supported on the other – which affects its acceptance at institutional level.<sup>2</sup>

Each association is responsible for quality assurance regarding EVC with respect to the following criteria: transparency, reliability and regularity of the procedures and methodology adopted.<sup>3</sup> The Flemish government has responsibility for the five-yearly evaluation of how the associations and institutions attend to the quality assurance of their EVC procedures and their dispensation procedures.<sup>4</sup>

### 6.2.3 Public Sector Initiatives in the French Community

#### 6.2.3.1 *Policy context*

On July 24 2003, a cooperation agreement on the validation of competences in the field of continuing vocational training was concluded between the different authorities of the French-speaking part of Belgium (*la Communauté française, la Région wallonne and la Commission communautaire française*). The cooperation agreement was formalised through three decrees adopted by the authorities concerned at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004.

In July 2005, the combined authorities of the French-speaking community of Belgium published a second Strategic Plan for Research and Training, to develop knowledge and

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

know-how in Wallonia.<sup>1</sup> The plan acknowledges the progress made by the different actors involved (the validation consortium and the CCPQ – see below) but stresses that more needs to be done.

There is a specific objective in the plan "to accelerate the process of development of the validation of competences", where progress to date was recognised but deemed insufficient. These specific objectives with respect to validation were set out:

- to establish new validation centres in Wallonia and Brussels;
- to disseminate to potential validation centres more precise information on the criteria they must meet for approval;
- to reorganise the production cycle for the validation reference frameworks;
- to take into account the reference frameworks set out by the CCPQ;
- to organise a dissemination campaign with the aim of increasing the awareness of validation among potential beneficiaries.

The following sections outline the objectives of the validation of competences, the methodology in place to implement validation actions and the specific frameworks with respect to formal and higher education. These should permit an overview of the extent to which the plan's objectives are being addressed.

#### 6.2.3.2 *Validation of Competences - Objectives*

The main objective of the legislation on *validation des compétences* is to enable citizens over the age of 18 to gain recognition for the competences they have acquired through professional experience and training and through other life experiences. Official recognition of individuals' skills is seen as beneficial in terms of their professional identity and should guarantee access to continuing education, enable the individual to manage their career path and allow them to validate their abilities within the labour market.

In line with the *Note d'orientation stratégique* (see below), priority is currently given to the following target groups:

- Workers, in or out of employment (with priority given to the unemployed)
- Individuals with skills which are not recognised
- Individuals without an upper secondary education diploma (CESS)

Target groups are also selected in line with the current employment policies and measures in place, in order to ensure that the *Titres de compétence* can help to support these (e.g. policies to help older workers).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Plan stratégique transversal 2 Recherche et formation – Développer les connaissances et les savoir-faire en Wallonie. Available at: <http://www.validationdescompetences.be/desktopdefault.aspx?tabID=89>

### 6.2.3.3 *Validation of Competences - Methodology*

A consortium of the five main public sector providers of continuing vocational training manages the implementation of the legislation on validation of competences. These are:

- *Enseignement de Promotion Sociale, EPS* (Adult Education Provider in the 'communauté française' – i.e. Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Regions);
- *The Institut de Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises, IFAPME* (Training Agency for the Self Employed and SMEs in the Walloon Region);
- *FOREm* (the Walloon Professional Training Service);
- *Bruxelles Formation* (Public sector training agency in the Brussels-Capital region)and;
- *Service de Formation des petites et moyennes entreprises, SFPME*, (Training Service for Small and Medium-Sized enterprises in Brussels).

The Consortium oversees a network of 22 centres<sup>2</sup> which carry out the recognition and validation of competencies. These centres are run by one of the 5 public sector providers, or by a partnership involving one of the 5 providers.

The validation centres carry out certification by delivering *titres de compétences* to adults who can prove that they meet the standards for a certain occupation. These *titres de compétences* are based on testing and in the future a competence portfolio will also be used. These certificates are not on their own, equivalent to standard diplomas, but are designed to facilitate access to further training courses. The *titres de compétences* can also be accumulated to obtain a qualification, on the condition of passing an integrated test (épreuve intégrée) organised by the *Enseignement de Promotion Sociale*.

Indeed, policy developments on the validation of skills therefore follow on from earlier restructuring in the adult education sector. Since the adoption of a new legal framework in 1991<sup>3</sup>, adult or continuing education (*Enseignement de Promotion sociale*) in the French Community has been progressively restructured to create a more coherent, modular structure with transferable credit units and more flexible timetables. For each module or "training unit/ *unité de formation*", teaching and learning outcomes have been established, together with prerequisite levels of knowledge or experience for individuals wishing to undertake the course in question.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the *Enseignement de Promotion sociale* modified its *reglementation* to automatically recognise the *titres de compétences*.

<sup>1</sup> Consortium de Validation des Compétences, 2007, Dispositif de la validation des compétences professionnelles, Présentation brève, June 2007

<sup>2</sup> Consortium de Validation des Compétences, 2007, Dispositif de la validation des compétences professionnelles, Présentation brève, June 2007

<sup>3</sup> The Decree of 16 April 1991

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.enseignement.be/citoyens/annuaires/promsoc/propos.asp>

Each year, a *Note d'orientation stratégique* is adopted on 15 October via the *Commission consultative et d'agrément* by the social partners and the public employment services. This *Note* gives strategic direction to the measures in place to serve the decrees on *validation* and specifies for which professions *titres de compétences* should be made available. The number of qualifications available through *validation* therefore increases year by year.

For each profession, a *Commission de Référentiels* has been established which brings together the social partners for the sector with education and training providers. Within a timeframe of four to six months these *Commissions* are expected meet at least six times in order to determine competence and validation reference frameworks for the professions within the relevant sectors:

- A competence reference framework (*référentiel de compétence*) defines the profession, a list of the key activities which are carried out and the skills required within the profession.
- Within the competence reference framework, the profession is then subdivided into 'competency units' (*unités de compétences*). The number of competency units associated with a profession vary between two and five, each of them corresponding to a *titre de compétences*.
- For each one of these competency units, a validation reference framework (*référentiel de validation*) must be defined. The validation reference framework specifies the evaluation criteria and the professional activity which can be observed to determine whether the individual possesses the competences required to be granted the *titre de compétence*.

*Competency units for each profession* are thus recognised through a certificate (*titre de compétences*) which is obtained via an examination (a professional observation). These certificates confirm the individual's ability to carry out a certain element of a profession and are legal documents, recognised by the three governments of the French Community. However, they do not bring the same legal rights as a certificate awarded through formal qualification.<sup>1</sup>

Once the validation reference frameworks have been finalised with complete consensus and approved by the Governments, the validation centres begin to deliver the corresponding certificates (*titres de compétences*). However, only centres with an appropriate agreement are allowed to organise validation testing. Centres have to develop a quality system similar to the ISO 9001-2000 certification to become validation centre. This agreement is awarded by the Governments.

<sup>1</sup> Rapport conjoint 2008 sur la mise en oeuvre du programme "Education et Formation 2010", Belgique francophone

By June 2007, validation was possible through the 22 official Validation Centres for 23 professions.

#### 6.2.3.4 *Formal education and training - exemptions*

The system of boards of examiners in the French Community (*Jury de la Communauté française*), which are operated by the Ministry of the French Community provides alternative examinations for those who have followed other "learning routes" than formal schooling. To prepare for these examinations, candidates have access to necessary facilities in public or private schools and through arrangements for distance learning. Executive orders (arrêtés de l'Exécutif) determine the rules and regulations governing the organisation and functioning of the assessment boards. In secondary education, a number of qualifications may be obtained through this route.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2.3.5 *Validation in Higher Education*

In terms of access to higher education, establishments organise admittance exams for persons who do not have a secondary education qualification. In certain cases, it is possible for a person who does not have a first cycle diploma to access the second cycle (masters) via recognition of the knowledge and skills they have acquired through professional or personal experience.<sup>2</sup>

The 2005 Strategic Plan for Research and Training states that a valorisation process should to encourage those adults (job-seekers and those in employment) who wish to enter higher education to do so via the valorisation of their professional experience, other experience and training. Aside from the personal benefits to the individual, it is intended that this should facilitate job-search and promote active citizenship among those adults who resume higher education study.<sup>3</sup>

The plan sets out the following objectives for the sphere of higher education:

- to encourage higher education institutions to accept adults wishing to resume higher studies. This requires partnerships to be set up between higher education institutions and the FOREm;
- to establish a framework for the validation of competences as a method of gaining a place at a higher education institution.

The use of validation as a method of applying to higher education (*universités* and *hautes écoles*) was to be operationalised during 2007. In 2006, the Lifelong Learning Commission

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Belgium, published by Cedefop

<sup>2</sup> Towards the European higher education area, Bologna process, National Reports 2004-2005, Belgium, French Community. Available at: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national\\_impl/05NAT\\_REP.HTM](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/05NAT_REP.HTM)

<sup>3</sup> Plan stratégique transversal 2 Recherche et formation – Développer les connaissances et les savoir-faire en Wallonie. Available at: <http://www.validationdescompetences.be/desktopdefault.aspx?tabID=89>

of the *Conseil Universitaire de la Communauté française, CIUF* (University Council of the French Community) received a grant from the French Community to "support the development of good practice in supporting adults to resume studies and the structuring of activities for the validation of experience in the *Académies*". This grant was distributed to the three university *Académies*, each of which set in place a pilot project for VAE.<sup>1</sup>

## **6.3 Private Sector**

### **6.3.1 Role of the Social Partners**

Social partners, at both cross-sectoral and sectoral level, were involved, in collaboration with the public actors, in the definition of systems of references within the framework of the validation of competencies.<sup>2</sup> The sectors have been encouraged to validate training through sectoral certification systems or "vocational training passports".<sup>3</sup>

In the Flemish community, the involvement of the social partners in drawing up the priorities and the growth path for the experience certificates was established in the Flemish employment agreement for 2005-2006.<sup>4</sup>

The work of vzw VOKANS in Flanders is a good example of how social partners have become involved in the implementation of VAE actions, as outlined below.

<sup>1</sup> Rapport sur le suivi du Processus "Education et Formation 2010", Belgique Francophone

<sup>2</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Belgium, published by Cedefop

<sup>3</sup> Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Third follow-up report 2005

<sup>4</sup> Education Department, Ministry of the Flemish Community (2005), Implementing the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, National report 2006 of the Flemish Community (Belgium)

### EVC activities run by VOKANS

vzw VOKANS (Vormings- en opleidingskansen' - Vocational Training and Education Opportunities), was set up in 1990. The trade unions ACV and ACW form the basis of this non-profit organization.

vzw VOKANS has been recognized and subsidised for some considerable time now as a vocational training and employment organization; it pursues the objective of increasing and sustaining employment opportunities for job-seekers and employees.

VOKANS is running or has already conducted a number of projects on the recognition of acquired skills. The 'competentiespiegel' ('skills mirror') is directed towards recognition of various forms of acquired knowledge, abilities and attitudes from a non-formal framework, specifically for low-skilled women with little in the way of work experience of relevance to the labour market. These women will consequently be better screened and more efficiently steered towards labour-market-oriented training courses and thence towards regular employment. The 'E=MC2'-project pursues the objective of offering the unemployed or other groups more concrete prospects of employability. The e-learning method proposed by the project is based on the EVC perspective. Through the application of the existing EVC methods, attempts are being made to achieve two development goals: first, the development of the client and, second, developing supply among organisations on the labour market. The project is designed to face the challenge of motivation and to give form to instrumentation via the e-learning of skills (e-learning van competenties - eVC).<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.3.2 Professional Profiles at Federal level

A number of initiatives in the field of professional skill profiling and accreditation have been undertaken in Belgium. Although these initiatives have been led by public sector organisations, they have involved close co-operation with representatives of the private sector and social partners.

At the Federal level, accreditation of individuals was overseen by Belcert, the body responsible for accrediting organisations that certify products, quality systems and individuals, until 2006. Belcert used ISO/IEC 17024 (former EN 45013) on certifying individuals as a reference and certification organisations were accredited in a number of sectors, including construction and catering. A Royal Decree of January 31, 2006, created BELAC<sup>2</sup> as the sole Belgian body body for the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies and came into force on August 1, 2006. BELAC therefore took over all activities previously carried out by Belcert.

#### 6.3.3 Qualification and Training Profiles at Community level

The concept of qualification and training profiles (*profils de formation*) originated in the French Community decrees of 27 October 1994 and 7 April 2005 on cooperation in secondary education. This legislation led to the establishment of the *Commission Communautaire des Professions et Qualifications*, CCPQ (Community Commission for Professions and Qualifications) which brings together public and private partners from the

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> <http://belac.fgov.be/>

spheres of education, business, trade unions and representatives of other training providers. The CCPQ has two key aims:

- to verify the relevance of training provision to the current and future needs of business and where necessary, to instigate necessary amendments;
- to redefine training provision and place more emphasis on the skills which must be acquired, rather than the volume of content which is delivered.

In order to achieve these aims, the CCPQ set up nine *Commissions consultatives*, CC (Consultative Commissions) which prepare the profiles – there is one commission for each of the nine training sectors. The Commissions are composed of groups of representatives from the same range of organisations as the CCPQ and are led by business representatives.

#### 6.3.4 Activities within the Private Sector

The role of skills or competencies in Human Resources Management has become a significant issue in many private sector organisations in Belgium. Research<sup>1</sup> has shown that many companies have undertaken analysis of the activities, roles and job and person specifications within their businesses, leading to the establishment of standards or *référentiels* related to specific jobs. These developments are generally used within businesses to feed into remuneration decisions (linking pay to skills), mobility within the firm and recruitment policies and requirements.

However, the range of models and the way they are implemented remains very varied and where validation procedures exist, these are generally not recognised outside the company or sector. In general, standards, which may or may not be validated in a formal manner, tend to be framed on the basis of a particular job description, rather than skills and personal development of the individual. This means that much firm-based validation of skills does not lead to “qualifications” that are recognised in the wider labour market. Indeed, one of the main objectives of the 2001 law on validation of skills was to provide a transparent framework for validation leading to commonly recognised standards and “transferable” skills.

Although, within the scope of this overview, it is not possible to examine individual private sector activities in the field of training and recognition of competencies in great detail, the following case study from one of Belgium’s largest manufacturing companies is included for illustrative purposes.

<sup>1</sup> See for example: *La validation des compétences buissonnières, quels enjeux pour les entreprises?* - CRIFA

### 6.3.5 Training and Skills Management in Cockerill Sambre

Cockerill Sambre is a Wallonia-based steel making business, which, since 2002, has been part of the Arcelor Group, the world's biggest steel maker. Group-wide restructuring means that Cockerill's blast-furnace activities will end in 2009 and the workforce will be cut by 25%. As part of the restructuring plan, the company's training department teamed up with researchers from the University of Liège (CRIFA<sup>1</sup>) to develop a methodology for transferring the knowledge and skills of workers leaving on early retirement to other workers within the firm. This project involved:

- identification of skills profiles and key individuals to act as "trainers"
- development of training techniques and tools
- validation of these tools and desired outcomes within the firm (training centre and Human Resources department)
- implementation of training plan.

## 6.4 The Third Sector

In Flanders, SoCiuS, the support service for social and cultural adult education, is an autonomous body with the objective of strengthening the social and cultural sector. One of its stated aims is to ensure that social and cultural organisations play an important role in lifelong learning and, to this end it is a partner in the adult learning co-ordination organisation DIVA.

In 2005, a working group was set up, led by SoCiuS and FOV (Federation of Organisations active in the popular (non-formal) adult education scene), with the task of developing a vision around EVC in socio-cultural work.

In the same year, a vision text on EVC was developed by the socio-cultural sector, including the policy areas Youth (represented by Steunpunt Jeugd) and Sport (represented by the VSF). In this vision, the term 'recognition' or 'assessment' is taken to mean *"the assessment of the listed skills that are supported by documentary evidence. Such assessment happens on the basis of (a) reference framework(s), also known as (a) standard(s). Such assessment may be done by the individual himself or herself, by means of a self-evaluation. The latter is especially the case when EVC has a formative function"*<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, organisations in socio-cultural adult education can, at their own discretion, issue a certificate to their members for a completed course of training (these certificates can be

<sup>1</sup> Centre de Recherche sur l'Instrumentation, la Formation et l'Apprentissage

<sup>2</sup> By 'formative function' the socio-cultural sector understands the advantages (social integration, social involvement, active citizenship) and personal development of RAS. This is distinguished from the summative function, which refers more to the economic and educational advantages of RAS.

downloaded from the SoCiuS website). Within youth work, attestations for vocational training are delivered by the Flemish government (the Youth Department). The recognition and assessment of skills in the Sports sector is the remit of the sports agency BLOSO (Intern Verzelfstandigd Agentschap met rechtspersoonlijkheid).<sup>1</sup>

At present responsibility for whether and how such 'assessment' is conducted lies with the providers of the training course themselves, within both socio-cultural adult education and youth work. To give a clearer structure to EVC in socio-cultural education the vision text proposes making use of two sorts of evidence: the learning certificate and the skills certificate.

The **learning certificate** *"is a piece of documentary evidence of experience in education and vocational training. It is a form that is issued by the entity organizing the activity after completion of a training, study day, course..."* It is therefore a proof of participation by the person in question. The learning certificate also states the educational objectives of the training activity. To increase the recognition of such a certificate SoCiuS provides a common format for organisations in this sector. There are currently no strict conditions to be satisfied for issuing learning certificates.

A **skills certificate** shows that a coherent whole of skills has in fact been acquired. In order to obtain a skills certificate an assessment must therefore be conducted. The awarding body guarantees that the skills are in fact present and controls the quality of the process and the applied standards. The same format is used for a skills certificate as for the learning certificate, supplemented with a description of the skills and the level at which they were acquired.

A further suggestion is the introduction of a function certificate. A **function certificate** *"shows that a particular function as volunteer was performed during a certain period"*. Besides the recognition of acquired skills, this certificate is therefore also a form of appraisal of the applied effort. Function certificates not only recognise the visible, describable functions but also the less obvious. No function certificates have yet been issued but socio-cultural education intends to develop this instrument in the near future.<sup>2</sup>

The abovementioned certificates may be included in a 'learning book' (see below) which can be used as a portfolio to group together experience from informal and non-formal learning environments.

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> SoCiuS 2006a, in Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

An overview of the use of the learning and skills certificates was published in October 2005 and showed that learning certificates were issued for 429 (11%) of 3,800 registered activities. 33 of those 429 activities were organized by non-accredited organizations.<sup>1</sup>

A small survey was conducted in the same year among movements, institutions and associations in socio-cultural education. A total of 10 movements, 10 institutions and 9 associations were questioned about the knowledge and use of learning certificates and skills certificates.

**Table 6.1 Knowledge and use of learning certificates and skills certificates**

	Movements (N=10)	Institutions (N=10)	Associations (N=10)	TOTAL (N=29)
Knowledge of learning certificate	4	9	1	14
Knowledge of skills certificate	2	7	1	10
Use of learning certificate	1	6	0	7
Use of skills certificate	0	1	0	1

The data shows that approximately half of the respondent organisations knew of the learning certificate, but only a limited number of organizations actually used the learning certificate. Knowledge and use of learning certificates was highest among the institutions. This is because persons following a training course in an institution can use training cheques (if training cheques are used then you must receive a learning certificate on completion of the course). Furthermore, institutions offer more courses in non-formal contexts than movements and associations, where the learning context is of a more informal nature.

The learning certificate is not used more widely for a number of reasons, including the associated administrative burden and the fact that the formulation of learning objectives is not clear.

At present there are no strict conditions to be satisfied for issuing learning certificates. In the same survey the organisations were asked to say which conditions they would attach to the learning certificate. The answers were varied, but they do give a picture of the vision of conditions and quality assurance for the learning certificate. The most frequently

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

mentioned conditions concerned the duration of training, the demand of the participants themselves and the use of training cheques.<sup>1</sup>

A further opportunity in the Flemish community with a view to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in socio-cultural work may be found in the development of the *leerboekje* or learning track record. The *leerboekje* is a useful instrument for the recognition and 'stock-taking' of skills in the life-wide sphere. It is a type of portfolio in which knowledge, talent, ability and skills acquired in a non-formal or informal learning environment in one or another (socio-) cultural sectors are recorded. In his policy letter *Cultuur 2006-2007* Minister Anciaux announced that, in his opinion, the *leerboekje* is one of the priorities of the ministerial committee Education, Vocational and Employment. The coordination and implementation of the detail of the project is managed by SoCiuS.<sup>2</sup>

SoCiuS emphasises that there are fundamental differences with regards the recognition of skills in socio-cultural adult education, compared with the policy areas Education and Work. In socio-cultural adult education, the actors involved prefer to develop their own instruments and procedures and for vocational training providers to choose the way in which they will or will not develop their training and whether they wish to recognise the acquired skills. This freedom is seen as crucial. The main concern of socio-cultural adult education is that the recognition of acquired skills involving training work is excessively geared towards the award of diplomas. This would mean that training courses would need to be highly structured and formalised, with clear objectives and assessment. Stakeholders from socio-cultural education fear that the emphasis is therefore placed on the acquisition of diplomas, rather than the acquisition of skills. The stakeholders therefore prefer to focus on lifewide learning and the development of social, cultural and communications skills.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, a pilot project for EVC within voluntary work showed that regarding tools, volunteers are less willing to use 'hard' assessment tests but prefer self-evaluation tools, such as a personal portfolio.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SoCiuS 2006a, in Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.socius.be/?action=artikel\\_detail&artikel=303](http://www.socius.be/?action=artikel_detail&artikel=303)

<sup>3</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>4</sup> Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005, in Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

An example of an EVC project in the youth sector is given below.

### Competence Sticks

In the Flemish Community, the youth service Jeugd en Stad (JES) used a grant from the European Social Fund (Objective 3, focal point 4) to develop a project called "C sticks" ("competence sticks"). C Sticks are digital portfolios which help young people to identify, access and develop the key competences they have learned through volunteering and to help them to understand how to use these competences in the labour market.

The target groups for the project were young people aged 18-25, volunteers in urban district youth work, young job-seekers and JES workers.

40 beneficiaries took part in the pilot project and developed their own digital portfolio on a usb drive. This enabled them to collect information about themselves and their skills through different media (pictures, videos, images) and to update their portfolio very easily. A second phase of the project was planned, involving more people and an older target group.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond socio-cultural adult education and youth work, the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning in cultural sectors of the Flemish community of Belgium, such as the amateur arts and libraries, is still in the planning phase.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusions

The importance of recognizing skills gained through non-formal and informal learning is well established in Belgium and formal legal frameworks have been put in place in both the French and Dutch speaking parts of the country. The concept of validation adopted in both communities relates mainly to vocational skills (gained through informal learning) although it does allow for the recognition of skills gained outside work in, for example, voluntary activities. The scope of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal skills is not currently as broad as that set in place by the most recent French legislation on the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*, in so far as it will not cover such a wide range of qualifications or form the basis for the award of full diplomas of qualifications.

As noted, the systems in both the French and Flemish Community are still being developed and implemented. As such, it will be important to monitor progress. For example, in Flanders, EVC procedures currently in use vary across the organisations involved and there are no procedures in place to monitor and coordinate EVC initiatives. Stakeholders consider supervision and quality control to be important aspects for the

<sup>1</sup> Youth Action for Peace, 2007, YAP Mag, Vol. 3 June 2007, available at [http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!\\_june2007.pdf](http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!_june2007.pdf) and Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

future development of EVC and recommend that an institutional framework for the recognition of acquired skills should be set in place.<sup>1</sup>

The implementation of EVC/VAE procedures will need to be accompanied by strong actions in terms of raising awareness and support among the general public and the stakeholders involved. In the Flemish Community, for example, it is essential to overcome fears that developments in the recognition of skills will be to the detriment of educational standards and will encourage an increase of unqualified school-leavers.

However, across the country, the benefits of EVC/VAE are clearly recognised. Measures in place to validate competencies acquired outside of the school system play a major role in professional and geographical mobility. It is also recognised that they bring social advantages (social integration, social commitment, active citizenship) and personal development.<sup>2</sup> This recognition of the benefits of the validation of non-formal and informal learning represents an important step towards the integration of methodologies in practice, and their take-up by the public.

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

## 7.0 Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>

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*By Rasa Juciute (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 7.1 Introduction

Bulgaria has developed a national policy for lifelong learning which is now in the process of being implemented. This chapter aims to present issues surrounding Bulgaria's approach to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, which is linked to the developments in policy for lifelong learning.

Bulgaria's long tradition of adult education mirrors that of its neighbours (such as Romania) and of other countries in the Balkan region and Western Europe. The first written legislative articles to regulate education in the Principality of Bulgaria were introduced in 1878. In 1924, the education law for trade and industry was enacted, which divided all the country's vocational schools into secondary, practical and additional schools. The purpose of the latter group was to raise education and qualification levels amongst employees in specific vocational sectors, who had not finished vocational or grammar schools.

During the period 1944-1989, education was characterised by its highly ideological orientation, centralised administration and the weakness of education structures brought about by many reforms. In addition, there was a multiplicity of informal institutions that offered education in the form of courses, rounds and correspondence. The subject matter mainly centred on the improvement of the knowledge and proficiencies of workers in specific fields of work. Further education, as well as re-education was usually organised by factories according to changes in their workforce requirements necessitated by the economy. The Ministry of Education was responsible for overseeing further education and re-education. The Ministry of Labour, its branch ministries, and authorities were responsible for their organisation.

Since 1989, the education system in Bulgaria has undergone a process of reform aimed at achieving coherence with other educational systems, especially those in the other EU countries. The Bulgarian authorities have already made, and must continue to make, considerable efforts to guarantee sustainable development of the education system with a view to providing valuable and competitive knowledge and skills for its population.

Within the context of post-1989 Bulgaria, numerous transformations and new challenges were initially posed by the EU accession criteria, then by post-membership developments

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Bulgaria chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Dr. Anca Dumitrescu (University of Bucharest)

and as a result the lifelong learning (LLL) agenda developed slowly. A new legislative framework for adult training in Bulgaria progressively emerged through, for example, labour market training for the unemployed, continuing adult education as part of the formal education system (mainly in the form of involving schools in providing training for the unemployed), promoting a more comprehensive approach to non-formal learning and tackling the quality issues and recognition of prior learning as well as actions towards designing a national qualifications framework.

Although some initial steps have been taken forward already, the process of re-integrating the education system into one whole, corresponding to the needs of the knowledge society and knowledge economy, has in practice developed slowly. Achievements are rather modest and scattered initiatives have mainly been brought about by foreign companies. It seems that it is still too early for the issues of identification, assessment and recognition / validation of non-formal and informal learning to appear among the priorities on the national policy agenda<sup>1</sup>. Recent initiatives related to the implementation of the National Lifelong Learning Strategy and further development of the National Qualifications Framework are laying the foundations for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and may change the situation in the future.

## **7.2 Public Sector**

### **7.2.1 General legal framework**

The process of implementing policies and measures targeted towards the identification, assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning has already started in Bulgaria, mainly using the respective common principles from the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration. However, the developments are still at a very initial stage.<sup>2</sup>

The principle of lifelong learning (LLL) in Bulgaria was initially defined in the Law on National Education adopted in 1991 with its Article 4.1., which stated that “Citizens shall be given the right to education. They can enhance continuously their education and qualification”.

Prior to the most recent developments which have resulted from the work carried out in order to meet EU accession requirements and then the preparation of a national lifelong learning strategy and a national qualifications system, lifelong learning was only partly or indirectly mentioned within Bulgarian legislation. Now, legal acts or their amendments are starting to be defined with consideration for the issues of lifelong learning, which in turn set the foundation for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the future. For

<sup>1</sup> This statement is made on the bases of the wide range of consultations and interviews with the national stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup> National Report – Contribution of Republic of Bulgaria to the 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Progress in Implementation of the Education and training 2010 Work Programme. Sofia, April 2007.

example, the new provisions of the National Education Act<sup>1</sup> and the Rules of Procedure for Application of the National Education Act refer to the aspects of transparency of qualifications and acquired competences. The Vocational Education and Training Act<sup>2</sup> contains certain provisions allowing the recognition of informal/non-formal learning, though still with little practical application.

Many other national strategic documents and programmes have been developed in the spirit of lifelong learning: the National Strategy for Continuous Vocational Education and Training 2005-2010, the National Action plan on Employment, the Employment Strategy 2004-2010, the Programme for School and Pre-school Education Development 2006-2015. Recently, an inter-ministerial working group has been created to elaborate a draft National Strategy on LLL.

The Action Plan 2007 of the National Strategy for Further Vocational Training 2005 – 2010 is among the few documents which already directly address aspects of lifelong learning. Besides the objectives aiming to improve the effectiveness of interaction and co-ordination between the responsible institutions, to increase investments and research assurance of further vocational training etc, the aims include the establishment of a system for validation of qualifications acquired by informal or non-formal learning.

Investing in professional qualification of human resources is part of the general employment policy, regulated by the Employment Promotion Act<sup>3</sup> and accomplished through the national action plans on employment and corresponding national programmes; in which the specific target is lifelong education programmes and measures aimed towards both the employed and the unemployed.

As already stated, the process of identification, assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Bulgaria is still in its initial phase. Legal provision is provided in the Vocational Education and Training Act, adopted in 1999. The Framework Programme on Further Vocational Training for Actualisation or Expansion of an Acquired Professional Qualification, approved by the Minister of Education and Science, regulates the conditions and the procedure for obtaining professional qualifications on the grounds of work experience without formal vocational training. The programme defines a procedure which enables employees with respective work experience to obtain a certificate stating his / her professional qualification (mainly under the defined conditions of state exams). So in fact the document aims to establish a validation procedure for competencies acquired through

<sup>1</sup> Published, SG, issue 86 / 18.10.1991, last amended and supplemented, issue 41 / 19.05.2006, issue 105 / 22.12.2006

<sup>2</sup> Published, SG, issue 68 / 30.07.1999, last amended and supplemented, issue 62 / 1.08.2006, in force since 01.01.2007 – the accession date of Republic of Bulgaria to the EU, amended, issue 63 / 4.08.2006

<sup>3</sup> Published, SG, issue 112 of 29.12.2001, in force since 01.01.2002., last amended and supplemented, issue 48 / 13.06.2006, in force since 01.07.2006

work experience. It is expected that the validation process will begin at the end of 2007, after the methodological and organisational base is set in place<sup>1</sup>.

The 2005 national action plan on employment provides for the development of a concept for the legal and methodological provision for validation. Some actions in this direction are included in projects by PHARE and by bilateral projects too. There are also assumed some possibilities for validation of non-formal and informal training.<sup>2</sup>

The highest expectations are now attached to the adoption of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning which, it is expected, would focus direction for further developments in the field concerned.

### 7.2.2 The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy is one of the main strategic documents for initiating developments concerning lifelong learning in the countries where the culture and traditions were interrupted due to the political developments in the last century. In Bulgaria, the LLL Strategy is for the period 2007 – 2013. The Strategy is currently being drafted by an inter-ministerial working group and is expected to be forwarded to the Council of Ministers by the end of 2007. The draft of the LLL Strategy is based on the objectives of the National Strategic Reference Framework, the Employment Strategy, the National Strategy for Further Vocational Training, the National Strategy for Human Resources Development, as well as other legal documents. The main priorities of the LLL Strategy regarding the common European trends can be defined as follows: access to Lifelong Learning; possibilities for validation of key competencies, knowledge and experience acquired through informal and non-formal learning; high quality and access to information; support for social inclusion and training.

The draft of the Strategy was developed within a project under the PHARE programme by a broad inter-institutional working group, which included representatives from the responsible ministries (the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Finance) and social partners, with the assistance of a consulting company.

The draft of the document is based on the concept that lifelong learning is a base for achieving economic, social and mental prosperity of individuals and the country. The purpose of the project was to ensure the interlinking and consistency of learning at the different stages of human life, taking into account its specific features. It defines lifelong

<sup>1</sup> National Report – Contribution of Republic of Bulgaria to the 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Progress in Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Sofia, April 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Implementing the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Bulgaria. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

learning in specific relation to the economic and the social development of the country and the personal development of every individual.

The document sets out the key areas for action which in turn are harmonised and are in line with the broader strategic national objectives for LLL and correspond to the relevant documents adopted at European level<sup>1</sup>. Necessary amendments are being made in the legal documents that are already in place, for example, the National Programme for School and Pre-School Education Development (2006 - 2015), the National Strategy for Introducing ICT in the Bulgarian Schools (2005 – 2007), National Strategy for Further Vocational Training (2005 – 2010), Employment Strategy (2004-2010), as well as the Human Resources Development Operative Programme (2007 – 2013). A further legal framework which is needed to support the Lifelong Learning Strategy is being developed using support that usually comes through the PHARE programme. For example, the Adult Training Strategy (2007 – 2013), developed in 2006, aims to lay the foundations for the further development of adult training and foresees assistance to its effective functioning.

The development of the National Qualifications Framework is another very important part of the process of building the lifelong learning system in Bulgaria, which creates possibilities for the validation of competencies, knowledge and experience acquired through informal and non-formal learning in the future.

### 7.2.3 The National Qualifications System and its links to VET

The establishment of a national qualifications system and frameworks that are in line with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) is ongoing in Bulgaria. Initial steps were already taken back in 1996 when the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) started to develop professional standards. In 2001 the Minister of Education and Science approved the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training, which corresponds to the International Standard Classification ISCED-97. The List of Professions is developed in conjunction with the traditions, work experience and accomplishments in the development of Bulgarian vocational education and training system. In relation to accession of the Bulgarian system to the European Standards, recent tendencies have been detected in the development of the Vocational Education and Training, such as enriching the variety of professions, flexible curricula and possibilities for continuous training during the preparation period. At the time, the classifications were interlinked through the codes established by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (hereafter NAVET), but there were difficulties with their implementation in practice. To improve this situation a working group was established consisting of MLOSP, NSI, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), and the National Employment Agency,

<sup>1</sup> National Report – Contribution of Republic of Bulgaria to the 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Progress in Implementation of the Education and training 2010 Work Programme. Sofia, April 2007.

with the aim to investigate how to make this implementation more effective in order to provide adequate VET for the labour market.

The process gained new shape and content with the start of Bulgaria's accession to the EU consultation process, which resulted in the further development and implementation of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) which is now ongoing in the country.

At the moment, seminars are carried out with broad representative participation from the education sector, local authorities, social partners and non-governmental organisations.<sup>1</sup> Discussions and analyses cover the compliance of degrees of professional qualification regulated by the national VET Act and the general recommendable degrees and assigned competences to them from the EQF. They also try to interlink with sectoral qualifications.

The EQF document has been translated and disseminated in the Bulgarian language and a major national seminar for popularising the national content of EQF has been carried out, with the participation of more than 150 representatives from educational institutions, public authorities, employers and social partners. The present stage of the consultation process is aiming to assure better transparency of qualifications and raise the mutual trust between educational institutions and social partners and interlinks EQF / NQF, the mechanisms for accumulation and transfer of credits, the EUROPASS and the PLOTEUS portal. Efforts are made to ensure that the process is supported and "owned" by stakeholders both from the national and sectoral levels. Therefore wide informative dissemination is part of the process, for example, the outlines of the ECVET system were published in the national newspaper "Azbukii" and sent out to all vocational secondary schools and social partners. Two seminars have been carried out, with more than 100 participants from all stakeholding entities.

A new structure of the State Educational Requirements' (Standards) for the acquisition of qualifications by professions in Bulgaria, was recently proposed by NAVET, which is expected to provide opportunities for easier comparison and recognition of qualifications acquired in Bulgaria and abroad, using the EQF, as well as gradually introducing ECVET in the Bulgarian VET system. The developments are building on the previous attempts to improve the quality of the national VET system by defining national requirements for vocational training.

For example, as a result of the PHARE project "BG 9506: "Vocational Education and Training Development" which started in 1996, 18 vocational education and training standards were developed on a pilot basis and a modular approach was introduced in the VET system. A total of 33 pilot schools from 18 towns were involved in the project to implement the modular curriculum approach for vocational training in 18 occupations. After

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

completion of the project, a total number of 31 VET schools introduced the modular approach between 1999 and 2003 and in the school year, 2003-2004 - 64 VET schools (288 classes and 7000 students). The number of teachers trained in the modular approach was 594 in 2004 (compared to 217 in 1999).

The National Employment Service, along with the MLSP, designed and proposed a methodology for the establishment of national requirements for vocational training. When the draft national requirements were agreed, training was organised on an experimental basis by established training organisations with a view to checking their usability and validity. Piloting activities were successfully completed and the first set of requirements was ready to be applied on a broader basis. Similar requirements were worked out shortly after for other occupations and specialities with appropriate conditions for sector and branch being created gradually. It was expected that these actions would standardise the content and conditions as well as assessment, recognition and documentation of job skills acquired that in turn would improve the quality of the vocational education and training process, the skill level of the labour force and the country's competitiveness within the labour market in the broader sense<sup>1</sup>.

Bulgarian vocational schools (except those involved in the piloting projects) currently use the list of vocations for education that were developed and applied in 2003. Experience from the other EU member states show that the development of standards (either vocational or professional) takes time. To date 71 professional standards have been developed and approved by the NAVET and MES in Bulgaria. These standards are applied to both initial and continuing training. According to the MES procedures, piloting of the finalised standards started in 2003 and was followed by the gradual development of new vocational curricula in accordance with the standards. The implementation of the new curricula started in 2004/2005 and the process may continue up to 2008.

In Bulgaria implementation is based on laws and the respective documents are worked out by individual ministries. Except single documents, they usually do not include targets for implementation, in terms of people, measures, timing and financial recourses. This might reduce the commitment and in turn the impact of the reform process and hinder implementation under the National Employment Plan and PHARE. Yet the actions are limited to the general projects which are still to be translated into concrete measures.

The detailed description of competences acquired through formal learning will contribute to the development of tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the future and is seen to link training institutions with enterprises. To this end, the necessary examination materials need to be developed as well, in order to specify whether the candidate can (and to what extent) demonstrate knowledge, skills and competences

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

assigned to each of the results listed in the respective State Educational Requirement (standard). Methodical support to the pedagogical staff for further vocational training for adults needs to be developed as well as the information database for the support of research activities and activities for popularising and introducing good practices in this field. Methodical Guide for training of adults in the Vocational Education and Training system has been developed and distributed.

#### 7.2.4 Links with Higher Education

The structure of higher education is now in line with ISCED 97. This gives opportunities for the improvement of the educational and qualification level of training within the LLL context and in turn lays the foundations for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the future. The present legal framework and legal acts that regulate aspects of education and training (set out above) now define the necessary knowledge, skills, and professional qualifications to be acquired within the framework of high and higher education, as well as the acquisition of professional qualifications for those, who have chosen a vocational form of training<sup>1</sup>.

A new draft of the National Education Act is now being prepared, aiming to regulate and expand the legal framework for provision of the existing forms of training – individual study, distance and correspondence training methods. The Vocational Education and Training Act now defines full-time, extra-mural, and part-time studies or forms of individual studies of vocational training. It also gives an opportunity to provide flexible training by a form of short occupational courses, training by Framework Programme E with the possibility for further training as well as non-formal and informal learning. Since the end of 2004, the provision of distance learning has been legally approved within the framework of higher education; its provision in vocational training centres has been under development too.

But despite these developments which aim to introduce more flexible forms of learning that are provided and recognised by educational institutions, informal and non-formal learning is not yet officially recognised by VET institutions of secondary education level and universities. Higher education institutions are still entitled to decide which results or exams taken in previous forms of study will be recognised upon applying for a certain cycle of study.<sup>2</sup>

Steps in this direction were taken in 2004, when the Framework Programme for further vocational training for actualisation or extension of already acquired professional qualification(s) was developed and approved by the Minister of Education and Science.

<sup>1</sup> Implementing the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Bulgaria. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Towards the European Higher Education Area, Bulgaria National Report 2004-2005

With this respect, training seminars have been carried out in 2005 – 2006 in Sofia and Thessalonica, Greece, through a joint Bulgarian-German project on the theme “Promoting Adults Vocational Training and Employability”. Experts from the responsible ministries, the NAVET, the Employment Agency and representatives from the social partners have participated in them as well. Validation of informal and non-formal learning processes is part of the process and it is foreseen that it will be started in 2007, after the methodological and organisational basis is assured<sup>1</sup>.

As previously mentioned, amendments and supplements of the VET Act (SG, issue 77 / 2005) have led to amendments and supplements in the Higher Education Act (SG, issue 77 / 2005) related to the attestation of professional qualifications. These establish a legislative base for the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes<sup>2</sup>. This is seen as a prerequisite for improving VET’s appeal and quality, as well as for promoting LLL. It contributes to the achievement of compliance with the common European principles for the identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning. Yet practical implementation of this requires further action on the development of methodical documentation and handbooks to be carried out, corresponding legal entities to be defined, and for the validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning to be publicised among the potential users (employed, un-employed, employers, etc.)<sup>3</sup>. At the present moment, a working group on the development of a draft of Law on Recognition of Qualifications has been established and is working under the Ministry of Education<sup>4</sup>.

Widening partnership between institutions and stakeholders, which is now of high importance, would assure better trust, objectivity and trustworthiness of the processes that have started in recent years. That also will allow greater responsibilities to be taken towards the development of legislation, institutional work and strengthening mechanisms for the evaluation of competences – standards on competences, standards on validation, defining validation beneficiaries and quality assurance in this field.

### **7.3 Private Sector**

Social partners in Bulgaria are now more often involved into the decision making process concerning the increasing of adaptability, employability and career development of the employees, and in supporting the delivery of appropriate education and training<sup>5</sup>. Although tripartite bodies at the national, regional and local levels take part in consultations on the development and implementation of the policy on VET and employment, their involvement

<sup>1</sup> National Report – Contribution of Republic of Bulgaria to the 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Progress in Implementation of the Education and training 2010 Work Programme. Sofia, April 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Social Partner Involvement in Lifelong Learning Examined (2005). European Industrial Relations Observatory.

in developing validation initiatives is as yet very low. The nationally representative trade unions and employers have established vocational training centres themselves, in order to provide continuing training for both unemployed and employed people. For example, the Centre for Vocational Training at the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) has been licensed by the NAVET to provide vocational training; the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA), which is another nationally representative employers' organisation, also operates a Centre for Vocational Training and the "Podkrepa" Confederation has established a special unit for syndicate training – a Syndicate Development Confederation Department. None of these entities are yet developing any initiatives concerning identification, assessment and recognition of learning acquired through informal or non-formal education.

Within individual companies, there are stakeholders interested in developing validation methodologies, although actions have so far been very limited. The importance of various LLL areas of training usually varies according to the sector, company size and activity type and those that are implemented are usually introduced as part of the working culture of foreign companies. Thus, whereas in the public sector an increasing concern is the need for validation of knowledge in foreign languages; in the private sector, trade and marketing issues are of increasing importance, whereas in mixed property units the target is personal skills development.

The private sector is encouraged to contribute to training: the state subsidy for higher education development was 0.8 % of GDP and 0.9 % of GDP in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Since the beginning of 2007, all training activities are now VAT free. It is expected that this would increase the provision of training activities, including training in the work place, as well as increasing the participation of the target groups.

### The Establishment of a Vocational Training Centre in Devnya

As a response to the need to upgrade the skills of workers at the Solvay Sodi Combined Works in Devnya, it was decided that a vocational training centre should be set up within the plant. The decision was related to the need to improve the organisation of training, to develop better and more efficient methods of financing and to achieve a higher quality of training in line with specific requirements.

A self-contained Centre for Vocational Training for the personnel of the Combined Works will be established. There are plans to provide opportunities for training geared to specific needs, which will be identified annually, through validation methods such as observation. The occupations for which employees will be trained are included in the official classification of occupations in the manufacturing sector. The types of training available are to include initial training, additional training and retraining. Training will be linked to production needs in terms of use of specialist equipment, product mix and structural, technical and organisational change. Representatives of all the 23 social partners – government institutions, employers, and trade unions – are involved in the work for this Centre's establishment.

## 7.4 Third Sector

As far as the third sector is concerned, there is already an awareness of the potential and relevance of methodologies and tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. On the one hand, possibilities to assess and recognise acquired knowledge and competences lift the profile of informal and non-formal learning and reflect a person as a whole. On the other hand, individual “social competences” are becoming increasingly important in all types of work.

Various NGOs have developed many initiatives under informal and non-formal learning programmes. For example, the Network of the traditional Bulgarian culture and its educational centres organise a range of activities including language courses, music lessons and theatre acting, as well as certain professional training. The Society for the Propagation of Knowledge is the largest non-profit-making Bulgarian adult education organisation. Similar activities are implemented by “Znanie” society (dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge), structures of the centre “Open Education”, schools such as “Europa” and “Faros”; foundations such as “Open Society”, “Potential”, “Development of the Civil Society”, “Incobra” and “Time”.

## 7.5 Conclusions

Post-1989 Bulgaria, in common with the other acceding and candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, has primarily focused on economic and political issues. Its priority targets were the creation of a modern market economy based on the development of an efficient private sector, lower levels of regulation and less state interference in the economy. After decades of existence under the totalitarian regimes, the Bulgarian education system also had to undergo a general reform process to become compatible with the education systems in other members states of the EU. Therefore Bulgaria's legislation on LLL is currently focused on establishing a general commitment to universal access to education, training and retraining over the individual life-cycle of a person and does not mention the active development of its components including validation of competences, tacit and explicit knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Within this context of transitional changes, the concept of lifelong learning has been partly embedded in Bulgarian VET / labour market reform (for example, improved access to education as well as to training of adults, and quality of education and training), but an integrated approach is still needed. Reference can be made in this respect to the development of organised and systematic access to LLL, jointly driven by the common support of enterprises and public polices. In Bulgaria (as in Romania and other ACCs), this issue has been lagging behind and is therefore still acknowledged as a key challenge.

There are intent and planned efforts for aspects of LLL already, but that could be put into practice only through considerable concerted efforts. This is due in some respects to the fact that the conditions under which Bulgaria has to develop its LLL policy are very different from those in other EU countries and therefore the implementation process is often much harder.

The assistance and competent support from European Projects and participation in the networks of ETF and CEDEFOP that Bulgaria received as a candidate country and still receives after becoming EU member, are of vital importance and in fact they are the only instruments that allow the implementation of reforms in the education system and are available for the country so far.

With the efforts to comply with the membership criteria and later joining the EU in January 2007, the development of lifelong learning in Bulgaria is becoming one of the main priorities in reforming its education system. The obvious reason for this is that in the near future Bulgaria has to continue and better focus on important targets. These include: reducing the imbalance between the formal and non-formal/informal components of the LLL systems; supporting non-formal and informal learning by social and managerial

recognition, extension and diversification of learning provisions; strengthening the coordination, links and pathways among formal, non-formal and informal learning by improving counselling and promoting cooperation among the different networks; shortening the delay between decision making and practical implementation; striving to achieve by different means better inter-ministerial coordination to encourage the shift from the sectoral approaches to systemic, integrated reform covering LLL; extending guidance and counselling services beyond the strictly vocational and educational dimension and including more social and citizenship aspects; substantially developing the new funding mechanism and providing more training and education incentives within economic, social and regional programs.

The last implementation stage of the National Lifelong Learning Strategy also foresees the development of tools and methodologies for validating informal and non-formal learning and the further development of the National Qualifications Framework show that Bulgaria is already committed to support the complex development of LLL. From a national perspective, this is seen as one of the major factors in improving employment and promoting “active citizenship” to achieve the targets of the Lisbon Economic and Social Strategy and the Copenhagen Declaration on Training and Education.

## 8.0 Croatia

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### 8.1 Introduction

The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is only beginning to surface. However, some developments have been made in recent years, mostly driven by the process of European integration and initiatives from the private and the third sector. The Strategy on Adult Education adopted in 2004 claims that, while at first sight there is a rich and diversified range of education institutions in regard to non-formal education, actually it hides 'an incoherent, voluntary 'system' of educational infrastructure, unclear spatial and human potential and an unresolved financial status, caused by various ad hoc factors'. One of the current priorities in the public sector regarding adult education is the institutional building of the governmental Agency for Adult Education. The Agency will be responsible for the development of the system of adult education, which also includes non-formal education. However, it has been established recently, and is not yet fully operational. Apart from that, work on the development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) started in 2006 and the Baseline for framework was adopted in July 2007, which is seen by some interviewees as a precondition for further development in certification and validation of prior learning.

The Strategy on Adult Education stresses that "there is hardly a single state in Europe which is not participating in an international project on adult education such as SOCRATES, Grundtvig, Leonardo, or CARDS – except for Croatia". However, since the adoption of the Strategy three years ago, Croatia has signed the contract for the CARDS 2004 Adult Learning Project (in June 2007) and the Agency for Adult Education began with its implementation in September 2007. Also, it is important to note that Croatia recognises the importance of joining the above-mentioned programmes, now integrated in the Lifelong Learning Programme, and is intensively preparing for full participation in 2009. This is relevant to the issue of validation since in many European countries the development of new methodologies for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the private and the third sector has to a large extent been developed through participation in the aforementioned Community programmes. In Croatia this has not been the case until recently, however a few very valuable initiatives in the field of validation have appeared through the activity of the third sector.

In the past, there was a lack of interest in the private sector for involvement in the drafting of new legislation and in presenting the needs of the sector. This problem is now being resolved by planning for the participation of stakeholders in the implementation of all

relevant strategic documents: the National Employment Policy; the Joint Assessment of Employment Priorities, Measures of an Active Employment Policy, the reform of the system of employment services, etc. At the same time, the private sector in Croatia is indirectly creating pressures for change with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning through advocating employers' needs for specific skills and competences and by self-organising into professional organisations and developing systems of certification and standardisation.

To sum up, while recent government documents claim that the building up of a system to accredit skills acquired through non-formal or informal learning or work experience is important, few concrete activities have been undertaken in this direction so far. However, an important motivation for regulating and introducing models of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is the process of accession to the European Union and the possibility of participation in EU funding programmes, and therefore it can be expected that improvements will be made in the near future. Also, initiatives from the private and the third sectors are driving the process of change forward as well.

## **8.2 Public Sector**

### **8.2.1 Key public sector stakeholders in the validation process**

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is a new issue on the governmental policy agenda in Croatia. Therefore only broad outlines of a network of key stakeholders exist, while the remaining task is to design a clear division of mandates and responsibilities in the field of recognition, accreditation or assessment of qualifications, and in this process to transform the existing system. The Agency for Adult Education was established recently with the mandate to introduce and manage the European Commission Integrated Lifelong Learning Programmes and the Youth in Action programme for Croatia.<sup>1</sup> The Agency for Adult Education and other relevant bodies have yet to define their roles in the validation of nonformal and informal learning. However, the establishment of statistical monitoring of adult education institutions and programmes by the Agency for Adult Education will be an important step in the development of the system of adult education, in that it will allow for data collection, monitoring, analysis and evaluation in the field of nonformal education..

<sup>1</sup> Currently, the part of the Agency for Adult Education in charge of the Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action Programme is in the process of becoming an independent Agency, called 'Agency for Mobility and EU programmes'. The establishment of this new agency is expected to be finished in November 2007, after which the process of preparatory measures for the implementation of the LLP will follow in the course of 2008.

Another government body that deals with issues of recognition and validation is the Agency for Vocational Education and Training. Further details on the work of this Agency can be found below.

The Directorate on Secondary Education in the MoSES houses the Department for Adult education, which is in charge of certifying programmes that lead to formal qualifications. Legally speaking, adult education programmes fall under the Act on Secondary Education. In other words, adults can take formal qualifications at technical and vocational schools and the said Department is in charge of certification of these programmes. Every education-provider that wants to offer a course that will lead to a formal qualification must apply for certification to this Department. A course that has this certificate legally becomes part of the formal system of education and can be entered into the individual record of achievement of qualifications and work experience. This individual record is kept in a booklet called 'radna knjižica', which originated in the former Yugoslavia as a way of recording a person's qualifications and years of work experience for the purpose of establishing entitlements to the public pension system. In fact, any educational programmes can be entered into the radna knjižica. Every working individual, with a labour contract (not people working on short-term contracts) in Croatia possesses one. However, while there is no formal requirement that only accredited programmes can be entered into the radna knjižica, in practice the local government offices which do enter items into the knjižica normally accept only certified education programmes.

There are also attempts from secondary schools to provide courses of various types for the adult population.

The Croatian Employment Service is the government agency for job mediation, vocational guidance and provision of financial support to unemployed persons. One of its tasks is the activation of the long-term unemployed through active employment measures, and therefore it provides vocational training and retraining, upskilling of unemployed persons as well as offers employers pre-selection, selection and referral of candidates. In the profiling of the unemployed it has moved from registering only formal qualifications, and registers other relevant skills (such as IT skills and language skills) as well as any prior work experience that lasted for longer than six months. This type of activity represents a type of portfolio method through which the individual is encouraged to create a record of all previous work experience for purposes of new employment. However, as yet a standardised profiling method has not been developed and the system is not aligned with the current European trends. There is a need for further work in this area in relation to methodology.

The Employment service is also a good source of all types of non-formal and informal training, as it registers all types of verified and non-verified courses attended by the

unemployed. This source is crucial for a deeper analysis of the actual supply of non-formal training in Croatia but to date has not been used for this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

### 8.2.2 Key public initiatives or laws that enable/encourage validation of informal and non-formal learning in Croatia

Regarding the existing normative framework in Croatia, several relevant documents have been produced in the last few years: The Strategy on Adult Education (2004), the Act on Adult Education (2006), the VET White Paper (2006) and the Act on Volunteering (2007). According to the Strategy on Adult Education, Croatia strives to develop flexibility in finishing education, and aims introduce recognition of non-formal education. Since there is quite a lot on offer in terms of non-formal education, recognition would possibly result in a better picture of the educational structure of the population. The newly adopted Act on Adult Education contains a provision in Article 11 according to which 'adults shall have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities, regardless of the means by which these were acquired, by taking an examination.' This provision represents the necessary legal grounds for validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, according to the staff in the MoSES Department for Adult Learning, legal ground for a type of validation of prior learning has already been in place prior to the introduction of this new Act. An individual who is applying to an adult learning course that leads to a formal qualification is allowed to provide proof of relevant work experience, and this is taken into consideration when putting together a programme of coursework that the individual must complete. For instance, according to them this is commonplace for gaining the qualification of a bookkeeper. However, in practice this has only worked with prior practical work experience, or in other words with informal learning, while validation of non-formal learning when registering for a qualification course has not been present – only prior formal learning is recognised.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training (AVET) is a key stakeholder for VET in Croatia with a mandate for planning, development, organization, monitoring and evaluation of VET system in Croatia. AVET's tasks include:

- developing modern curricula based on learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and competences;
- defining pedagogical standards in VET;
- developing VET management informational system (VETIS), and collecting and analysing data that can help in successful planning of the system;
- coordinating activities of development and reviewing occupational standards and VET qualifications and cooperating in the development of the Croatian qualification framework;

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Croatian SME and entrepreneurship policy centre, CEPOR

- organising and conducting in-service education and training of VET teachers, and exams for probationers;
- following up the work of VET teachers and promoting VET teachers into professor – mentor or professor– adviser posts;
- organising and conducting student competitions in the field of VET;
- implementing international and EU funded projects in the field of VET.

Within the system of vocational education and training there are craft programs called “unified model of education” (UME) which have taken the place of the former dual system of crafts occupations. There are 56 of these programmes. The MoSES is responsible for the general education component, while the work practice (apprenticeships) is a joint responsibility of the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship and the Chamber of Crafts. An apprenticeship has two components: a vocational-theoretical part which is carried out in schools and practical one which is carried out in licensed craft firms.

Within this system the title of a Master craftsman can be obtained, after finishing secondary school in UME programmes and after 2 year of work experience, by proving, in front of a commission of independent experts which is usually arranged by the Chamber of Crafts and Trades, that one possesses the necessary skills, rather than being obliged to attend a formal training course. This type of practice could be classified as the validation method of simulation and evidences extracted from work.

According to the 2006 White Paper on VET education, learning programmes should give recognition to formal, informal and non-formal learning. AVET has begun the process of developing a new system of qualifications which will be based on learning outcomes, and will reflect labour market needs. For this purpose a methodology of developing standards of occupation and qualifications was developed in cooperation with experts in the CARDS 2003 VET project. This is being carried out through the work of 13 Sector Councils which were founded by the Agency as tripartite bodies with representatives from the economy (employers), unions, the education sector (secondary and higher), government institutions etc. According to the White Paper the system of VET qualifications should not be linked to a period of study time or an age of student or the type of provider since many qualifications are applicable to people of all ages and can be gained through a variety of learning approaches including informal and non-formal, as well as formal learning.

At the beginning of 2006 the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a working group which began preparations for development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF). A proposal for the CROQF was completed and during November and December 2006 it was presented to and discussed with all the relevant stakeholders at three conferences organised by the working group. The CROQF is comprised of eight

levels, with an additional seven sublevels reflecting the particularities of the national education system. Levels six, seven and eight correspond to the three cycles in the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). So far, the levels have been described only through credit ranges and qualifications gained after the completion of studies within a certain level.

Based on the work of this working group, the Croatian Government adopted the Baseline for the CROQF in July 2007. The Baseline determines the glossary of terms, outlines the CROQF aims and principles (which follow the guidelines in the proposals and discussions for the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework) and sets out the credit ranges and qualifications gained. The national committee for establishing and implementing the CROQF was established in September 2007, and all relevant stakeholders are represented in the committee, including the academia, representatives of the employers and representatives of the trade unions. It is one of the main tasks of this national committee to build the description of competences (in the wide sense of the term) and general learning outcomes for each level of the CROQF."

In higher education, recognition of prior learning which was based on formal study is performed by respective higher education institutions as a basis for allocation of credits and continuation of study. There is need to further improve recognition this process, as well as recognition of prior informal and non formal learning. An important role in this will be played by the Bologna Process, entrance into EU programmes, and other national reforms in this general area.

The requirements for entry into higher education depend on whether the person is interested in enrolling into university or professional study programmes. The legislation stipulates that higher education institutions are autonomous in setting the requirements for entry into their programmes. In practice, all persons who want to enrol into university study programmes must have completed 4-year secondary schools or taken exams to achieve the equivalent of 4-year secondary school. The minimum requirement for entry into professional study programmes is normally completion of either 3- or 4-year secondary schools. In addition to that, universities administer entrance exams and based on these two criteria (exam results and secondary school grades) they rank and enrol students. The school-leaving exam, MATURA, is being currently prepared, most likely for the generation that will finish secondary school 2009/2010, or the year after that. The school leaving exam will be the first externally administered final qualification exam in Croatia, and is expected to replace entrance exams to university, at least in part. Regarding using the MATURA for validation of prior learning currently the team that is running the MATURA project is against making it possible to take the MATURA without completing the formal 4-year programme. However, this has not yet been legislated and the information is based on opinions of relevant stakeholders.

As has already been mentioned, the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning has only recently appeared on the agenda in Croatia, provoked in large part by the European integration process and the demands put before Croatia in order to participate in the funding programmes of the European Union. Croatia is planned to start participating in the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes from 2008 (implementation of preparatory measures, followed by full participation in the Programme in 2009), which should have a positive effect on developments in the field of validation. Also, it is important to acknowledge that Croatia is currently making significant reform efforts in all segments of its formal system of education, which is straining its administrative, management and planning capacity. Therefore, it is to be expected that the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning will climb up the governmental policy agenda in the coming years in Croatia.

### **8.3 Private Sector**

Since Croatia has a dual system of training for crafts occupations, several social partners are directly involved in the issuing of qualifications and formal certification. As has been explained, the Chamber of Crafts and Trades holds the central role in apprentices' and master's exams, where it coordinates the practical and school part of the programme among the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship, the MoSES and the participating employers. In that sense it acts as an interface between the education system and the private sector.

According to the Strategy on Adult Education formal education in Croatia always finishes with issuing a public certificate, while in the sphere of non-formal education, especially regarding learning of foreign languages and ICT skills, apart from private certificates there is a number of international certificates that can be obtained in Croatia – for instance from the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the ICC or Microsoft, ECDL, Xpert, the European Computer Passport and others. Growing numbers of people attend such training since it is becoming essential for gaining employment. In that sense the private sector in Croatia is influencing the recognition of specific skills and competences. Especially regarding ICT skills and the knowledge of foreign languages the situation is such that regardless of the formal qualifications if such exist, employers validate actual skills and competences through the selection process for employment.

A Zagreb-based company that specialises in job advertising, recruitment and selection for employment, Selectio Group Ltd., as part of its mission works on raising awareness among employers and employees in Croatia to focus on the development and validation of real usable skills, knowledge and competences rather than formal qualifications. It runs numerous projects to promote this objective, among which are Career Days for students and employers at universities, a web portal for job seekers MojPosao, as well as a

specialised web portal for first job seekers – MojPrviPosao - which promotes internships, volunteering and other forms of job activation. Through these activities which have gained public attention in Croatia (though primarily in Zagreb) they are educating employers and employees in self-profiling, job application and self-presentation.<sup>1</sup> Their websites contain CV templates which suggest to employees the types of skills, competences and experience to include in putting together a job application. Apart from that, in the last few years Selectio Group Ltd. has undertaken several surveys to find out more about employers' needs and expectations.<sup>2</sup> According to one survey from 2005<sup>3</sup>, more than half of the surveyed employers emphasised that they look for specific skills in workers, such as project management, teamwork, presentation and communication skills, as well as language and IT skills.

The same survey asked the employers to judge how well the formal system of education has prepared their employees for work, and the results were quite disappointing. This is particularly the case for administrative and legal positions, and for positions that require good knowledge of economics and finance. According to another survey from 2005<sup>4</sup>, employers predict that in the next five years employees will have to be technologically very advanced, know at least two foreign languages, and be prepared for constant re-training. Very indicatively for Croatia, employers are demanding more proactive workers, with can-do attitudes and initiative. Through its work Selectio Group Ltd. is voicing the needs of the private sector, where there is a strong awareness of the inadequacy of knowledge and skills acquired through formal education in Croatia for today's labour market demands. Employers in Croatia are shifting the emphasis from formal qualifications to actual skills and competences that an individual possesses. While specific methodologies for validating non-formal and informal education apart from the curriculum vitae do not seem to exist, an individual's skills and competences that are in demand are validated regardless of formal certification.

Another example of initiative from the private sector is the Association of Management Consultants (AMC). It is a voluntary, independent association established with the aim to promote standardisation in the delivery of management and business consulting services by qualified practitioners. Through its work the AMC is defining professional standards for Croatian management consultants, running training and, in some cases, administering certifications in accordance with international principles and practices. This is an example of a type of a validation initiative that appeared in a fast growing sector in Croatia with new professions where no formal qualifications are yet available. Management consultants in

<sup>1</sup> There are a number of other job portals in Croatia (the Croatian Employment Service has the widest coverage as well as demand and supply, others are local and have a much narrower coverage)

<sup>2</sup> The Croatian employment service has a country wide employers' needs survey on an annual basis which also should be mentioned here

<sup>3</sup> MojPosao (2007) Poslodavci prvog izbora – rezultati istraživanja (**First Choice Employers**)

<sup>4</sup> MojPosao (2005) *Na kakvog ste se zaposlenika spremni kladiti?* (**What Kind of Employee Would You Bet On?**)

Croatia have in part grown 'out of the job' and not through formal training, and therefore this association is attempting to validate this knowledge and competences through a type of licensing and international certification in order to professionalise the occupation.

Similarly, the Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency organises exams for brokers, investment consultants and pension fund managers which certify them for employment purposes. While the agency offers training programmes, any individual that conforms to the requirements can take the exam without going through their programme, which means that they can validate prior learning through examination regardless of whether knowledge was acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning.

Other similar examples of certification through examination in specific professions exist in Croatia.

The private sector provision of education services has expanded visibly over the last ten years, especially in management at college and university level. Not all of these courses are validated but they have attracted sustainable demand for their services.

A third type of training is directed towards the corporate sector, offering mostly soft skills, business skills such as marketing, finance, logistics and coaching for top management. Language and IT skills are particularly widely available at all levels and for different target groups.

Generally speaking, the growth of private sector training services has been more dynamic than the regulatory framework, with the result that quality of services is not easy to ascertain and the market is not transparent. There is, however, a growing demand boosted partly by the inadequacy of the formal educational system to supply key competencies which are required by the labour market such as language, IT skills, soft skills and management skills. This demand will soon extend to higher order occupational skills as the economy picks up - skill gaps are already visible across the country.

## **8.4 The Third Sector**

Since 2001 momentum has been gathering in Croatia for public recognition and affirmation of voluntary work, driven primarily by nongovernmental organisations that rely on volunteer enthusiasm. In 2001 the National Committee for the development of volunteering in Croatia was established and put in charge of drafting the Act on Volunteering as a first step in regulating volunteer work in Croatia. Since then the draft Act has gone through many revisions and has finally been adopted in May 2007. This legislation is very important since up to now no normative framework for volunteering existed in Croatia. This resulted in numerous problems such as the inexistence of data on volunteers and the

scope of volunteer work in Croatia, as well as the lack of efficient mechanisms for establishing the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

The newly adopted Act on Volunteering creates a good starting point for developing validation initiatives related to volunteer experience since it establishes an obligation on the part of the employer to issue a written confirmation of volunteer work experience. This provision is the result of initiatives from the third sector, especially the network of volunteer centres in Croatia which exist in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek. They had advocated for the introduction of a volunteer booklet that would serve as a public document to testify to the experience that a volunteer acquired through volunteer work. They proposed that the employer would be responsible for recording the period of work, type of work done as well as any education and training that the volunteer has taken part in. As such the volunteer booklet is an example of the portfolio method, which is often used as a tool to help further academic or career development of an individual.

The volunteer booklet was not legislated through the Act as such, however the Act specifies that the employer is obliged to issue the volunteer a written confirmation of work, which must include the following information: time period spent volunteering, short description of activities, and education and training provided. Article 34 of the said Act also specifies that an employer may issue booklets, cards or other forms of documents for this purpose. In that sense the Act now provides minimal legal requirements regarding recording volunteer experience.

According to information obtained through interviews, volunteer centres in Croatia have through the last 4-5 years developed the practice of issuing volunteer booklets regardless of the existence of the legal provision. All five mentioned regional centres issue and promote the same type of volunteer booklet, introduced by the Split volunteer centre, Association MI. As they state on their website, the volunteer booklet is their original product which started life as an internal way of rewarding and recognising work of their volunteers. Eventually, it gained interest among other nongovernmental organisations and institutions and is now more and more widely used. The booklet collects all of the individual's volunteer experience in one place, specifying time period spent working, activities undertaken, trainings and education, and it requires that each experience is verified by seal and signature of employer. The volunteer booklet is an example of a validation method developed, promoted and introduced within the third sector in Croatia.

## 8.5 Conclusion

The public sector in Croatia is only beginning to consider validation of non-formal and informal learning, largely in response to requirements of the European integration process and specifically the requirements for participation in EU funding programmes. There are no legal obstacles to the development of validation initiatives, but the institutional framework and capacity for such development is only beginning to take shape. One of the chief institutions envisaged to be responsible for monitoring, analysis and evaluation in the field of non-formal education - the Agency for Adult Education - was established recently. The Agency for Vocational Education and Training has begun a process of developing new qualifications which is taking into account non-formal and informal learning. Apart from that, work has started on defining the Croatian Qualifications Framework, which is understood in Croatia as an important prerequisite for validation of non-formal and informal learning because, alongside of the goal of making the Croatian system of qualifications comparable to the European one, within this framework protocols, procedures and responsibilities for quality assurance and the validation of qualifications should be established. Also, it is to be expected that Croatia's participation in the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes of the European Community will give impetus to validation initiatives.

As was noted in the introduction of this text, the public sector has largely introduced change in this area in reaction to the European integration requirements, and also partly in response to the initiatives from the private and third sector. The private sector is indirectly influencing change by valuing and emphasising skills and competences instead of formal qualifications. Also, some of the new professions in Croatia such as business consultants or brokers have started organising into professional associations with the aim to develop standards and offer training and certification procedures. The third sector on the other hand is largely responsible for the fact that volunteering has finally been legislated in Croatia, which is an important positive development for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is through the initiative of volunteer centres in Croatia that a new validation method, the volunteer booklet, has been introduced and is becoming accepted practice in documenting volunteer work in Croatia.

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## 9.0 Cyprus

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### 9.1 Introduction

Even though a framework and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus have not yet been set up, there are many efforts being made in that direction and the framework for a System of Vocational Qualifications has been set.

The EU developments in the field of validation are also being followed closely by national policy makers and Cyprus supports the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework. In this context, the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC) was established as the National Europass Centre in 2005.

The non-formal learning sector in Cyprus is growing rapidly, mainly due to the activities of Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), the organization responsible for vocational training. Furthermore, adult non-formal education is offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

### 9.2 Public Sector

Cyprus is committed before the European Commission to the development of a Competence –based System of Vocational Qualifications. This is a high priority objective which is included in the National Programme for the Lisbon Strategy and in the Lifelong Learning Strategy of Cyprus.

HRDA is the national body which has been assigned the responsibility to gradually establish and implement a System of Vocational Qualifications. The HRDA is a semi-governmental organisation governed by a tripartite Board of Directors, including representatives of the government, employers and trade unions. The Authority has been in operation since 1979 and its policies and financial support for almost 30 years stimulated a change in both attitudes towards training and the volume of training. The HRDA places emphasis on continuous assessment of labour market supply and demand; the formulation of strategies to meet the learning needs of individuals in employment and of those seeking employment; and listening to the needs of employers.

In relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, a law, which became effective on 1 November 1999, broadened HRDA' s powers and placed emphasis on the need to introduce a System of Vocational Qualifications. More specifically, the law assigned the following responsibilities to the HRDA:

- to define the standards of vocational qualifications
- to provide for the assessment of vocational qualifications and
- to issue the relevant certificates of vocational qualifications-

The System of Vocational Qualifications is based on Standards of Vocational Qualifications, which are developed with the involvement of technical sectoral committees. The System is designed specifically for the assessment and certification of the knowledge, skills and competences of a person to perform competently in a working environment under normal working or simulated conditions at a predetermined level of occupation.

At the 1st phase (2006-2008), five Standards of Vocational Qualifications at level 2, for the occupations of waiter, cook, receptionist, construction mason and sales person (retail trade) have been developed and utilised. Opportunities for access were provided to employees.

During the 2nd phase (2007-2013), the development of standards of vocational qualifications for additional occupations at various levels is envisaged. Specifically, it is envisaged to cover approximately 60 occupations in the economic sectors of Manufacturing, Hotel/Catering, Construction, Retail and Wholesale Trade, Repairs of Motor Vehicles, Communication Networks and Computers as well as Hairdressing and the profession of Trainer of Vocational Training. During this phase, opportunities for access will be provided to employees, unemployed and economically inactive persons.

Following the decision of the Cyprus Council of Ministers of the 27th April 2005, the CPC was set as the National Europass Center. Europass records skills and competences in a clear and easy to understand way, to help individuals to find a job, gain experience abroad or enrol in an education or training program.

The CPC as the National Europass Centre:

- is responsible for the coordination, management and promotion of all the activities related to Europass and its documents.
- provides information to individuals, education and training providers, guidance operators, employers and anybody requiring information and guidance on Europass and any of its documents.
- assures cooperation with other related organisations that operate in the same field of mobility and qualification transparency and also background information relating to the Europass initiative.

Following discussions amongst government departments in October 2005, a debate has been initiated in Cyprus amongst numerous public and private stakeholders in the field of

learning, including the social partners, for contributing towards the development of Cyprus position on the EQF initiative. The EQF initiative was presented, analysed and discussed in early January 2006 and the participants were then asked to prepare and submit their proposals. At the same time the same stakeholders have started discussing and debating the need for the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). On the basis of these proposals and further consultations and discussions, Cyprus has developed and submitted its view to the European Union, thus contributing to the shaping of the EQF. (Ministry responsible: Ministry of Education and Culture).

### **9.3 Private Sector**

Tripartite cooperation is well developed in Cyprus and the social partners have been involved in the debate on developing a System of Vocational Qualifications, especially since the social partners are members of the Board of Directors of the HRDA and fully support the development of the System.

In addition, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) is operating a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects such as word-processing, databases, spreadsheets etc, based on the Chamber's own examinations. The certificates awarded enjoy recognition by the enterprises who are members of the Chamber, but also from other private companies and public organisations. The majority of participants are young people (15-18 years old) but the scheme is also targeted to people already in employment. Apart from this scheme, other European methods such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), is also available and widely used in Cyprus.

There are also examples in the banking and accounting/auditing sector in Cyprus, whereby foreign certifications are recognised as described below. This has led to an impressive increase of participants in these qualifications schemes, among the employees of banking and accounting/auditing firms in Cyprus:

- The Cyprus Association of Commercial Banks recognises the qualifications awarded by the Chartered Institute of Bankers of England and Wales; the American Institute of Bankers and the Documentary Credits Certificate awarded by the International Chamber of Commerce.
- The Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus and the accounting and auditing companies that are members of the Institute, recognise the qualifications awarded by the Chartered and Certified Accountants of the UK and the US CPA qualification.

## **9.4 Other initiatives**

Apart from the above, a number of EU-funded projects have enabled Cyprus to become involved in other multi-country pilot actions in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning. For example, Cyprus participated in the Leonardo project “Diaplus”, which aimed to produce a European tool for life-long career management, to enable individuals to monitor their career. The Information and Communications Technology sector was selected for the pilot implementation of the project and partners from six countries worked on producing a tool giving individuals the opportunity to review their qualifications, personal and occupational profile, so as to set new goals and plan their development accordingly.

ESF funds were also used to co-fund projects with an element of validation. The ESF projects aimed to train and improve the employability of persons from disadvantaged categories and in order to provide an individual pathway to work for each beneficiary, the prior skills, competences and knowledge the beneficiaries held would be informally assessed.

## **9.5 Conclusions**

In conclusion, even though there is not yet a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus, there are developments in that direction.

During 2006, the HRDA established and began to implement a System of Vocational Qualifications. In the first phase (2006-2008), five Standards of Vocational Qualifications have been developed and utilised. During the second phase (2007-2013) it is envisaged to develop Standards for around 60 occupations at various levels. A consultation process is under way between public stakeholders and the social partners to discuss how the standards will actually be implemented.

In October 2005, Cyprus has initiated a debate amongst numerous public and private stakeholders in the field of learning, including the social partners, for contributing towards the development of Cyprus position on the EQF initiative. On the basis of their proposals and further consultations and discussions, Cyprus has developed and submitted its view to the European Union, thus contributing to the shaping of the EQF.

Private sector initiatives have also started to be implemented both at the level of the social partners and of individual companies, mainly in the areas of IT, banking and accounting/auditing.

# 10.0 Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>

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*By Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

## 10.1 Introduction

Since 2005, legislation has been put in place step-by-step in order to create a framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic. The New School Act which took effect on 1 January 2005 enables individuals (above 15 years of age) to acquire a partial qualification (a certificate on having completed a part of an initial formal educational programme) by passing a single examination as a part of the respective final examination, regardless of how they acquired the relevant knowledge and skills. The new Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results which came into force in August 2007 foresees a possibility for adults to acquire partial vocational qualifications, through an examination (practical, or, if appropriate, oral or written as well) to compare an individual's prior learning achievements (his or her knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of how they were attained) with qualification and assessment standards of respective partial vocational qualifications. However, it is not possible to gain full qualifications through these procedures of validation and a comprehensive national system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning still does not yet exist in the Czech Republic, it has only been in the development and piloting stage to date.

The value of competences and knowledge acquired in a non-traditional way (e.g. on-the-job, through self-study) does serve as a benefit in gaining an employment position, but this depends very much on the judgement of an individual potential employer.

At the moment, several factors are preventing the creation of opportunities for recognition of informal and non-formal learning. First, training programmes offered by schools mostly focus on initial education and training. Consequently, they are too long for adults (several years) and not adjusted to their educational needs and learning possibilities. Secondly, although the supply of continuing training by enterprises and private training organisations is abundant, the certificates, if issued, are not generally recognised socially (de facto) and mostly have no national-level formal validity (de jure). Thirdly, there is a shortage of short modular programmes which makes it difficult to complement and enhance qualifications according to specific individual needs<sup>2</sup>.

New legislation is gradually paving the way to a solution to the above problems, especially by increasing the flexibility of initial VET and its interconnecting with the highly deregulated

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Czech Republic chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Olga Strietska-Ilina

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*

system of continuing VET; the lack of these desired features is currently stifling the development of a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic.

## 10.2 Public Sector

### 10.2.1 Legal framework

#### 10.2.1.1 *New School Act (2005)*

The new School Act (*Školský zákon*) (Act no. 561/2004), effective from 1 January 2005, has been a first step towards the creation of comprehensive legislation governing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic. Before this Act, adult learners, in order to acquire the relevant certificate of education, had to undergo the same comprehensive programmes as in initial education. No account was taken of the diversity of prior formal or non-formal learning and the competences of the individual.

The new School Act makes it possible for adults (who have attained at least compulsory education of 9 years) to acquire a partial qualification by passing single examination(s) – part(s) of a full qualification – i.e. parts of:

- “*Final examination*” (completing upper secondary level vocational programmes of the type ISCED 3C leading to a certificate of apprenticeship) at secondary vocational schools (*střední odborné učiliště* - SOU)

- “*Maturita examination*” (completing all upper secondary level programmes of the type ISCED 3A, general, technical or vocational) at grammar schools (*gymnasium* – G) or secondary technical schools (*střední odborná škola* – SOŠ) or secondary vocational schools (*střední odborné učiliště* – SOU),

- “*Absolutorium examination*” (completing non-university tertiary programmes of the type ISCED 5B leading to an Absolutorium certificate) at tertiary technical schools (*vyšší odborná škola* – VOŠ).

An individual can obtain a certificate of the single examination(s), regardless of how he/she has acquired the relevant knowledge and skills<sup>1</sup>.

A participant can pass the single exams pertaining to the common part of the *Maturita* exam, which is managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, by applying to the Centre for Evaluation of Educational Results (CERMAT).<sup>2</sup> An applicant can pass the single exams pertaining as parts to the *Final examination* to the profile part of the *Maturita*

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CERMAT was set up on 1 January 2004 as one of the divisions of the Institute for Information on Education by transforming the Centre for the Maturita Examination Reform. CERMAT plays an important role in the development of evaluation methodologies and procedures in the Czech Republic. Its main task is to develop instruments for external evaluation and interpretation of its results.

exam or to the *Absolutorium*, which are managed by schools, by applying to the head teacher<sup>1</sup>.

Passing single exams does not however grant the full qualification but only a certificate of the single exam(s). Theoretically, it is possible to obtain the full qualification, avoiding actual studies in the secondary or tertiary technical school, by successfully passing single exams in all subjects or other parts (e.g. modules) of study programmes (e.g. modules) in all school years, along with passing the respective complex final examination (i.e. *Final* examination, *Maturita* examination or *Absolutorium* examination)..

In the case of a practical exam from vocational training or vocational aspects of the final examination, it is normally necessary to undergo a certain number of hours of practical training.<sup>2</sup> For continuing training of adults the head teacher may, however, permit omitting part or all of the practical training, if the applicant can prove he/she has the relevant practical experience (again no precise procedure is stipulated, leaving the decision at the discretion of the head teacher).

Currently, the weak point is the fact that the decision to recognise prior learning lies partially in the hands of an individual school teacher, whose choice depends on many factors. Also the final examination is not fully standardised and the outcomes of education often vary from one school type, or even school, to another. This is largely the result of the absence of an independent assessment system, by an external examination and certification body.

#### 10.2.1.2 Act No. 179/2006 (2007)

A more systemic step in terms of recognising non-formal and informal learning is the new Act No. 179/2006 of 30 March 2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment of Some Other Acts (Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results) which entered into force in August 2007. This Act creates a systemic framework for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning by offering the opportunity to acquire partial qualifications. The Act does not make it possible to acquire a full qualification other than through the formal education system.

Verification of partial qualifications is done by means of contrasting the actual competences with the relevant qualification and assessment standards, to be undertaken by an authorised "person" (individual or organisation) appointed by an authorising body

<sup>1</sup> The reform of Maturita examination (still under way) aims to provide for more objective assessment and for standardisation of requirements concerning general education, regardless of vocational/technical fields (branches) of study and/or priorities of schools. Maturita shall consist of two parts. The common part of the Maturita examination shall ensure uniformity of requirements. Its content, form and assessment criteria are being set by the CERMAT. The profile part of Maturita shall test the knowledge and skills in the subjects the school considers to be the most important in view of the respective vocational/technical fields (branches) of study and/or the given school's priorities. Its content and form shall be determined by the school head teacher.

<sup>2</sup> As determined by the framework curricula

(relevant ministry). The validation should be carried out by means of an examination (practical and, if appropriate, oral or written as well) the content of which is in line with the respective job requirements. The acquisition and demonstration of the competences are then confirmed through a certificate, which corresponds with the relevant partial qualification and is recognised both in the system of initial education and in the labour market<sup>1</sup>.

Recognition of results of non-formal education and informal learning is only based on the skills and knowledge proved within the examination, regardless of the way the applicant gained them. The system of recognition in the Czech Republic is neither tied to completion of any form of education nor to recognition (seeking the evidence) of competences (for instance by means of individual skills portfolio).

Until the Act came into force, thus, it was not possible to act in accordance with it. Since the Act came into effect, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has approved the first set of qualification and assessment standards for partial qualifications. Further sets of the standards are currently at the final stage of approval process. In this respect, the first authorisations have been granted by the Ministry for Regional Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. In the immediate future, the first examinations will take place leading towards certificate issuance confirming that an examination was passed successfully and that the relevant partial qualification was attained.<sup>2</sup>

The above approach has been piloted through ESF-funded projects with the objective to develop a relevant scheme and to gradually launch this on a national basis<sup>3</sup>. An important ESF project in this respect is the UNIV project (“Recognition of the results of non-formal education and informal learning in networks of schools providing education services for adults”) (August 2005 – July 2008) which is carried out by NÚOV<sup>4</sup>. One of its sub-aims was to prepare schools for the implementation of the Act No. 179/2006 by offering them the chance to gain experience with the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This offered them the unique opportunity to become authorised to perform validation activities once the Act came into force. During the piloting stage, 20 partial qualifications were chosen for piloting and six regions were covered for the development of the network of schools (*Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, Pardubice, Jižní Čechy, Zlín, Olomouc*).

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*; Čiháková, H, Stretti, M, 2007, *VPL2 casestudies- in-case analysis*, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

<sup>4</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education run by the Ministry of Education, youth and sport to develop vocational education.

The assessment of the client's current competences will be based on the so-called 'assessment standard' which, together with the qualification standard, will form the description of each qualification. While the qualification standard will define the necessary competences (knowledge and skills) of each person who wants to obtain the respective qualification, the assessment standard is a set of criteria and procedures for assessment of persons' meeting the required competences (knowledge and skills)<sup>1</sup>.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is then based on seeking the "evidence" and/or proving the individual competences required by the assessment standard. A tailored training programme focusing on the competences, completion of which will be considered necessary for the individual client, will be offered, and the client will have the opportunity to undergo such training at one of the schools involved in the network of schools providing the training for adults.

The recognition of prior learning in this way will extend the availability of further vocational training. People who would normally be discouraged by the length of study or hindered by lack of self-confidence will be offered the chance to obtain a full or partial qualification, or to receive additional training.

The UNIV project uses the experiences acquired in the Leonardo da Vinci project entitled EPANIL "European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning" (2005-2006). This project was concerned with developing methods and procedures of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the chosen branch of "cook" (ISCED 3C) with the aim to improve the access of adults to further education. Pilot testing of the methods and procedures for the qualification of cook at ISCED 3C level had been carried out in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia<sup>2</sup>.

#### 10.2.1.3 *Development of a National Qualifications Framework (2007)*

The Act No. 179/2006 is closely related to the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The project "The development of the National qualifications framework supporting links between initial and further education", was initiated in April 2005 by the Czech Ministry of Education in cooperation with the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education and the private company Trexima. The project is co-financed by the state budget and by the ESF<sup>3</sup>. The NQF shall include a register of all complete and partial qualifications acknowledged, distinguished and

<sup>1</sup> Čiháková, H, Stretti, M, 2007, *VPL2 casestudies- in-case analysis*, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education; National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*; UNIV. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.univ.nuov.cz/index.php?r=237>

<sup>2</sup> EPANIL. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.epanil.net/aoprojektu.html>

<sup>3</sup> NSK. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.nsk.nuov.cz/index.php?r=63>

recognised in the Czech Republic which should lead to more transparency<sup>1</sup>. It is based on the "Integrated System of Standard Working Positions" (ISTP) operated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This system describes working activities performed in a specific job position, the required working experience, competences, personal characteristics and qualifications. It links jobs in the labour market to requirements for education and necessary qualifications<sup>2</sup>.

The NQF architecture is created by<sup>3</sup>:

- **NQF units** – these units are qualifications of two types:
  - ▶ a complete qualification – the ability to perform a certain occupation (possibly several occupations);
  - ▶ a partial qualification – the ability to perform a certain work activity or a coherent set of work activities enabling to perform a profession.
  
- **NQF standards** – describe qualifications in a standardised way. There are two types:
  - ▶ qualification standards – the structured description of requirements for a certain qualification;
  - ▶ assessment standards – a set of criteria and procedures for the verification of qualification requirements
  
- **NQF levels** – (divide the NQF in the vertical direction) taking into account the levels which are defined by the Czech educational system; they are related to the levels which are defined by the European Qualification Framework;
  
- **Qualification fields** (groups of fields)– divide the NQF in the horizontal direction (i.e. from the vocational viewpoint) taking into account the division into educational fields used in the Czech educational system;
  - ▶ Links within the NQF – links between the aforementioned units and standards;
  - ▶ Links between the NQF and its environment – links between the NQF and the world of work and the NQF and the sphere of education.

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), 2007, *OECD activity on recognition of non-formal and informal learning, country background report Czech Republic*.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*

<sup>3</sup> *A proposal for the concept, structure and processes of the national qualification framework*, April 2007, NQF team, NSK

#### 10.2.1.4 *Statutory training*

The lack - until recently - of a generally valid legal regulation fostering the recognition of non-formal education has resulted in the development of a number of specific sub-regulations within decrees issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other ministries (agriculture, industry and trade, health, the interior, and defence) which govern various specific types of CVET or qualification testing. These partial regulations are abundant and they concern, for example, the recognition of the professional competence of individuals working in electrical engineering (Act on professional competence in electrical engineering), crews of ships (Act on maritime transport), railways and railway transport operators (Act on railways), healthcare workers, etc. In line with the relevant regulations they are required either to have obtained the respective certificate, or to have passed the relevant examinations. What is most important in this respect is that it is impossible to perform the respective activity unless the individual holds the relevant formal certificate<sup>1</sup>.

The qualification requirement can in some cases also be satisfied by providing proof of years of work experience (e.g. 6 years of work experience in the given trade in case of businesses in the crafts sectors requiring vocational competence, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, cosmetic services, photographers, etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

EU citizens who wish to work in a regulated profession or trade<sup>3</sup> in the Czech Republic can gain recognition of their qualifications through the Act No. 18/2004. This Act assigns the coordination function to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The recognition body depends on the specific profession or trade (e.g. Ministry of Health for medical professions, etc.). The law stipulates compensation mechanisms for the recognition of vocational qualifications attained in other EU states allowing for one of the following options: proof of practical experience in the trade or profession; an examination or an adaptation period<sup>4</sup>.

#### 10.2.1.5 *Retraining*

In 1991, the "Chance" programme was developed. It assists clients of labour offices in their (re)integration into society and the labour market. The programme was initially implemented in one district but has been very successful and now is widely applied in many districts across the country. The programme is based on an individual and comprehensive approach to the client. The clients – people above 15 years of age, many of whom have dropped out of schooling – take part in the programme on the basis of their own decision and the recommendation of the relevant labour office. The process includes

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Act No.455/1991.

<sup>3</sup> These are approximately 470 professions and trades according to the Czech legislation. Retrieved: <http://www.ipravnik.cz/clanky/spravni/uznavani030423.html>

<sup>4</sup> Portal of the public administration. Retrieved: <http://portal.gov.cz/wps/portal/s.155/701?kam=zakon&id=2175>

three stages. As the clients are mostly individuals who have not been very successful in school and employment, their awareness of the need for self-fulfilment must be encouraged. After this stage career diagnostic testing is carried out<sup>1</sup>, whereby the client's personality is mapped and his/her professional orientation is identified. Then a one-month motivational course follows, during which the client's suitability for the chosen profession is tested in a working environment in his/her place of residence. This stage is finalised by assessment of the overall suitability of the client for the profession. This is followed by a retraining course or search for an alternative solution. Retraining courses are modularised and consist of both theory and practical training. Theoretical training is provided by *Republikové vzdělávací centrum (RVC)* or other regional training centres. Practical training is organised in small and medium-sized companies in the client's place of residence, in line with the relevant curricula and agreements concluded between the company and RVC. Upon passing a final examination the participant obtains a certificate which is accredited by the Accreditation Commission of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports. Approximately 600 clients of labour offices are trained in 40 professions within the Chance programme each year. The resulting rate of success<sup>2</sup> in the labour market is high at around 80%.<sup>3</sup>

Graduates of accredited retraining courses acquire formally recognised national certificates of qualification, which, however, are not equivalent to the certificates obtained in the formal education system. So far it has not been possible to ensure formal recognition of single skills that, when accumulated, could constitute an equivalent to the relevant certificate recognised in formal education (applying the principle of formal recognition of non-formal or informal learning outcomes). Whether or not these certificates are recognised in the labour market is therefore not clear, and depends on the specific provider and the quality of the course<sup>4</sup>.

### 10.2.2 Balance Diagnostic Centres (BDCs)

In response to the need for more comprehensive and efficient approaches in assessment of individual potential in the labour market, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs introduced Balance Diagnostic Centres (BDCs). Following a pilot stage, the network of BDCs was created in 2000<sup>5</sup>, which by 2003 comprised 2 methodical and 10 executive

<sup>1</sup> Career diagnostics is carried out with the support of COMDI computer diagnostics.

<sup>2</sup> Success rate is determined in terms of finding employment within one month of the course completion. Clients usually find employment in the enterprises where they underwent practical training.

<sup>3</sup> Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Czech Republic, QCA Consortium, 2004. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Czech\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Czech_Rep.pdf). See also Šíroký, Vladimír. Profesionální diagnostika při KD Junior Chotěboř (Professional diagnostics at KD Junior Chotěboř) <http://www.quido.cz/diagnos.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The system is implemented on the basis of the Government Decision No. 418/1999 and the subsequent Notification by the Director General of State Employment Services No. 3/2000.

centres established at labour offices in the regions and 23 external sites endorsed by the State Employment Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs<sup>1</sup>.

The task of the Centres is to assess the overall potential of an individual with the help of complex modern diagnostic methods with a view to recommending an optimal professional orientation and placement (*bilan de compétence*). The assessment takes into account opportunities in the regional labour market; the individual's interests; the individual's prior learning and acquired competences; his or her motivation, psychological characteristics and subsequently comes up with an appropriate career development plan (possibly including a plan to acquire a formal qualification) for the individual in the form of a final report<sup>2</sup>.

For the time being, the possibilities of the balance diagnostic process are limited, due to the lack of a system of recognition of prior learning. However, since they are part of the network of labour offices and therefore naturally linked to retraining opportunities offered in the framework of active employment policy, these centres could become important instruments in the provision of formative validation of informal and non-formal learning<sup>3</sup>.

### 10.2.3 Regional centres for human resource development

A very promising project aimed at establishing multifunctional regional centres for human resource development and continuing vocational training targeted a wide range of the adult population (employees wishing to develop or upgrade their qualifications, the unemployed, inactive, disadvantaged, etc.). Two pilot regional centres in Vysočina and in Moravia-Silesia were established<sup>4</sup> and there are plans to establish such centres in other regions too, utilising existing training capacities. The centres offer training courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications in the fields most needed in the region (working closely with social partners), with the specific methods and tools adapted to the needs of adult training. The centres also provide counselling and guidance services, balance diagnostics and validation of competences attained from informal and non-formal learning<sup>5</sup>. Such centres could be a major step forward in the development of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, if the project implementation goes hand in hand with such changes in the legislation, which would allow for national credibility and recognition. It is unclear at the moment how counselling, training, validation and certification functions will be combined under one roof, avoiding conflict of interest and

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo project VPL-2- analysis grid for the case studies. Grid for the description of SYSTEM case studies, Leonardo project VPL-2, Partner: NUOV, Czech Republic, source: National Training Fund, NÚOV

<sup>3</sup> This was also one of the conclusions in Král, Jiří et al. Využití bilanční diagnostiky v ekonomické praxi. Metodická příručka pro lektora. Kurs pro personalisty (Bilans de compétence in business practice. Methodological toolkit. Training course for personnel managers), DHV CR, 2003

<sup>4</sup> The project was prepared by the National Training Fund with the support of Phare programme.

<sup>5</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Uvažuje se o tvorbě krajských center rozvoje lidských zdrojů. [HN.IHNED.CZ](http://HN.IHNED.CZ) 25. 8. 2003

how and which stakeholders, important for the legitimacy of the validation outcomes, will be involved.

### 10.2.3.1 *Higher education*

#### *Academic programmes*

Currently, the discussion of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic in higher education is very much linked to the possibility to gain recognition of partially gained qualifications in order to change study programme/faculty or institute. However, it is not yet possible to gain full recognition and obtain a qualification by any other means than by achieving a completion of an accredited study programme or pre-graduate tertiary education in the respective education institutes (universities and colleges)<sup>1</sup>.

The recognition of partially gained qualifications is mainly organised in the Czech Republic through the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS serves to increase the mobility of students inside a particular study programme nationally and internationally. Even though as yet, no legal provision exists obliging higher education institutes to use the ECTS, all Czech higher education institutes apply ECTS or use some kind of ECTS-compatible credit systems<sup>2</sup>. Problems occur however with the transfer of credits when different types of institutes/faculties and/or study programmes are involved. In addition, transfer from a tertiary technical school (at least three years post-secondary) towards a higher education institution (even in the same study field) is highly unusual.

Technical universities have started to introduce flexible pathways (e.g. credit approach), enabling students to modify their study plans within given limits. Non-university tertiary education institutes have however much stricter study programmes which leave only limited space for their students to adapt their study plans<sup>3</sup>.

#### *Lifelong learning*

The 1998 Higher Education Act states that higher education institutions may provide lifelong learning programmes within the framework of their educational activity. Lifelong learning may be either vocationally oriented or follow personal interests.

Higher education institutions issue certificates to all those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes. Those who receive lifelong learning forms of provision are not

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education (NUOV), 2007, *OECD activity on recognition of non-formal and informal learning, country background report Czech Republic*.

<sup>2</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

<sup>3</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

students under the 1998 Act, which means that they cannot be awarded any academic degree and that they do not have the same rights and advantages concerning social benefits (e.g. health insurance, tax deductibility) as students studying in academic study programmes.

However, Amendment No. 147/2001 to the Act enables lifelong learning programmes to be provided in accredited study programmes. If those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes of this kind become students under the Act, a higher education institution may recognise up to 60% of the credits they have already obtained as a result of such provision.<sup>1</sup>

### *Research Projects*

Several universities are involved in research projects with respect to recognising non-formal and informal learning. Several of these projects have been set up in the framework of the research programme "Modern society and its change" of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which was launched in 2004.

For example, the research project of Prague University of Economics "Demand for education and employment of the Czech labour force linked to the integration to the economic and social structures of EU" was implemented within this framework. Part of this project dealt with recognition of qualifications and informal/non-formal learning and maps the situation and offers some solutions based on the best European practice.

Another project in the framework of the research programme "Modern society and its change" was implemented by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA) in cooperation with the Masaryk University (School of Social Studies) and National Observatory of Employment and Training (part of NTF). The project also mapped the situation, criticised the lack of mechanisms for recognition of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic and recommended a focus on elaboration of the national system of qualifications, standardised and independent systems of assessment and certification which would cover both IVET, CVT and competences attained informally, particularly stressing close cooperation with social partners.

## **10.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector**

The recognition of acquired non-formal and informal skills in the Czech labour market is important, but no formal validation or accreditation of these skills takes place. Formal qualifications are only required for professions and trades covered by specific laws and

<sup>1</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

regulations, otherwise employers are free to accept any job candidate on the basis of their previous work experience and any other acquired non-formal and informal learning experience. Various surveys among Czech employers show that they actually prefer skills acquired informally (communication skills, leadership skills, team spirit, etc.) over formal qualifications.

### 10.3.1 Councils

#### 10.3.1.1 *Sector councils in the NQF<sup>1</sup>*

A new phenomenon in the Czech Republic is the establishment of Sector councils as part of the National Qualifications Framework. These councils are established after negotiations with the relevant representatives of employers and are supported by the NQF team, Integrated System of Type Positions (ISTP) administrator and a National Framework of Occupations (NSP) team.

The private company Trexima oversees the activities of the sector councils. In addition, an employee of Trexima usually holds the post of sector council secretary. Representatives from the sphere of education are also members of sector councils. Sector councils have a varying number of members, but the optimal number is considered to be up to 15 members. Extra members can be included when necessary, drawing from an external network of sector council experts.

The Sector councils serve as a platform of cooperation, focusing on the following activities:

- Assessment and creation of occupation descriptions and smaller segments of work which stipulate potential partial qualifications;
- Assessment and creation of qualification and assessment standards of complete and especially partial qualifications; and
- Cooperation in awarding authorisations and the supervision of authorised persons.

#### 10.3.1.2 *National HRD Council and regional HRD Councils*

In spring 2003, the Czech government adopted a national strategy for human resource development to create a co-ordinated, transversal human resource platform which will interlink issues of employment, vocational education and training, skills and entrepreneurship.

The National Council (*Rada vlády pro rozvoj lidských zdrojů*) was to be the coordinating body. The Council, chaired by a member of the government, had 27 members

<sup>1</sup> A proposal for the concept, structure and processes of the national qualification framework, April 2007, NQF team, NSK

representing the state administration, the autonomous regional governments, employers' organisations and trade unions. Its task was to formulate national HRD policies and priorities and to co-ordinate the relevant policies of the different ministries, economic sectors and industries.

The National Council (Rada vlády pro rozvoj lidských zdrojů) was dissolved by the Government Resolution No. 1088 of September 20, 2006. In connection with the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., the National Board for Qualifications has been established, joining together leaders across different bodies. Members of the Board are, for instance, representatives of central administration bodies, stakeholders within industrial sectors, organisations of employers, trade union organisations, and associations of legal entities carrying out activities of schools.<sup>1</sup>

### 10.3.2 Sector-specific initiatives

Various specific sectors in the Czech Republic have developed elaborate systems of assessment, training and certification of qualifications. These sectors mostly concern sectors with professions covered by specific laws and regulations and sectors where international qualifications and certificates play an important role.

One such a sector is electrical engineering, which has a detailed system of training and assessment of workers, including modular training leading to specific competences related to specific requirements for certain professions. The Czech Association of Energy Sector Employers (ČSZE) managed the Leonardo da Vinci project "European Certification in Vocational Training for Electricity Generation and Distribution" (approved in 2000) which aimed to set up a unified system of qualification examination with international certification<sup>2</sup>.

Another sector is accounting, for which the Union of Accountants<sup>3</sup> has set up a system of certification, designed for the accountancy profession at large, i.e. it offers examination and certification as well as education and training from the lowest-skilled to the top tier of accountancy professions. The system of certification was created on the basis of a Phare project ("Harmonisation of Accounting in the Czech Republic with E.U. Directives") of the Union of Accountants, prepared in consultation with leading European experts in accountancy and professional education of accountants (particularly the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants - ACCA). The system consists of three levels of

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

<sup>2</sup> ČSZE webpage. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.csze.cz/english.php>; National Training Fund, Czech National Agency Leonardo da Vinci webpage. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.nvf.cz/archiv/leonardo/about.htm>

<sup>3</sup> The Union of Accountants is a voluntary and independent special-purpose national organisation established in keeping with the Civic Association Act no. 83/1990 Coll., as amended, which, since 1990, has been associating under its present name accountants, auditors, tax advisors, and other interested people who agree with its programme defined in the statutes of the Union and in other documents. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni\\_en.htm](http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni_en.htm)

qualification - Accounting Assistant - technician, Balance Accountant - executive accountants and Accounting Expert. Participants need to have a general upper secondary diploma in order to be admitted to courses and/or examination. But if they lack this, they can apply for a procedure of validation and recognition of previous education, training and experience to the Council for Recognition of Education<sup>1</sup> to gain admission. The implementation of the system started in autumn 1997 and by 2002 it recorded 5,900 applicants, of which 2,136 obtained certificates.<sup>2</sup>

Within the field of marketing, a system of training of certification has been developed since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing<sup>3</sup> (CIMA) in cooperation with the Dutch Institute of Marketing (NIMA) under the Phare programme, National Training Fund and Ministry of Industry and Trade in 1996. Emphasis is put on competences required to practically execute the marketing profession in the labour market. CIMA has been accredited by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with the rights to issue a certificate of qualification after the completion of training courses in marketing at three levels; A, B and C. The A and B level marketing educational system, which is compatible with other similar European educational systems was introduced in 1993 at 11 educational institutes. More than 5000 marketing professionals passed the first level educational programme CIMA-A (about 120 training hours), and about 1000 students passed the second level of CIMA-B (about 120 training hours). The implementation of CIMA-C is under preparation. Participants who do not wish to undertake the courses, can apply to CIMA and the examination commission and participate directly in the exams if his or her expertise gained through non-formal and informal learning is valued to be sufficient<sup>4</sup>

### 10.3.3 Individual companies

Over 60% of Czech companies offer some sort of training (formal or non-formal) to their employees (on the top of legally binding courses). This is not only training leading to specific knowledge and skills (foreign languages, accounting, laws and regulations, IT) but often also training focusing on non-formal competences (managerial and marketing skills, interpersonal communication, presentation skills). Currently, training provided by enterprises might but does not always lead to a certificate at the end of a course. Such certificates have no formal validity, although some have international, sectoral or corporate validity and are often very well received by employers (e.g. ECDL, Microsoft training providers).

<sup>1</sup> The Council for Recognition of Education is an independent body represented by experts from the world of work, and from upper secondary and higher education. The body evaluates applications for recognition of previous learning and practical experience and decides about satisfaction of qualification requirements on the basis of the evaluation. The decision always derives from the requirements of the system of certification for accountancy professions, documents confirming education and experience of the applicant, school curricula and other materials. Additional documents for attestation, an interview or sitting a test can be requested from the applicant in case of uncertainty.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni\\_en.htm](http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni_en.htm); <http://www.komora-ucetnich.cz/>; <http://www.i-servis.cz/isu/>

<sup>3</sup> CIMA was created in 1992 as a non-profit organisation by the decision of the Minister of Industry.

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved: <http://www.cima.cz>

One third of the companies undertaking training however often do not assess training outcomes. Some 43% of companies ask training providers to submit assessment of the training results of participants. Approximately 15% of companies assess training results informally, e.g. based on work performance. Only a minor share of employers have an established system for assessment of training results (less than 2%), or use some specific assessment schemes (e.g. interviewing, examining or testing the training participant, assessment by the immediate supervisor etc.)<sup>1</sup>.

Over 80% of employers assess regularly (51%) or in special circumstances (33%) the competences of their employees. According to an employers survey of 2003<sup>2</sup> the majority of Czech employers (44% for all job positions and 46.3% for selected positions) tend to have built up for these assessments an elaborate categorisation for each employment position explaining necessary competences and qualifications. Particularly Czech employers with more than 500 employees (often with foreign capital or ownership) tend to have such a system, mostly in the sectors of finance and insurance, state and public administration, transportation, storage, post and telecommunication.

#### **10.4 Review of existing initiatives: Third sector**

Activities in the third sector with respect to recognising non-formal and informal learning have been very scarce to date.

One promising example is the Centre for Quality and Standards in Social Services (CEKAS).<sup>3</sup> The centre developed the system of quality assurance for social service providers (who mostly belong to the third sector) and the methodology for evaluation, including self-assessment. Among other criteria, the system clearly lays down requirements for human resource management and development, including recruitment procedures and requirements, induction training, qualification and competence requirements for each job position, assessment of competences and validation of prior learning of employees, provision of training opportunities in various forms (formal and non-formal). The verification of qualification and competence requirements usually provides an option of recognising certain years of work experience for the specifically required qualification. The system was developed for several areas of provision of social services (e.g. guidance services, asylum seekers services, family and parental advice, counselling

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Strietska-Ilina, Olga et al. Identification of skill shortages in the Czech labour market, NOET-NTF, 2003. See also the background report Survey of the labour force – Final report, Median 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The Centre has the status of non-governmental public benefit organization. It was established under the initiative of the National Training Fund (NTF) in 2003. The activities prior to 2003 had been developed by a team within the framework of NTF. Retrieved: <http://www.cekas.cz>

for drug addiction etc.). It can be used as an internal tool for quality assurance by service providers as well as for voluntary external assessment.

Another example is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) which has been implemented in the Czech Republic since 1999. The guarantor for quality of testing, accreditation of the test centres and issuing ECDL certificates is the Czech Society for Cybernetics and Informatics (CSCI) – a non-profit organisation. In order to publicise and develop the usage of ECDL in the Czech Republic, CSCI established a working group for the development of information literacy ECDL-CZ. So far 12,128 holders of the European Computer Skills Card are registered in the Czech Republic and 8,913 ECDL certificates of different levels were awarded on the basis of tests results<sup>1</sup>.

The National Training Fund (NTF) is also important to mention. This non-governmental public benefit organisation has been founded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for the implementation of programmes and projects in the field of human resource development (HRD) and employment. The NTF has been involved in a variety of projects focusing on education and recognising non-formal and informal learning. For example, the NTF was responsible for a recent project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs *Education, research and development as key factors of the development of contemporary society training*.<sup>2</sup> One part of the project, implemented in collaboration with the NUOV (National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education - NITVE), dealt with developing a system for continuing training and how to recognise it through a model for certification of competences in CVT.<sup>3</sup> In particular, it suggested that development of professional profiles based on competences required in the labour market (linked to occupational profiles in the ISTP and to the framework study programmes) can lay the basis for recognised qualifications not only in the initial but also in continuing, non-formal, training. They also emphasise direct involvement of social partners in the development of the profiles which will increase the credibility of qualifications. They recommend that qualifications in CVT should be constructed in accordance with job requirements and the usage of modular training should be gradually broadened<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni\\_stav\\_testovani.php](http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni_stav_testovani.php)

<sup>2</sup> Project 'Modern society and its change', 2003. The part on development of CVT system was prepared by the teams from NTF and NITVE.

<sup>3</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Další vzdělávání v ČR před branami EU. (Continuing training in the Czech Republic at the entrance to the EU). Andragogika: selected papers, [http://www.daha.cz/andr\\_palan.html](http://www.daha.cz/andr_palan.html).

<sup>4</sup> Rozvoj národní soustavy kvalifikací, Strategicko-operační dokument. (Development of the national qualification system. Strategic/operational document.) NITVE, 2003

## 10.5 Conclusions

Until very recently, no comprehensive system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning existed in the Czech Republic. However, slowly the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly taking its place on the policy agenda. One of the first changes has been the implementation of the New School Act in 2005, followed in 2006 by Act no. 179/2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment of Some Other Acts (Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results) which entered in force in August 2007. Both the School Act and Act no. 179/2006 focus on the possibility to acquire partial qualifications. Since 2005, these legislation initiatives have been accompanied by activities to develop a National Qualifications Framework and to provide its pilot implementation studies.

Besides legislative changes, many small-scale (pilot) projects are undertaken in the field of non-formal and informal learning, by a diverse set of organisations (non-profit, social partners, employers, public sector). However, in spite of this, the Czech Republic as yet has only put in place the “bones” for setting up a national system of validation of informal and non-formal learning - it lacks the “flesh” with clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities and other practicalities.

# 11.0 Denmark<sup>1</sup>

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By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research) and Jo Hawley

## 11.1 Introduction

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark has been high on the policy agenda since 2001 when initiatives such as the Adult Education Reform (2001), ASEM Lifelong Learning Initiative (2002) and the policy paper 'Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System' (2004) evolved. These developments were documented in the previous ECOTEC Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning.

Since this time, the 'final report of the Tripartite Committee on Lifelong Learning and Skills Upgrading for all in the Labour Market (2006)' and the 'Accord on the Implementation of the Government's Globalisation Strategy (2006)' have been developed. Both of these documents have an application to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). In addition, Denmark has:

- Relevant legislation to enhance the use of RPL in adult education and continuing training (passed in June 2007, taking effect August 1 2007);
- Further experience of applying RPL in a variety of educational settings, across the public, private and third sectors;
- Continuous experience of using tools, methods and procedures for assessing RPL;
- A network funded by the Ministry of Education for sharing RPL experiences and best practice;
- A National Knowledge Centre on Assessment of Prior Learning (August 2007), funded by the Ministry.
- Substantial financial support from the Ministry, which funds most of the country's RPL;
- A qualification system that has become increasingly modular and outcome or competence based<sup>2</sup>, which recognises non-formal and informal learning in terms of 'credit'.

However, it should be noted that there is currently no national approach or methodology for applying RPL across the board. Denmark does not have common methods of assessment, which can be applied / adapted to all educational environments. *It instead*

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Denmark chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Annelise Hauch (Danish Ministry of Education), Prof. Erwin Seyfried (FHVR Berlin) and Manuel Souto Otero (ECOTEC Research and Consulting). Additional information provided in 2007 by Annelise Hauch, Danish Ministry of Education.

<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

*has widespread practice carried out in different ways in a variety of settings.* The Ministry is however working on further guidance to support RPL in 2007 and this is likely to change in the future.

The Danish system appears to have evolved through a strong national tradition of RPL, which is currently working to meet the requirements of EU policy.

## **11.2 Public Sector**

‘Anerkendelse af realkompetence(r)’ or, in English, ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL) has a long tradition in Denmark. The Public sector started to work on policies relevant to RPL in 1997 (adult vocational training programmes) and more generally in 2001 (adult education and continuing training) and the key policy “Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System” was published already in November 2004.

We start this chapter by outlining the key policy for validation of informal and non-formal learning (Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System 2004), followed by legislative and policy changes which have taken place since the last Inventory and a list of the key stakeholders involved in validation in Denmark.

We then provide an overview of existing arrangements on recognition of prior learning in the following areas: General upper secondary education, initial vocational education and training (VET), tertiary education, general adult education and vocationally oriented adult education. This information is based on the 2005 Inventory and has been updated in line with other reports which have been published since then.

### **11.2.1 The policy for validation of informal and non-formal learning**

The policy Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System (2004) acts as a follow-up to the 2002 Better Education Action Plan and gives RPL a high priority and very specific focus. It recognises that RPL is not a new phenomenon especially in initial-VET, adult education programmes and tertiary education but that more needs to be done to recognise competencies achieved at work, from taking part in liberal adult education etc<sup>1</sup>. The policy paper proposes that recognition of non-formal and informal learning be taken into account throughout the entire education system, and that initiatives be taken in adult education and continuing training to improve opportunities for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>2</sup>

The policy is clear that any competence assessment should be carried out within the requirements of the education/training programme and hence entry onto courses or

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System (November 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

exemption from modules should only occur where equivalence can be clearly demonstrated.

The government has developed the policy along certain principles; these are in accordance with the Bologna and Lisbon declarations:

- The individual citizen should be able to request an assessment of his or her prior learning based on the framework and regulations applicable within the individual areas of education
- The individual has a responsibility for contributing to the documentation of his/her prior learning.
- A user fee may be charged for a competence assessment, with the exception of the low skilled when a personal study plan is prepared for them.
- A competence assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question.
- The individual's competencies should be recognised irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality/standard of the education and training programmes.
- The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome.
- The result of the assessment should be documented by issuing a certificate.

The policy acknowledges that the success of competency assessment or recognition of prior learning depends completely on the methods applied to assess RPL and the quality mechanisms in place to support the process. Each competency assessment needs to include:

- **Guidance and Clarification** i.e. the educational institution providing information on their options, regulations, their obligations in the process etc;
- **Collection of documentation** e.g. documentation from employers, participation in seminars, training activities, liberal adult education activities, voluntary experience etc;
- **Competence assessment** i.e. reviewing the documents, structured interviews, observation, asking the learner to complete a practical task, tests etc.

Recognition of prior learning after competence assessment may result in the following:

- Entrance qualifications for an education/training programme
- A shorter study plan ('credit' in an education programme)
- Documentation of competencies/qualifications in relation to part of an education programme

- Recognition in relation to a full education programme, if possible.

Work to infiltrate the policy into each area of education in Denmark has largely taken place since January 2006. This involved:

- Working with educational institutions to establish methods, principles etc and guaranteeing quality;
- Developing tools to support the documentation of RPL (in conjunction with social partners and other stakeholders);
- Ensuring the work fits in with the Tripartite Committee on lifelong skills enhancement and education and training for all in the labour market;
- Providing information and advice to citizens and businesses through a portal known as the 'Education Guide'.

## 11.2.2 Developments 2005-2007

### 11.2.2.1 *Legislation (2007)*

The key change in Denmark recently is the legislative amendment, which has given each individual the right to have their prior learning experiences validated in relation to adult education and continuing training. This legislation was passed on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and has been effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007 (in one instance August 2008). It is likely to have a major impact on the uptake of RPL. The new policy centres on the needs of the individual and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible. A key aim is to motivate those with little or no education to participate in lifelong learning by making it easier for them to access learning opportunities, through recognition of their prior learning.

According to the new legislation, each education institution can assess, and subsequently recognise prior learning in adult education and continuing training for the purposes of:

- Accessing formal education i.e. using non-formal/informal experiences to meet the admission requirements;
- Preparing a shortened learning programme;
- Awarding a certificate or diploma for part of or a whole programme if the non-formal/informal learning meets the requirements of specific modules within the learning programme;
- Offering the learner, on request, documentation that recognises their prior learning, which does not equate to a specific certificate or diploma.

The proposed amendments aim to implement a number of principles, which *extend* the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in education programmes in adult education and continuing training:

- Individuals can have their non-formal and informal learning assessed on the basis of frameworks and regulations specified in the individual education programme area;
- Individuals contribute to the documentation of their non-formal and informal learning;

- Competence assessment is always based on the goals and admission requirements of the individual education programme (or subject area standards within general adult education and upper secondary subjects for adults);
- An individual's competence is recognised no matter how or where it has been acquired;
- The quality and standards of an education programme must not be lowered, even if the leaving certificate or diploma is based partially or completely on the recognition of prior learning from outside the publicly-maintained education system;
- The results of assessment are documented by issuing a competence certificate or diploma to recognise either a completed programme or completed modules specified in the programme's regulations.

*“The development and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in relation to specific education programmes or in relation to subjects in specific programmes is based on a voluntary approach principle, in that it is an offer extended to the individual”<sup>1</sup>.*

#### 11.2.2.2 *The Welfare Accord (2006)*

The accord comprises a number of objectives; one of these is to provide better opportunities for recognition of prior learning acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The focus of the Welfare Accord is on the low skilled and other disadvantaged groups within the labour market<sup>2</sup>.

#### 11.2.2.3 *The Globalisation Strategy (2006)*

In 2006, Denmark developed a strategy for utilising the benefits of globalisation. Part of this strategy involves the ‘Flexicurity model’, which has an application to informal and non-formal learning.

The Flexicurity model is the term that refers to Denmark’s exceptionally flexible labour market. They accept that globalisation has and will continue to take jobs away from the country but that these will always be replaced by alternative employment options. As such, they endeavour to support the labour market in adapting to these constant changes. The easy hiring and firing (flexibility for the employers) is combined with high benefits for the unemployed (security for the employees when changing jobs). There is an important role for RPL within this since it helps the labour market re-train/adapt to suit different professions by recognising what workers already know.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>3</sup> <http://presse.uvm.dk/taler/bh/181106.htm?menuid=600510>

#### 11.2.2.4 *The Tripartite Committee (2006)*

In March 2006, the Tripartite Committee i.e. comprising social partners and the Danish government agreed their joint responsibility to strengthen adult education and training in Denmark. In August 2006, the government and the social partners completed a joint task focusing on adult education and training efforts. Further tripartite negotiations will continue in 2007 with the implementation of the Welfare Accord and the Globalisation Accord.<sup>1</sup>

#### 11.2.2.5 *Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2007)*

In the Danish Government Strategy for Lifelong Learning (report July 2007), one of the cross-cutting actions is the Recognition of Prior Learning. Better opportunities for individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences assessed and recognised within adult education and continuing training are to promote participation by adults in adult education and continuing training and to improve their opportunities in the labour market. Four initiatives to promote this aim are mentioned, including implementation of legislation, quality assurance and development of documentation tools.

#### 11.2.3 Key Stakeholders

In Denmark, there are a number of key stakeholders working together to take RPL policy forward. The key national body is the Ministry of Education, although there has been some input from the Ministry of Science, Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs to the Government Policy Paper (2004).<sup>2</sup>

The Ministry of Education is ultimately responsible for RPL within its field of responsibility (which does not include universities). It has developed policy guidelines, funded projects looking at developing tools, methods and procedures for RPL, set up a network for sharing best practice in RPL as well as a National Knowledge Centre for Competence Assessment partially funded by the Ministry, and importantly funds RPL in respect to education and training programmes. From 2007, the Ministry will continue to develop guidance for educational institutions in assessing RPL.

In the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training (initial and adult), there is a long-standing tradition of involving the social partners, who have been attributed significant influence in a number of areas defined in the legislation. Thus, the government works closely with social partners. For example, the Council for I-VET (REU), the Council for Adult and Continuing Training (REVE), the Council for Short term further tertiary education (Erhvervsakademirådet) and the Council for Medium Term

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> The 2007 legislation applies only to the field of responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Economy and Business Affairs (maritime education/training) are implementing the principles of the policy paper without specific legislation. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation has not developed the RPL further since the 2004 government policy paper.

further education (MVU Council). These organisations advise government on their specific areas of education and training.

The “National Trade Committees” define the content of qualifications and labour market competence frameworks and monitor labour market developments so as to develop suitable VET. There are also trade committees that act at a local level. Vocational Training Committees play a similar role in relation to adult vocational training programmes.

The educational institutions themselves are responsible for assessing and approving RPL for their educational and training programmes.

The individuals themselves have a responsibility to provide educational establishments with the necessary documentation to help enable them to assess their informal and non-formal learning. For example, using ‘*Min Kompetencemappe*’, the documentation tool developed by the Ministry of Education in co-operation with the social partners, or other tools of their own choice.

#### 11.2.4 Existing practice<sup>1</sup>

The assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning currently exists in various forms across the different education sectors. In all programmes, the assessment approaches are converging.<sup>2</sup> We now consider each education sector in turn.

##### 11.2.4.1 *General upper secondary education: A more flexible credit transfer system*

Within general upper secondary education, a new advanced level reform in Denmark (which commenced in 2005) introduced a credit transfer system based on an assessment of the individual student’s prior learning. The objective is to give the students the opportunity to receive credit transfers for previously completed studies, periods of stay abroad, etc. and therefore be granted admission to subjects at a higher level or extra optional subjects or – if the particular credit transfer is very substantial – a reduced advanced level course load. Assessment is made after entry.

General upper secondary education is offered as single subject courses for adults. There are moderate user fees for all participation in the education programme in this case – the fees also cover individual assessment.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that general upper secondary education is regulated by a different legislative act and is subject to different conditions than Vocational Education and Training.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the 2005 Inventory written by Annelise Hauch (Danish Ministry of Education), Prof. Erwin Seyfried (FHVR Berlin) and Manuel Souto Otero (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)]. Updates are referenced.

<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

#### 11.2.4.2 *Initial VET: Individual competence assessment as a general principle*

*Recognition of Prior Learning is mandatory for vocational education and training.*

Following the Better Education Action Plan the government amended the Initial VET legislation, taking effect from 1 August 2003, introducing a general principle of individual competence assessments as a basis for preparation of apprentices' personal education plans. In order to manage highly individualised VET programmes, all apprentices have to have a personal education plan drawn up. Together with a contact teacher (tutor), apprentices draw up a personal education plan describing all their learning objectives and how to attain them. The personal education plan is based on an assessment of trainees' competences and outlines an individual pathway through the VET system. When the trainee starts practical training in an enterprise, the latter is also involved in the definition of the overall objectives for the training in cooperation with the apprentice.

Flexible pathways (personal education plans) adapted to the apprentice's actual ('real') competences may shorten education periods (exemptions), but they may also lead to longer education pathways adapted to individual needs, or to additions in order to enable the apprentice to acquire additional qualifications.

The national trade committee for a particular VET programme has the authority to decide on exemptions from programme requirements that exceed four weeks (exemptions of up to four weeks being within the authority of the college). The social partners are equally represented in the bipartite trade committees.

In connection with 2004 amendments of legislation, similar provisions of individual assessment of competences now apply at the institutions of social and health education.

Since 1992, following a Parliament resolution, all ministerial orders on initial VET programmes regulated that in Adult VET, students at least 25 years of age who can document relevant non-formal learning may get credit as part of a VET programme. In general, these former special arrangements are now being replaced by the general principle of individual competence assessment of trainees in the initial VET system.

#### *Mainstream Tertiary Education: Admission*

Within tertiary education, the individual educational institutions may – as previously – grant admission to students on the basis of individual assessments of these applicants' qualifications when the applicants have actual qualifications that are comparable to the general formal admission requirements (exemption from formal requirements). Validation is not possible in relation to shortening education periods in tertiary education (exemptions from modules etc). Exemption is only possible on the basis of credit transfer for formal education elements.

In June 2004, the Government decided to change the restricted admissions system for tertiary education with effect from summer 2007. The quota system under restricted admission up to now has a number of weaknesses, as it has raised many false hopes about attaining a quota II place through an often futile hunt for points. The objective of the new admissions system is, firstly, to encourage and assist young people to complete their studies faster and minimise the time between completing their advanced levels and continuing their studies at tertiary level, and secondly, to strengthen the course-specific qualifications of the successful applicants in order to reduce the drop-out rate. Two quota systems are in place:

- Quota I, which is based on the results from the qualifying examination, will – with minor adjustments – continue to be the main admission route to the studies where admission is restricted.
- Quota II has been changed. Quota II applies to certain selected studies and provides a small group of applicants with a further chance of admission after a reduction in the quotient, including adjustment for any relevant course-specific skills enhancement. For all studies, this quota permits admission of students following individual assessment and entrance examinations or similar.

With respect to the other subgroup, quota II b, the educational institutions are still able to admit students following individual assessments and entrance examinations or similar. There must be room for exemptions, i.e. for applicants who do not meet the general admission requirements in the form of A levels etc. but who have actual qualifications that – following a competence assessment – are considered comparable with A Levels and who also meet specific admission requirements, if any, for the particular course in question. Thus, quota II b provides opportunities for prior learning assessment of the individual applicants.<sup>1</sup>

The new system clearly attaches importance to qualifications for studying but also provides opportunities for prior learning assessment with the aid of examinations, interviews, and other means.

The 2007 legislation (outlined below) proposed that access to individual competence assessment should be introduced in the short-cycle higher education programmes for adults (VU) and in diploma programmes (continuing professional education at bachelor level) in the higher education system for adults, either as a substitution for formal qualifications necessary for admission, or as an element in shortened programme length.<sup>2</sup> Until 1 August 2007, applicants to these programmes had to document a relevant

<sup>1</sup> Seyfried, Prof. E., Souto Otero, M., with amendments by Hauch, A. (2006), National overview of methodologies and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark, taken from the world wide web on 20 August 2007. Available at: <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/validation.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

education programme and at least two years relevant work experience in order to gain admission.

#### 11.2.4.3 *General Adult Education*

On the whole, practice in Preparatory Adult Education (literacy and numeracy courses) and General Adult Education at lower secondary level already live up to the principles of the Government policy paper on Recognition of prior learning, especially through individual competence assessment for placement at suitable level. This has been made explicit in the amended legislation (2007).

In Preparatory Adult Education, an assessment is made to verify whether this is the relevant offer for the student: if not, to refer the student to another more relevant offer. Assessment is made after entry and the education programme, including assessment is free for all students.<sup>1</sup>

General Adult Education at lower secondary level (single subject courses) run parallel to, not identical with, the initial basic education for the youth group and are offered to all persons 18 years of age or older. An assessment of the individual's knowledge and qualifications in relation to the subject may result in placing the student at a relevant entrance level. There are moderate user fees for all for participation in the education programme. Assessment is made after entry and is thus covered by the fee.<sup>2</sup>

As from August 2008, adult education centres et al. shall offer all citizens who are eligible for their general education courses an individual competence assessment in relation to the educational goals, without simultaneous admission to the education programme, aiming to recognise prior learning for the purpose of issuing a competence certificate for a subject or a well-defined part of a subject (legislative amendment 2007).

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

#### 11.2.4.4 *Vocationally oriented adult education and training*

Recognition of Prior Learning is mandatory for adult vocational education and training.

##### **Adult Vocational Training ('AMU', CVT): Individual Competence Assessment and individual training plan**

Since 1997, Adult Vocational Training (CVT) centres and technical and commercial Vocational Education and Training (VET) colleges have been offering individual competence assessment (ICA) for the identification of competences and referral to courses within the adult vocational training programmes (AMU). The goal is twofold: first, to establish individual training plans that identify the individual's prior formal and non-formal learning; second, to offer individual training in accordance with (since 2004) the participant's job competence profile as reference point, and drawing up an individual training plan referring to the adult vocational training courses and VET single subjects listed in a common competence description that match the participant's job/competence profile.

The target group consists of employed workers of all skill levels. The scheme may be used by an individual for further personal or career development or, more typically, by enterprises as part of a Human Resources Development plan. The Public Employment Service may buy adult vocational training courses according to the identified needs of unemployed workers.

In the Adult Vocational Training scheme, ICA may be said to fall into the category of formative assessment approaches in which the validation process helps the student to fill in the knowledge and skills gaps on the way to meeting a job competence profile. The purpose of the assessment is to assess prior learning of the student and link it to institutional learning which results in a personalised study and training period at the adult vocational training institution. However, especially since the 2004 amendment of the Adult Vocational Training concept, which introduced joint competence descriptions for adult vocational training courses and VET single subjects, the ICA may also result in the recognition of prior learning, giving a right to credit transfer into initial VET, and therefore may be said to be summative in this respect.<sup>1</sup>

The ICA operates at two levels. At the individual level, the ICA starting point is the individual's personal ideas and professional and educational aspirations. At the enterprise level, the competence analysis focuses on the qualification needs of the company.

<sup>1</sup> Seyfried, Prof. E., Souto Otero, M., with amendments by Hauch, A. (2006), National overview of methodologies and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark, taken from the world wide web on 20 August 2007. Available at; <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/validation.aspx>

During the ICA the participant's prior learning is assessed by different methods (s. Danish Ministry of Education, 2002):

- Interview, to establish personal ideas and priorities
- Interview, to assess and recognize prior work experience and formal learning relevant to the present situation
- Tests, written and/or oral
- Practical exercises
- Simulation

The training plan based on the assessment of the individuals' prior learning covers technical, general and personal areas.

As a result of the ICA, the individual also receives an education or competence certificate. This certificate can generally be used when applying for an education programme, or together with a job application.

The vocational training committees according to the legislation on Adult Vocational Training, in which the social partners are equally represented, are responsible for dealing with complaints about the professional outcome of an individual competence assessment .

The new legislation introduced in 2007 (outlined below) has given individual competence assessment in adult vocational training a new name and a new orientation: from individual competence clarification (IKA) in previous legislation to individual competence assessment (IKV), which is in accordance with the policy paper principles, and supports a coordination with the similar scheme in Basic Adult Education (GVU), thus facilitating participants changing pathways. Recognition of Prior Learning will still take place on the basis of an (identification and) clarification of the person's competences, (collection of) documentation and assessment. In addition to this, the new legislation stipulates that from August 1, 2007, education and training institutions shall also offer screening of basic skills such as reading, writing, spelling or mathematics, as well as guidance in connection with this, to all participants in adult vocational training or single subjects, or in individual competence assessment.

## **Basic Adult Education Scheme: Individual competence assessment, Recognition of prior learning and individual study plan**

The Adult Education Reform (2001) introduced the Basic Adult Education Scheme ('GVU'). This scheme aims at introducing a new, flexible way for low skilled adults to have their formal, non-formal and informal learning assessed and recognised with a view to acquiring formal VET qualifications while retaining their work.

VET colleges offer a one-stop individual competence assessment and recognition of the student's prior learning. This forms the starting point for an individual study and training plan which allows for part-time study in a single subject structure qualifying for a VET diploma, without the practical training part and therefore without an apprenticeship contract with an enterprise because exemption can be granted for all practical elements of the training programme. The target group consists of part-time students who want to combine the study with continued employment (s. Danish Ministry of Education 2002). The admission criteria are threefold: 25 years of age, minimum two years of relevant work experience, and qualifications corresponding to compulsory school exit level in relevant subjects.

The Basic Adult Education Scheme is a summative approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning. It enables the student to close the knowledge gaps on the way to mastery (diploma identical to a VET diploma).

The reference points for the individual competence assessment (ICA) are the targets of the corresponding VET programme. These targets are indicated either in an annexe to the regulation of each VET programme or in attached guidelines. Two years of relevant work experience, as well as minimum age limit of 25, are the admission requirements for an individual competence assessment and a GVU individual study and training plan for the desired VET education programme. This work experience should contribute towards exemption for the practical training part. For ICA methods, see above under Adult Vocational Training.

The personal study plan drawn up by one college on the basis of individual competence assessment is binding for other colleges that provide the same programme and is valid for 6 years.

In contrast to initial VET, the national trade committees - in which the social partners are equally represented - do not take part in the individual assessment and recognition of practical competences in a Basic Adult Education programme. The college informs the relevant trade committee on the individual study and training plans that it has drawn up for participants. The trade committee has the right to advise the school on future practice.

The new legislation introduced in 2007 did not affect GVU and as previously, the vocational colleges will offer individual competency assessments as the basis for arranging a basic adult education programme and provide opportunity for abbreviating an education programme or to be moved ahead on the basis of a specific assessment.

### **Advanced levels of the Adult Education System: Work experience as part of admission requirements, study in interplay with work experience**

The Adult Education System as part of the Adult Education Reform (2001) also introduced a new framework for further education at tertiary level.

The reform of the Adult Education System aims at better connecting formal education and non-formal learning at work. This promotes the goal of further education at advanced levels to develop progression in professional competence rather than the progression in study competence, which is dominant in the mainstream tertiary education programmes (s. Danish Ministry of Education, 2002).

The Adult Education Reform (2001) introduced relevant work experience as part of the entrance requirements for the Adult Education System. Although validation of non-formal and informal learning is not recognized as part of the education programme at this level, the (shorter) duration and the organization of the content and teaching methods of the continued education programmes is to a high degree based on the life and work experience of the adults. Especially in connection with the final student's project there is interplay between theory and the adult's prior non-formal and informal learning acquired through work and life experience. In accordance with the Act on Open Education (which governs provision and financing of vocationally oriented adult education and training), the target group of the study programme are individuals that are working.

The admission criteria for this programme are twofold: Relevant educational background and two years of relevant work experience are required. The education institution assesses the relevance of the work experience in two dimensions: relevance in relation to the previous educational background and relevance in relation to the desired further education programme.

The following legal amendments have been introduced in 2007 for the two lower advanced levels of the Adult Education System (short cycle 'VVU' and medium cycle '*diplomuddannelse*'), bringing it in harmony with the principles of the 2004 policy paper:

- The introduction of general access for applicants who do not have the formal qualifications to have their corresponding prior learning assessed and recognized
- The shortening of courses in the ordinary programmes on the basis of recognition of non-formal competences
- The possibility of having certificates or diplomas issued exclusively on the basis of recognition of non-formal competences.
- Assessment and recognition of prior learning in education programmes.<sup>1</sup>

#### 11.2.5 Other methodologies and projects developed by public authorities

Experience from pilot projects undertaken to develop relevant tools, methods and procedures for recognising prior learning, which have been used in a variety of educational contexts and industry sectors, and other experience has been shared through a network called 'The Reference Group of the Ministry of Education regarding Validation', which has been funded by the Ministry. The newly established National Knowledge Centre of Competence Assessment (August 2007) will have as its primary tasks to gather, develop and spread knowledge on assessment of competences for the benefit of a number of stakeholders: educational institutions, professional organisations, third sector organisations, guidance centres, private and public enterprises, and citizens. It is thought that a national and all-encompassing approach to validation is likely in the future.

##### 11.2.5.1 *Projects aimed at developing a national documentation framework*

In 2005, the Danish government initiated two parallel projects aimed at developing a national framework and methodology for the identification and documentation of non-formal and informal learning. The more general tool project for documentation of learning was undertaken by the Technological Institute. The sector tool project for assessment and documentation of non-formal and informal learning in liberal adult education and the voluntary sector was carried out by Syddansk Universitet Knowledge Lab. Both frameworks now exist and have been tested in a number of environments, e.g. the workplace, adult liberal education etc<sup>2</sup>. The general tool project resulted in 'My Competence Folder' described in 2.5.2. The sector tool project resulted in three e-portfolios accessible through My Competence Folder and various links mentioned in 2.5.2.

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

<sup>2</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

#### 11.2.5.2 *The 'My Competence Folder' (e-portfolio)*

The competence folder (known nationally as '*Min Kompetencemappe*' ('My Competence Folder')) was launched in September 2007. It is an electronic folder in which a citizen may gather documentation for all competencies irrespective of where those competencies have been achieved. For example, in the workplace, though voluntary experience as well as grades achieved through formal education etc. It is the responsibility of the learner to update their folder and it is up to the learner who sees this file. No other organisation will have access to it. This folder resembles the EU CV. The folder may also be used in the paper version.

Enterprises may also use special facilities in My Competence Folder for identification and documentation of their employees as a basis for competence development. In this workplace context, both the employees and the enterprise have access to the folders.

'My Competence Folder' is also available in English.

The folder is accessible on the Internet ([www.minkompetencemappe.dk](http://www.minkompetencemappe.dk)). It can also be found via the 'national guidance portal'<sup>1</sup> (*UddannelsesGuiden*) at [www.ug.dk/realkompetence](http://www.ug.dk/realkompetence).

My Competence Folder also has links to the three e-portfolio tools that have been developed by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with liberal adult education associations and other third sector associations mentioned above under 2.5.1, to document in more detail the personal and other competences acquired in various activities in the third sector such as liberal adult education, association life, voluntary organisations etc. They are to be found at:

<http://www.realkompetence-folkeoplysning.dk/>

<http://www.realkompetence-forening.dk/>

<http://www.realkompetence-frivillig.dk/>.

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

### 11.2.5.3 *Other E-Portfolios*

With respect to migrant policy, the Danish government has undertaken a number of pilot projects looking at developing **e-tools**, offering a database on competence documentation and assessment, a digital competence card and a competence card specifically to be used in industry. The tools developed through these projects are considered to be of a good standard according to an evaluation undertaken in 2006. These pilot projects were undertaken at the five regional knowledge centres, which were established 2004 through 2007 to develop 'documentation and recognition of prior learning for refugees and immigrants'.

The employment services have developed an '**Internet competence portal**'. This ensures that individuals consistently update their electronic CVs in order to collect their unemployment allowance.

**At sector level**, there are numerous examples of the e-portfolio. One such example is the case of the Danish Union of Electricians. They have developed an Internet tool for qualification assessment. Electricians that are members of the union can input their technical, general and personal qualifications and the system automatically evaluates the member's profile. This system can then recommend relevant adult education courses so that the member's profile better matches industry needs.

The Liberal Association of Adult Education (LOF) and the Network for Non-Formal Education (NETOP) have established a '**competence portal**'. This consists of questionnaire comprising approximately 70 questions, testing seven competencies. These include professional competence, learning competence, self-management competence, democracy and social competence, physical and health competence, creative and innovative competence and communication competence.

The State Centre for Competence and Quality Development has developed an Internet-based game, which enables workers in a given workplace to assess job tasks and competence requirements as a basis for competence development and/or job re-organisation.

It should be noted that a number of public sector organisations have developed an on-line portal to document competence, similar to the tools mentioned above.

#### 11.2.5.4 *Meritlærer*

*Meritlærer* is a programme aimed at primary and lower secondary education teachers. It aims to qualify teachers sooner, and through a special programme, by recognising credit for prior learning. This is to address the lack of qualified teachers in Denmark and support 'non-traditional' groups to access the profession. This is one of the few projects that has already been evaluated. Briefly, the finding indicated a high level of satisfaction on the part of the learner and a positive perception of *Meritlærer* students. The weaknesses appear to be related to the reliable transfer of credit. For example, where credit was awarded it was felt that the students lacked subject knowledge, that the programme was actually too short, that the programme only had two main subjects (which is insufficient) and that the rules relating to credit transfer are problematic. The transfer of credit proved not only to be difficult to manage administratively but also inadequately defined.

#### 11.2.6 Funding

RPL is financially very well supported by the Ministry of Education, which has developed the following system<sup>1</sup>:

- No fees are charged for assessment of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and mathematics for participants in Preparatory Adult Education or in courses included in the "common competence description";
- Within adult vocational training (GVU and AMU) persons have the right to assessment of their competencies. No user fees are charged for this; the institutions are paid a one-off taximeter funding<sup>2</sup> for competence assessment and personal study and training plan (GVU), and for competence assessment (AMU), respectively.
- Within general adult education, a distinction should be made between two situations: Competence assessment for entry to programmes continues to be included in the tuition taximeter combined with modest tuition fee. For competence assessment without entry to a programme (from August 2008), where the goal is issuing competence certificates and documentation, no user fees will apply but taximeter funding will be used.
- Within tertiary education, user fees for competence assessment are only applicable for persons with a higher education level than qualifications up to and including upper secondary level. The educational institutions are paid a one-off taximeter funding if the competence assessment and recognition results in the programme being shortened by 15% or more, or in the issuing of a certificate/diploma;

<sup>1</sup>OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> The taximeter scheme is where the government pays the educational institution a per capita fee for each student/activity;

- It is estimated that RPL will cost the Danish government an additional 20.1 million DKK (2.69 million Euros) in 2008, falling to 9 million DKK (1.2 million Euros) per annum once it is fully phased in (2010).<sup>1</sup> Of these figures, 9 million DKK are allocated to screening for basic skills (literacy and numeracy) as a new activity in adult vocational training.

### 11.2.7 Monitoring and Take Up

The Educational Institutions record the number of RPL assessments they make and submit these figures to the government. Denmark therefore has figures for uptake of RPL. Existing schemes have been used only to a limited degree, in part because they have been implemented relatively recently.<sup>2</sup> In 2004, 54,445 Individual Competence Clarifications (ICA) were recorded. This figure declined to 49,995 in 2005 and rose again to 51,411 in 2006<sup>3</sup>.

For 2007, it is estimated that 50,000 will be assessed annually in 'basic skills' programmes and a further 500 through the taximeter system in general education and general upper secondary. No figures are available for diploma and other tertiary programmes within the adult education system.

### 11.2.8 Challenges and Barriers to Take Up

The Danish Adult Education Association identifies that for the educational institutions, the new law means a number of new challenges; both for those with experience with the assessment of prior learning as well as for those for whom the field is entirely new.

The institutions must develop a practice that ensures a great degree of transparency and quality in the process involving the clarification, documentation, assessment and recognition of prior learning. This raises demands in relation to the instruments, methods and procedures involved. Moreover, it raises demands with reference to the skills and competencies of the persons who are to carry out the assessments.

Comprehensive project and development work is necessary. This experience is to be disseminated both "within the ranks" and across the education reforms and sectors. Widespread confidence must be established both among the educational institutions and the commercial enterprises; people must be able to count on the results of the prior learning assessments. The target audience must be comfortable with the certification of their competencies and education that are issued on the basis of prior learning assessments.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Economic estimates in Bill presented in Parliament, passed as law 2007

<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark OECD Country Report, 2007

<sup>3</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, and Ministry of Education: UNI-C's registers in Statistics Denmark

Old habits must also be shaken up in relation to guidance efforts, and there must be greater cooperation between institutions. For this purpose, local, inter-institutional adult guidance counselling networks, regional adult guidance forums and a national Council for Adult Guidance will be established.

The new National Knowledge Centre on Competence Assessment, its role and expectations, is mentioned above.

As a result of a political agreement in the summer of 2007, 20 national networks for outreach and counselling in enterprises targeting those with low educational attainment are to be established in November 2007. A new National Centre on Competence Development (Knowledge centre and evaluation function) is also to be established soon after. The Guidance portal [www.ug.dk](http://www.ug.dk) will be enhanced with an adult guidance portal. Also, a new council on adult guidance and counselling, with the participation of social partners, will be set up.

The recent OECD report recognised a number of barriers to increased take-up of RPL. These include:

- Lack of incentive for institutions because they obtain a greater return from students completing the whole programme (except in institutions that struggle to fill places);
- The taximeter system itself, which governs the whole recognition process, could be a potential barrier;
- Resistance by some institutions to create parity between formal, non-formal and informal learning (especially in the case of tertiary education and regulated professions).

As identified in the previous Inventory, a crucial is the need to look at the use of fiscal tools that can help to regulate the prior learning assessment activity. The Danish Ministry of Education argues that educational institutions must have the proper financial incentives to recognise an applicant's prior learning, including resulting reduction of study time on an individual basis. The taximeter principle (funding per student activity) works as a negative incentive in this respect because it encourages the institution to offer 'the whole package'. Existing arrangements operate with funding per individual competence assessment or per personal study plan.

The challenge is to achieve a balance between financial incentives encouraging the institutions to recognise prior learning, including preparing shorter study plans where relevant, and avoiding over-encouragement ('speculation' on the part of the institutions and a negative effect on the quality).

In the new legislation (2007), in connection with the new possibility of RPL in the Adult Education System at two advanced levels (short-cycle and medium-cycle) a taximeter funding is given to the institution, if the RPL results in the reduction of the education programme by 15 per cent or more.

On the whole, the Ministry will ensure that within the public budget available priority is awarded to those with the lowest level of education and training. Graduated user fees for competence assessment are to be introduced, except for the low skilled as their objective is a personal study plan.<sup>1</sup>

The new legislation (2007) is consistent with this policy.

#### 11.2.9 Quality Assurance

As has been mentioned before in this chapter, quality assurance is central to the RPL process since credibility of the educational system is imperative. The government therefore works closely with educational institutions to guarantee the development of tools, methods and procedures, which ensures “*dependability, visibility and documentability*”<sup>2</sup>. Educational Institutions have the responsibility for ensuring that this is achieved.

From 2007, the Ministry of Education will be responsible for establishing further rules for education institutions regarding “goals, frameworks, conditions and information requirements” for carrying out competence assessment. In each part of the education system, it is the educational institution that has responsibility for assessing RPL.

### 11.3 Private Sector

There has been a long tradition of RPL in the private sector, with examples of RPL usage dating back to the 1990s. Much of this experience has been related to the recognition of work experience but recently this has extended and unions now support individuals in applying to have their prior learning recognised e.g. HK and KAD<sup>3</sup>.

#### 11.3.1 The Role of Social Partners

There is a strong partnership arrangement between government and social partners in Denmark. The Tripartite Committee, which consists of government and social partners, plays an integral role in implementing VET, including policy formulation and

<sup>1</sup> Seyfried, Prof. E., Souto Otero, M., with amendments by Hauch, A. (2006), National overview of methodologies and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark, taken from the world wide web on 20 August 2007. Available at; <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/validation.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>3</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

implementation of RPL. Many of the social partners involved in the Tripartite Committee have been involved with developing tools for assessing prior learning.

## 11.3.2 Case Studies

### 11.3.2.1 *The Ramboll Management Study*<sup>1</sup>

The Ramboll Management study included six enterprises that used 'Individual Competence Assessment' (IKA) to develop a corporate culture of lifelong learning. They developed a standard assessment model to systematically assess non-formal and informal learning. This included documentation and certification elements relevant to workforce mobility and opportunities for recognition within the formal education system. There were a number of benefits of the programme reported by both employees and employers.

From the employees' perspective, there was a feeling that the company wanted to develop them, through identifying 'who can do what' the skills and strengths of employees were openly appreciated, which improved employee relations, generally increased self-esteem and enabled employees to feel more valued. The only negative consequence of the project was felt to be that it fully identifies those that are not achieving within the organisation, which can make them vulnerable within the organisation.

From the employers' perspective, they feel that assigning tasks becomes easier on the basis of competencies rather than 'who makes the most noise'. They feel that it allows them to design training specifically according to their employees' needs and because it led to a new distribution of job assignments within the company it resulted in less repetitive work for employees.

The employers noted a number of problems with individual competence assessment. These being that the employer must act on the assessment by offering targeted training, or their employees will have a negative impression of the process. That employees can be fearful of competence assessment, which leads to greater hostility between employees and management and that where employees access different job functions, an increased mobility regarding job change.

### 11.3.2.2 *Other examples*

Other examples of the private sector using RPL in Denmark are plentiful. Many examples are not available in English but the following have recently featured in an OECD report and in Framework for Action reports. It should be noted however that these projects have not been evaluated and hence the strengths and weaknesses of RPL methods etc have not been documented:

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

- All of the programmes under the Ministry of Culture (except architect and librarian) have entry tests of different areas of competence related to a specific qualification. However it should be noted that these are not regulated professions.
- A collaborative project between four pharmaceutical companies and the Transport Training Board of Denmark offered an accelerated training programme for unskilled or semi skilled workers in the transportation field. Participants were allowed to complete the course in 4-12 months and importantly the school based element lasted between 6-9 weeks as opposed to the regular 50 weeks.
- A joint initiative has been undertaken for the mercantile and administrative sector (HACKL), in Metal (ME) and Industry (IAU). This project stipulated that applicants should have either relevant qualifications or two years work experience. The 'continued education programmes' that they worked towards had a large element of life and work experience recognised. This led to access by applicants who did not have the necessary formal qualifications, a shortening of courses in mainstream education, issuing certificates/diplomas on the basis of RPL and assessment/recognition of RPL within the education programmes.
- The Jernvilje project was carried out in Northern Jutland, one of the regions most affected by unemployment in the traditional industries. Here, RPL plays a key role in returning the unemployed back into the labour market. The project involves the Metal Union, Aalborg Technical College and local employment authorities. They use individual competence assessment (IKA) to identify the individual's competencies, which allows them to re-qualify and re-enter the labour market. This is carried out quickly before the individual becomes unemployed for too long. In total 85% of participants in this project re-entered the labour market.
- The Danish Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK) runs a network looking at ways of improving the quality of employees' reviews. They look at issues such as competence development, how to uncover competence needs etc. They have uncovered good practice in a number of workplaces<sup>1</sup>.
- An 'intercultural competencies course' has been established within health and social care. It focuses on knowledge and understanding of ethical and cultural values to help non-Danish citizens to integrate into Danish society<sup>2</sup>.
- Social partners within the 'production and service sector' have developed the LEAN philosophy, which has a core element of competence development for skilled and unskilled workers. The aim is to move workers away from basic competencies and to

<sup>1</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2005)

achieve more specialised competencies. Social partners in the 'Electricity and plumbing sector' have instigated a similar focus on specialist competencies<sup>1</sup>.

- The Danish Construction Association and the Federation of Building, Construction and Woodworkers Union initiated a project entitled "Co-operation and Lifelong Learning within Construction" working with the Danish Association of Construction Architects and Danish Technological Institute. They have created different pathways for people at work to obtain qualifications depending on their very specific competencies and qualifications<sup>2</sup>.

#### **11.4 The Third Sector**

There are a number of interesting initiatives in place in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector in Denmark.

The day high school sector has carried out a project with developing the portfolio method together with the Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers. However, no documentation in English or interview partner has been available for further information. It is documented in Danish on <http://www.daghojskoler.dk/> (link: portfolio & realkompetence).

<sup>1</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2006)

New projects in the third sector are being developed. Seminars with scientific consultants have already taken place. Among the NGOs who have initiated development projects are: NetOp (Netværk for Oplysning) in cooperation with LOF (Liberalt Oplysnings Forbund), both adult education associations, and DUF (Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd), which is the Danish Youth Council. Information in English on these particular projects can be found on the website of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning:

[www.nordvux.net/object/5982/validationobject.htm](http://www.nordvux.net/object/5982/validationobject.htm), and  
[www.nordvux.net/object/5981/validationobject.htm](http://www.nordvux.net/object/5981/validationobject.htm), respectively.

The activities in liberal adult education organisations develop competencies, although these competencies are not formally recognised as education. This makes liberal adult education well prepared to take on the task of developing a wide range of competencies. On the other hand it will be a departure from previous practice for adult education to engage in systematic task of clarification and documentation of real competencies. It will require a coordinated cooperation within the liberal adult education and with other sectors.<sup>1</sup>

The "Danish Adult Education Association", which is a non-profit umbrella association for the liberal adult education associations and other associations within the "Folkeoplysning", has also had, for some years now, a "Realkompetenceforum": This is a forum for input, mutual learning and coordinating ongoing work in its member organisations. The Board of the Forum makes, and is responsible for, all political decisions on "Realkompetence" (Prior Learning including Non-formal and Informal) in liberal adult education. Links to ongoing projects are to be found on <http://www.dfs.dk/aktiviteter/realkompetencer/rkprojekterimedlemsorg>. An English description of the Forum itself can be seen on <http://www.nordvux.net/object/5983/validationobject.htm>. The Danish Adult Education Association website is updated on an on-going basis, with policy development and case studies published in English

<sup>1</sup> Prior Learning, What is new?, Taken from the world wide web on 30 August 2007. Available at: <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/whatisnew.aspx>

## 11.5 Conclusions

Denmark has a long experience in recognising informal and non-formal learning as a way of shortening study programmes or accessing formal education. Denmark sees the benefits of using RPL in a variety of contexts. For example, in supporting disadvantaged groups to access the labour market, helping recently unemployed people to access alternative employment, supporting people in accessing industries where there are shortfalls in staff, supporting the employability of all citizens by recognising their skills and experiences etc. The benefits are seen to be extensive and generally support the lifelong learning opportunities of all Danish citizens. As such, there is a strong national focus on RPL in Denmark within the context of Denmark's Lifelong Learning strategy, and there is currently continuous development in this field, especially with the passing of the new legislation in June 2007.

It is difficult to assess the current efficiency and effectiveness of current initiatives. There have been evaluation studies carried out, which in general have tended to see the value of RPL but have also acknowledged some problems in assessing competency, applying credit values etc. More will be learnt as best practice and lessons learnt are shared and more of the projects on-going in Denmark are evaluated. For now it is clear that there is significant RPL activity occurring in Denmark, examples of which other countries can learn from. However, there is also a need to develop a common methodology, which may help to address problems of how to award credit on the basis of competence assessment etc. A common approach should also help organisations within the public, private and third sectors that have no current experience of RPL, to use RPL more easily and should increase take up nationally. The Ministry will be further developing guidance to support RPL in 2007 and it is thought that this will work towards developing a common national approach to RPL.

## 12.0 Estonia<sup>1</sup>

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*By Rasa Juciute (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 12.1 Introduction

Estonia is in the midst of a major transition process involving all sectors: policy, education, the labour market and third sector. The developments of the first decade following the restoration of independence have received considerable support from international cooperation: Estonia has joined the Bologna and Sorbonne conventions establishing a European Higher Education Area as well as the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region and has adopted the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act. The national Professions Act setting the foundations for a qualification system in Estonia entered into force in January 2001.

In general, since 1992 Estonia has made constant progress in the gradual establishment and improvement of the education system and related legislation which were among the main priorities during the pre-accession negotiations, membership in the EU since May 2004 and post-membership developments. The legal framework was built up concurrently with changes in the subject matter, including the perceived need to take account of non-formal and informal learning. The recently adopted **Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy for the years 2005–2008** is the most comprehensive document so far concerning lifelong learning issues for adults. It sets out the principle that all strategic national, regional and local documents shall pay considerable attention to contributing to the development of the lifelong learning system, including the recognition of prior learning and work experience, the continuing improvement of the professional qualification system and the need to guarantee the quality and availability of training.

The **Universities Act** and **Applied Higher Education Institutions Act** now allows for accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) in HE curricula. Universities and higher education institutions are developing their internal regulations for implementing APEL, collecting useful information and trying to implement respective best practice. Improvements in vocational education are based on preparing curricula and training programmes according to the nationally developed occupational standards.

In Estonia, APEL is defined as 'Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning'. The Estonian approach is to develop a holistic approach for APEL. Projects such as Transfine and Refine led to a clear understanding that there is a need to assess formal, non-formal

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Estonia chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Aili Saluveer

and informal learning as a whole set of competencies of a person who is looking for validation.

In the rapidly changing job market one could follow two slightly opposite trends: on the one hand, great attention is still paid to official qualifications / formal training, on the other hand, work experience may be valued more than a university degree. Requirements for professional qualifications are defined for many professions already but work lies ahead to integrate these within the education system and the labour market.

In the national policy agenda one can notice remarkable **trends and discussions** between universities, other educational institutions, the Ministry of Education, NGOs, social partners and employers in conferences and forums as well as in specific workgroups about the need to identify, assess and validate the competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

## 12.2 Public Sector

Although some early initiatives were implemented by the private sector, legislation and **national policies** concerning various aspects of lifelong education and learning, especially regarding identification, assessment and validation of knowledge and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, **are fairly new** in Estonia. More visible developments at the national level of strategic planning started only in early 2000. For example, the Professions Act setting the foundations for a qualification system in Estonia entered into force in January 2001. The main strategic document – the Lifelong Learning Strategy started to be developed (by an expert workgroup formed by the Minister of Education) in 2001 and was approved only recently, in November 2005 (*Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2005–2008*).

### 12.2.1 Policy background

Among the first documents containing reference to lifelong learning for adults were the *National Priorities of Adult Education for 2004-2006* which were adopted by the Estonian Government and enforced as of July 2004. The *National Priorities* were developed and approved in parallel to the Lifelong learning strategy by a wide range of stakeholders, including social partners and the Adult Education Council. The experts formulated recommendations with respect to the national adult education priorities which included the development of the counselling system for adults, including career counselling and a study information database for adults; the development of the system for accreditation of prior and experiential learning and the development of a model for financing adult education, including changes to the taxation system to motivate employers to invest in training for their employees. Financial allocations were set in the State Budget Act accordingly.

Following the latter document, the Ministry of Education and Research and the National Adult Education Council developed a *National adult education development plan for 2005–2008*. One of the chapters of this development plan also directly dealt with the national initiatives for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning and the development of the national regulations and system for APEL guidance and counselling.

By the year 2007, the following legal framework covering various aspects of lifelong learning, including validation of non-formal and informal learning was approved at state level: *the Development Plan for the General Education System 2007–2013* (approved in 2007), *the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2005–2008* (approved in 2005), *the Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006–2015* (approved in 2006), *the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005–2008* (approved in 2005), *the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2007–2013* (approved by the Government in 2006 and approved by the *Riigikogu* in 2007), *the Youth Work Strategy 2006–2013* (approved in 2006) and *the Development Strategy of the Estonian Language 2004–2010* (approved in 2004) and *The Estonian National Development Plans for introduction of the Structural Funds of the European Union* – single programme documents for 2003–2006 and 2007–2013 (among the main instruments mentioned there for promoting adult education are establishing the system and setting the regulations for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning).

The strategic goals of the *Education and Training 2010* work programme, which also includes validation of non-formal and informal learning, were also taken as the basis when preparing the national *Action Plan for Growth and Jobs 2005–2007*, the *National Strategic Reference Framework 2007–2013* and the *National Operational Programme for Human Resources Development*. The chosen indicators (e.g. the proportion of adults participating in lifelong learning) are used when assessing the implementation of the Government of the Republic work schedule.

### **Estonian lifelong learning strategy for the years 2005–2008**

As the most comprehensive document so far, the Strategy sets out the principles of and need for lifelong learning on a wider scale, but its goals, measures and activity plans focus on adult education. The general goal of the Strategy is to increase the opportunities and motivation of Estonian people to participate in both formal and informal studies in order to improve their knowledge and skills in line with the needs of themselves, citizenship, society and labour market. The Strategy aims to increase the share of participants in education and training to 10 per cent amongst people aged 25–64 by the year 2008. It sets out the principle that for contributing to learning the source documents of all levels and fields of education and legislation must contain the idea of lifelong learning, be founded on common bases, using uniform terminology, be clear and fair to all people who wish to pursue further development, involve as many institutions from all three sectors in providing

the training service, create measures for financing lifelong learning and ensuring quality as well as allow for considering any earlier study and work experience in further training and entry into the labour market. The Lifelong Learning Strategy relates to all formal education acquired within the adult education system, provided outside daytime or full-time studies, non-formal education (work-related and popular adult education), the importance of and consideration for informal education, including the development of a system of taking account of recognition of prior learning and work experience (APEL) and the continuing improvement of the professional qualification system as well as the need to guarantee the quality and availability of training.

In order to increase coherence and coordination between the sectoral fields, a document entitled *Smart and Active People 2007–2010* was adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) in 2006. This document combines the goals of the further development plans and covers all sectoral strategies and source documents concerning the use of Structural Funds for 2007–2013. The Strategy covers the whole formal education system, non-formal education and informal studies. The development plan embraces the area of education, youth and language as well as research and development, including: the organisation and development of anything related to all the levels of vocational education, adult education and higher education; youth work (including hobby education) and support for the participation of youth, the organisation of the development and protection and presentation of the Estonian language and culture as well as Estonian foreign language policy. The development plan also serves as the basis for preparing the state budget.

### 12.2.2 Legal background

Besides the links between identification and validation of non-formal and informal and formal learning already under the development, initiatives are taken in order to increase the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training. Under the Copenhagen Process, tools and procedures were developed for the attestation and award of professional qualifications which allowed the possibility to validate the results acquired through non-formal and informal learning<sup>1</sup>.

The **Professions Act**<sup>2</sup>, adopted in January 2001 provides the basis for the development of the requirements for professional qualifications and the conditions and procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications. According to the document, the award of professional qualifications is a procedure where a person displays the level of his or her professional competence. Professional qualifications are awarded on the basis of an

1 Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Estonia. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

2 <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/default.aspx/3/menu/264>

application submitted by the person on a voluntary basis. For professions on the lower levels (levels I-II) of professional standards, the qualification attestation does not demand a formal education certificate as a prerequisite. A professional standard of a higher level (levels IV-V) usually requires a diploma of higher education. Methods used for attestation of professional qualifications are a written or oral examination, test assignment and attestation on the basis of documents produced by the candidate or a combination of them. The awarding body is responsible for setting a concrete method and a form of attestation for a certain professional qualification. It also takes into account the results of non-formal and/or informal learning, especially in case of re-attestation of qualification: although indirectly mentioned, among the documents the candidate must submit for the attestation of his / her professional qualifications, a description of professional activities (CV or statements from employers) is included<sup>1</sup>.

A significant role here is played by the **development of occupational standards** and a qualification system as a whole for which the foundations were set by the Professions Act. The process is led by the Estonian Qualification Authority (*Kutsekoda*) which closely works with social partners and professional councils. For example, between 1998 and 2006 representatives of over 1,500 different institutions (companies, training providers, professional and vocational associations) participated in the active development of professional standards. Three stages are foreseen for the development of the system:

- i. Determining the requirements for contemporary professional skills and their levels; developing professional standards;
- ii. Bringing vocational training into accordance with the requirements for professional skills;
- iii. Determining the criteria, procedures as well as terms and conditions for awarding professional qualifications; developing the system for attestation of professional qualifications.

The progress achieved so far is steady, for example, in 2003, 126 profession standards were certified (34 new processes) and 859 professional certificates were issued, by the end of that year there were 365 profession standards developed In total. By September 2004, professional councils had approved 419 professional qualifications as professional standards and issued 3895 professional certificates and as of January 2005 - 447 professional qualifications and issued 5869 professional certificates<sup>2</sup>. By 1 July 2007 there are 655 professional standards approved and 25 057 professional certificates issued in total. Today almost all of the curricula of the higher vocational and higher professional education systems have been compiled on the basis of these standards.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/default.aspx/3/menu/259>

### 12.2.3 Validation of informal and non-formal learning within HE and VET

Major changes have taken place in Estonian educational policy, particularly in the last decade. Starting with the reform of higher education according to the principles of the 2001 Bologna Declaration, Estonian Universities recognised the need for accreditation of prior formal learning. This was the second reform of the last ten years and it brought many new qualifications that differed from the previous ones both in purpose and length of study. However, this is just one of the aspects promoting new discussion around accreditation of prior learning and also of work experience.

Together with curriculum reform, there was also a reform of HE institutions. Many previous vocational non-HE institutions were reformed to vocationally oriented HE institutions, which then created the need for transfer of studies between different levels of education.

During the last two decades, the education system and curricula have become much more open, giving greater opportunity to take into account learning that is not exactly connected to the field of studies concerned. Educational institutions in different areas are interested in valuing prior learning and work experience and are implementing the system and procedures for APEL.

Within this context, **the first initiative** was made by the University of Tartu in 2001 with the initiation of its APEL system. In June 2002, an international conference on APEL was held in Tartu with the help of the THENUCE network. This conference and the example of the system at the University of Tartu initiated several discussions in other universities as well as at the Ministry of Education, and later brought along two new projects in the same field. By February 2003, the University of Tartu together with the Ministry of Education had completed a survey covering APEL practices and attitudes across Estonia in all sectors (within the European Transfine project) and as a result the new Universities' Act (approved at the end of January 2003) allowed for 50 per cent of the HE curriculum to be obtained through APEL.

In 2003, the implementation of a system for identification, assessment and recognition of previous learning and professional experience (PLPE), including the possibility to validate both informal learning and work experience, was regulated nationally by the **Universities Act** and Institutions of **Professional Higher Education Act**. The Universities' Act allowed for 50% of the HE curriculum to be obtained through APEL. All educational institutions providing higher education had to develop an internal order of PLPE and apply it from September 2004. Most of the HE institutions have now worked out their internal regulations for implementing APEL.

Validation is facilitated only to students who move to different study programmes inside the same institution and/or between institutions. It is not possible to apply validation in relation to admissions to university – candidates are still required by law to have completed

secondary level formal education (in Estonia or equivalent foreign qualifications) in order to apply.

Later the three year inter-university project "Increasing the Competition Capacity of University Graduates through the Improvement of the Quality of Studies"<sup>1</sup>, co-ordinated by the University of Tartu and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) started in August 2005 with the general aim to enhance the competitiveness of university graduates and develop their competences, which will secure their successful participation in the labour market of a knowledge-based society. The project consisted of seven interrelated sub-projects which covered the development of study programmes and training methods, and the promotion of counselling, in-service training and the recognition of formerly acquired knowledge (the APEL project) etc. The project involved a wide range of stakeholders in addition to the public universities and participants included the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, the Rectors' Council, the Estonian Qualification Authority, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions, the Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS, and the representatives of vocational educational institutions and the institutions of professional higher education. In 2006, the activities were centred on conducting a number of extensive surveys to receive feedback from various sources, including present students and graduates, students who had interrupted their studies, the teaching and support staff, representatives of employers, in-service training coordinators and advisers. In addition, the experience of other countries was carefully considered in each area of activity.

Concerning **vocational education**, the curricula and training programmes are developed in accordance with the professional standards and including the principles relating to the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the study organisation rules of the schools. The results of informal learning are also starting to be considered upon admission to the professional examinations. Vocational education curricula are based on professional standards, which, developed in co-operation with the representatives of employers and employees and revised no less than once in every four years, describe the knowledge, skills and competences required for working in a particular field. The professional standards are learning outcome oriented – i.e., they describe knowledge, skills and competences as an outcome of the learning process. As mentioned above, professional standards are grounded within the frame of reference provided by the state.

Although **progress** is being made, the initial phase was slow and difficult as higher education institutions were more interested in recognising prior certified learning rather than in valuing non-certified or informal learning. The main problems were the reluctance of the academic staff and lack of knowledge in the field of assessment of informal and

<sup>1</sup> LÜKKA, <http://www.ut.ee/lykka>

experiential learning, as well as a lack of quality instruments for the purpose of assessment.

Since **2006**, both universities and vocational education institutions can partially take account of a student's informal and non-formal learning<sup>1</sup>. Amendments were made to the Universities Act and the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, which among the other things defined the requirement to introduce the common principles of taking account of the informal and non-formal learning in the higher education standard. According to the amendment which will come into force on 1 September 2007, there will be no predetermined restrictions related to the volume of studies for the application of the APEL, providing that when completing the curriculum, the earlier study results in the BA and MA studies are taken into account along with professional experience, keeping in mind the principles set out in the higher education standard and the procedure prescribed by the council of the institution of higher education<sup>2</sup>. A separate working group has been established to develop the APEL principles in the higher education standard – amendments were made in 2007, which came into force on 1 September 2007.

<sup>1</sup>Preparation of the 2008 Joint Interim Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Member States' contribution. Estonia. June, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

### Validation of informal and non-formal learning in the University of Tartu

The University of Tartu is the first in Estonia to have developed a system and procedures for the accreditation of prior studies and work experience and this system is now in the implementation stage. Since summer 2003 an APEL specialist has worked at the University to develop the tools for APEL, information and guidance materials and to establish and develop a counselling and assessment jury system across the whole university.

Three regulations for implementing APEL at the University of Tartu are as follows: the Regulations for Admission, the Study Regulations and the Procedure and fees for considering applications for accreditation of prior learning and work experience at the University of Tartu. Depending on the volume of the accredited subjects or work experience, the application is reviewed either by the lecturer of the given subject or the committee (academic staff only) appointed by the Dean of the Faculty. A particular subject will be assessed by the lecturer, a bigger group of subjects (from 5 credits, or 7.5 ECTS) and the qualification requirements for admission will be assessed by the committee. The student is given a written answer within one month from the date of submission of the application. If necessary, the assessor may demand additional documents, the compilation of a portfolio, an examination or an informal interview. The decisions of accreditation of prior learning and work experience may be contested according to the procedures provided by the Regulations of Studies. Methods used for accreditation of prior learning are summative assessment and credit transfer. In 2007, the rules and purposes of APEL are set out in the Higher Education Standard which requires the Universities to update and uniform their regulations.

The University of Tartu was a partner in two European APEL related projects – VaLEx (Valuing Learning from Experience) and REFINE (REcognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education). Local partners in these projects are, for Valex; Universities, the higher education sector and NGOs and for Refine; the higher education sector, the vocational education sector and the youth sector. Activities in these projects are: piloting the use of the portfolio for accreditation of informal and non-formal learning, creating a course program for this and developing support materials for students, counsellors and APEL assessors. A third project – EuroguideVAL (Implementing the Common European principles through Improved Guidance and Counselling based on a common framework for guidance professionals) is finishing in September 2007. The aims of the project are the development of functional and competency standards, training standards and a training course for APEL practitioners.

## 12.3 Private Sector

According to the state Statistical Office, 63 per cent of enterprises carry out employees' training regularly, 12 per cent have a training budget and 3 per cent of enterprises have an internal training centre. An average of 28 per cent of employees participated in training courses (last updated September 2002).

According to the Estonian Employers' Confederation (ETTK) and the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions (EAKL), **social partners have not been very actively involved** in actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications. Their involvement in developing qualifications is most evident in working together in the management board of the qualification authority. They are also taking part in the work of the professional councils.

Since education and learning is closely linked to industrial relations, ETTK and EAKL have acknowledged their important role in activities for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications<sup>1</sup>. Considerable improvements in this field were achieved by the project initiated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (the project was funded by the Danish Government through the National Agency for Enterprise and Housing) and implemented between December 2003 and October 2004. It aimed to strengthen cooperation between the governmental institutions and the Estonian business and labour organisations. Among the main participants were the Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Foundation for Lifelong Learning Development Innove and the Estonian Chamber of Commerce (consisting of 36 unions). The project developed guidelines and administrative procedures for securing and strengthening a cooperation framework as well as developing and facilitating training courses for both civil servants and experts from business and trade associations.

Currently co-operation with social partners and particularly employers is in continuous evolution. Trade unions have been discussing lifelong learning issues in their meetings and called for these issues to be included in collective agreements and social plans (concluded for collective redundancies in big enterprises) – mostly in connection with employees' opportunities to gain new qualifications, needed within the company (or a region). The preparation of strategic documents and other developments concerning lifelong learning try to involve a wide range of stakeholders and social partners in order to gain broad consensus and commitment to the changes and to encourage new, sustainable developments.

Employers have always appreciated prior formal, non-formal and informal learning upon hiring people and valued work experience as well as other skills, personal characteristics and abilities. The main tool used for first evaluation is the CV and interview as the next step. Most companies have worked out a personnel policy and internal rules for measuring the potential of the applicant, although these are not available publicly.

In the labour market two main trends are evident: on the one hand, great attention is paid to official qualifications in some situations, on the other hand, work experience is valued more than a university degree.

Requirements for professional qualifications have been worked out or elaborated for many professions. Several qualification requirements became more difficult to achieve. In some

1 European Trade Union Confederation, Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest. Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications. Third follow-up report. March, 2005.

public service occupations an official degree (Master's degree) enables employees to receive a salary that is higher by 10 per cent.

In many cases, employers value work experience more than a university degree. Several reasons for this can be found, for example, a rapidly changing labour market that values recent work experience over 'old' (i.e. usually that means acquired before 1990) education; many SME (small and medium enterprises) managers have not themselves completed a university degree and therefore do not value it; new and rather liberal regulations have resulted in a plethora of new HE institutions being established during the last ten years which are considered to be of low quality and whose education provision is therefore not valued.

Employers are interested in certifying employees' skills as this is important for staff policy development, for the benchmarking of the company and for competitiveness in the market. As mentioned above, today the main activity is setting occupational standards. The Professions Act provides the basis for the development of the requirements for professional qualifications and the conditions and procedures for the attestation and award of professional qualifications. The representatives of over 1,500 different institutions (companies, training providers, professional and vocational associations) participated in active development of occupational standards between 1998 and 2006.

As assigning a profession is not obligatory and is not directly related to studies in the profession but at the same time, to meet the qualification requirements, it is necessary to complete certain additional training or work independently, one can agree that assigning a profession may be related to APEL.

The award of professional qualifications is a process in the course of which a person attests the level of his/her professional competence and a body which awards professional qualifications assesses the match to the professional qualifications applied for and issues a professional certificate.

No specific instruments and methodologies have been approved yet for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning; a description of professional activities is mostly used in the form of a CV or statements from employers.

Employers are encouraged to invest in the personal development and training of their employees by an exemption from income tax of the study and training costs.

## 12.4 The Third Sector

No information has been obtained on Estonian third sector organisations which are engaged in developing methodologies for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. However, a range of different third sector organisations have either a vested interest in policies dealing with the validation of informal and non-formal learning or are acting as providers of non-formal learning:

- There are some very active NGOs, such as the Association of Estonian Adult Educators (ANDRAS), the Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association, the Estonian Education Forum and Estonian Association for Personnel Development PARE, that are the main links between formal, non-formal and informal education, employers and the public sector.
- The Association of Estonian Adult Educators (AEAE) ANDRAS is an Estonian non-governmental organisation, which unites the representatives of different branches of adult education and aims to increase the competence of its members in the field of andragogics. The Estonian Education Forum's (*Eesti Haridusfoorum*) main activities are the development of a concept of education policy based on as extensive social agreement as possible, and the promotion of social partnership with the public sector.
- The Estonian Association for Personnel Development (PARE) connects human resource professionals. PARE draws attention to the importance of human resource management in society, gathers and mediates human resource management know-how, creates opportunities for personnel staff for professional development and regular exchange of information.
- The youth sector is interested in this topic as well, they have organised a conference about valuing informal learning and are involved in a number of projects.
- NGOs representing all of the most important interest groups in educational policy are taking an active part in forming the educational policy, executing educational research, organising training, seminars and conferences and gathering and distributing information concerning adult education. The main aim of the NGOs is to support democratic processes like participation, partnership and social agreement in Estonian education policy. They have co-operated with different public and private organisations, including the Ministry of Education, to compose the concept and strategic plan for the Estonian education system. One of the main forms of activity is the annual educational forum process - a set of conferences where the situation of education in Estonia is discussed and where the education and labour policy principles of Estonia are developed, specified and improved. Such an approach enables the moulding of a consensus among different interest groups as regards the draft resolutions prepared by experts, which should result in the realisation of the adopted resolutions.

## 12.5 Conclusions

According to national regulations in Estonia it is possible to apply APEL in some cases but it has not been regulated in detail. If there are any regulations for the application of APEL at all, then these are internal regulations for a given institution. For example, the Universities Act and Applied Higher Education Institutions Act now allows for accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) in HE curricula. Universities and higher education institutions are developing their internal regulations for implementing APEL, collecting useful information and trying to implement respective best practice.

As the process of the accreditation of prior and experiential learning started only in recent years, there is no qualitative or quantitative information on the results of the initiative yet. Some research is carried out on mapping non-formal education /adult education and through an ESF-funded APEL project.

In the national policy agenda one can notice remarkable trends and the Ministry of Education together with other stakeholders has prepared some important documents connected with validation of non-formal and informal learning such as the Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2005-2008 and the Professions Act (2001).

In the sphere of higher education, the University of Tartu is working as a promoter in this field. There are different activities involving co-operation between Universities as well as other educational institutions and the Ministry of Education and Research for development of APEL tools and practices in Estonia and to promote the APEL Network in Estonia. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research, the University of Tartu has launched an ambitious project financed by the European Social Fund (LÜKKA, [www.ut.ee/lykka](http://www.ut.ee/lykka)), to develop a national APEL system. The project and the envisaged system encompass also other universities, applied higher education institutions, vocational education institutions, qualifications agencies, and employers' associations. The project aims to develop APEL tools and practices, promote APEL networking in Estonia, provide advanced training to APEL assessors and set up and implement a system of quality standards for APEL. Thus, the coming years may be expected to speed up progress in many aspects of validation.

Employers agree that there is a need to develop common criteria for recognising APEL in Estonia. The State has started to create an official system through legislation such as the Professions Act but there is no vision of the system in its entirety yet, though people are aware of the need to create uniform principles and tools to simplify comparison of qualifications. The development of the Estonian Qualifications Framework and level descriptions (including HE qualifications) – will be adopted in 2009.

The third sector has taken an active role and is working together with other sectors in forming education policy in Estonia.

Although existing information and practical experience in validation of non-formal and informal learning is as yet rather limited, Estonia is now in an active position in the development of the system, tools and procedures for recognition of prior and experiential learning and has a framework in place to enable further progress to be made in the years to come.

## 13.0 Finland

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*By Anne-Mari Nevala (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 13.1 Introduction

Finland has had a comprehensive structure to validate informal and non-formal learning in the context of adult education and training since the mid-nineties, when the competence-based qualification system for initial, further and specialist VET was first established. Competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the skills and knowledge have been acquired; recognition of prior learning is at the very core of the system. The system also functions as a framework for vocational education and training, with the national core curricula and the qualification requirements having been drawn up so that their starting point is to describe the goals of the curricula and qualification requirements in terms of learning outcomes.

In addition to the competence-based qualification system, a number of different laws were passed in the nineties that provide individuals with a possibility to access formal studies at different levels - on the basis of their prior experience - even if they do not meet the formal entry criteria. The Computer Driving Licence, which was originally created in Finland and is now established in most parts of Europe, and the National Certificate of Language Proficiency are other prime examples of the ways in which competences and skills acquired outside the formal education system are recognised in Finland.

Similar examples can also be found in the private and third sectors, with ample examples of companies and voluntary sector organisations having been active in this field already for years. For this report we have selected some of the most widely recognised examples.

A legal framework is in place for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in higher education institutions, but traditionally - universities in particular - have placed more emphasis on accreditation of previous studies, rather than learning gained in informal and non-formal settings. However, this sector has seen some of the greatest developments since the publication of the previous Inventory, hence the key developments have been described in this report.

## 13.2 Public Sector

Recognition of prior learning has become a particularly established feature in the vocational education and training (VET) structure in Finland through the development of the competence-based qualification system. However, the issue of continuing training and recognition of work experience of the adult population was already a topic of the national adult education committee in the seventies<sup>1</sup>. Since then, a variety of different initiatives and legislative frameworks have been designed and implemented by the public authorities, with a varying degree of success.

In this section we aim to illustrate the key public sector provisions that enable individuals to get their prior learning assessed and officially recognised; to provide information on the development and the take-up of these initiatives; illustrate the legal background; demonstrate the roles of different stakeholders and finally, to bring together the lessons that have been learnt from practice over the past decade. The chapter has been categorised into sections describing:

- The national system of competence-based qualifications (section 2.1);
- The accreditation of informal and non-formal education outside VET / competence-based qualifications system (section 2.2);
- The National Certificate of Language Proficiency, that is, a test aimed at adults to measure their practical language skills, regardless of how and where their linguistic proficiency has been acquired (section 2.3); and
- The Computer Driving Licence (CDL) that was originally developed in Finland and is now a widely accepted tool to recognise and certify competencies in the ITC sector (section 2.4).

### 13.2.1 Competence-based qualification system

#### 13.2.1.1 *Background and the general concept*

The competence-based qualification system (*Näyttötutkinto*) is the most established form of validation in Finland. Competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the competencies and knowledge have been acquired. They can be demonstrated and accredited in officially approved practical skill demonstrations / tests<sup>2</sup>. Candidates can take their exams after or during formal training or without any formal training at all. In brief, the basic idea behind the system of competence-based qualifications is that adults with previous work and/or study experience should only study those areas of study programmes that provide them with skills that they do not as yet command.

1 Yrjölä, P. (2000) Näyttötutkintojärjestelmän kokonaisarviointi. National Board of Education.

2 Ahola (2003) Validation of prior learning in Finland. Nordic Council of Ministers.

The competence-based qualifications came into force in 1994 with the implementation of the Vocational Qualifications Act 306/1994 and are now included in the Act on Vocational Adult Education (1998). The framework was created by the National Board of Education, in close co-operation with the main labour market organisations and teachers. Today, it practically functions as the framework for VET, and the national core curricula and the qualification requirements in vocational education and training are drawn up so that their starting point is to describe the goals of the curricula and qualification requirements in terms of learning outcomes.

There are three levels of competence-based vocational qualifications (initial, further and specialised). The initial vocational qualifications correspond with the vocational upper secondary qualifications, mainly taken by young people. The further and specialist vocational qualifications are mainly intended for adults with three to five years of work experience who wish to validate their practical competences and vocational skills. Further and specialist qualifications are also upper secondary level qualifications (but classified as ISCED 3 for further qualifications and ISCED 4 for specialist qualifications)<sup>1</sup>.

#### 13.2.1.2 *Assessment methods*

Qualification guidelines determine both the qualification requirements and the means of demonstrating the skills. In terms of the latter, the most common methods are practical skill demonstrations, observation, interviews, questionnaires, portfolio work and/or project work.

Practical skill demonstrations are most common for those who are in employment<sup>2</sup>. They can last several days and they may be held at the candidate's own workplace, in another company or at the institute responsible for organising the test. It is also possible to obtain qualifications without tests, through portfolio work. A portfolio can include, for instance, work samples, descriptions of work tasks etc.

Competence-based skill tests are not designed or planned in accordance with existing training, in order to prevent tests from becoming, in effect, some sort of final examinations for training. Instead, the tests have been designed, on a tripartite basis, to demonstrate learning outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> The following quoted from Haltia: Finnish competence-based qualifications – organisation, assessment and legitimacy.

### 13.2.1.3 *The role of formal, preparatory training*

The **non-formality** of the qualifications is, nevertheless, obscured to a small extent by the fact that the overwhelming majority (95%) of the candidates taking the tests choose to prepare themselves by undertaking some form of formal training<sup>1</sup>. This takes place although candidates can take their exams without any formal training at all. This issue was also highlighted by the first evaluation of the system, which concluded that *“in practice, virtually all graduates have undergone preparatory training in order to be able to cope with the examination. Therefore, the idea behind the system has not been achieved as such”*<sup>2</sup>.

The reason for the high number of individuals taking some form of formal training as a way of preparing for the skills tests is that it is not always possible for an employee to learn the whole variety of skills and competences required for a qualification at a single workplace, as a line of work in a single company can be restricted. A representative of EK, the Confederation of Finnish Industries, highlighted that although most participants choose to take additional courses to prepare themselves for the assessment, the system definitely does take into consideration informal and non-formal learning of the participants. This is proven by the fact that, on average, adults with prior work experience obtain one of the initial VET qualifications within 12 months, while it takes three years for young people without prior experience to reach the same qualification.

Preparatory training is regulated by the vocational skills requirements defined in the qualifications guidelines, and the training is usually tailored to each student individually. It is usually drafted jointly by the training provider and the student, and is structured to complement the student's prior learning and work experience.

### 13.2.1.4 *Quality assurance*<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-nineties, educational institutions in Finland were given greater powers to determine their own activities. With regards the competence-based education system, upper secondary schools and vocational institutes draw up their own curricula on the basis of core national curricula formulated by the National Board of Education. Generally speaking, training providers, qualification committees and/or educational institutions approve qualifications: there is no national quality assurance body. For the validation of non-formal and informal learning this decentralisation means that individual providers are given a great deal of freedom to apply the legislative framework.

However, in order to ensure the quality of the assessment system and an appropriate match with the demands of the labour market, co-operation with key labour market players is essential and has been at the heart of all activities since the development of the system.

<sup>1</sup> Nyysölä (2002) Koulun ulkopuolella opitun tunnustaminen. National Board of Education & Ahola (2003) Validation of prior learning in Finland. Nordic Council of Ministers.

<sup>2</sup> Yrjölä et al (2000) Näyttötutkintojärjestelmän kokonaisarviointi.

<sup>3</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

Provisions and operating methods have been designed together with social partners; new competence-based qualifications are approved, qualifications requirements are prepared, qualification committees are set up and the quality of competence test performances is assured, invariably and in all occasions, on a tripartite basis.

Indeed, the responsibility for organisation and supervision of the competence-tests rests with Qualification Committees, which also write up certificates for students who have completed their qualifications. The Qualification Committees are required to have trade union and employer representatives and teachers. The sectors in which a large proportion of workers are self-employed must ensure that their Qualification Committees have self-employed people on board too. The National Board of Education appoints the committees for a maximum of three years.

In addition, an organisation called Alvar has recently been established which deals mainly with the material for the tests within the competence-based qualification system. In this way, Alvar ensures quality and parity across the qualifications and across the country. It is also the task of this organisation to ensure quality, parity and reliability across the qualifications. Alvar is mainly funded by the National Board of Education.

#### 13.2.1.5 *Take-up*

The popularity of competence-based examinations has increased rapidly since their introduction and they have continued to strengthen their position in the Finnish education system. Besides 52 vocational upper secondary qualifications, there are around 300 further vocational and specialist vocational qualifications on offer.

The number of individuals taking part in the competence-based qualifications is growing. Between 1997 and 2006, just under **365,000** individuals took part in the system, some 199,000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82,000 were partly qualified (see table below).

**Table 13.1 Competence-based vocational qualifications in Finland**

	Total number of participants		Number of participants who obtained full qualification		Number of participants of were partly qualified
		Of which women		Of which women	
<b>1997</b>	5,967	46%	4,237	48%	-
<b>1998</b>	12,923	49%	8,328	52%	-
<b>1999</b>	20,778	51%	12,971	54%	-
<b>2000</b>	31,957	54%	18,077	54%	10,679
<b>2001</b>	37,019	56%	20,709	58%	9,953
<b>2002</b>	40,628	57%	23,383	60%	10,138
<b>2003</b>	43,090	57%	24,485	61%	9,960
<b>2004</b>	51,564	56%	28,144	59%	13,770
<b>2005</b>	58,541	57%	29,223	59%	13,429
<b>2006</b>	62,506	55%	29,799	59%	13,692

Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting, 2007, on the basis of information from the Finnish national statistics office.

The statistics above indicate that the system has **increased significantly in popularity** over the past decade, particularly among women. At the start of the system, over half of all participants were male. Over the past years women have constituted over half of all participants, and women have a higher completion rate.

Most qualifications have been achieved in Social sciences, business and administration – equivalent to 27 per cent of all completed qualifications<sup>1</sup>. This is closely followed by qualifications in Technology, communications and transport (26%) and then Social services, health and sports (22%). The number of completed qualifications is low in the following fields (though the number is on the increase):

- Natural Sciences, natural resources and environment;
- Culture; and
- Education.

#### 13.2.1.6 *Impact and further development*

The competence-based qualification system is by far the most established and extensive public sector scheme for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. The overall impact of the system on vocational training has been positive<sup>2</sup>. It has resulted in increased consideration of labour market needs and increased co-operation between different labour and education organisations and private companies.

People completing competence-based qualifications or individual modules are usually adults aiming to improve their position in the labour market. Many who take part are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed. Anecdotal evidence therefore suggests

<sup>1</sup> Refemet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> Yrjölä et al. (2000) Näyttötutkintojen kokonaisarviointi. National Board of Education.

that it has helped to upskill individuals who are in a vulnerable position in the labour market.

It can also be concluded the competence-based qualification system not only aims but also succeeds, on a systematic basis, to identify, recognise and accredit informal and non-formal learning of the participants. Validation almost always leads to a shorter study period among adult learners. However, the validation of prior competencies rarely leads to a full qualification; most participants prepare themselves by undertaking some form of formal training, which is usually tailored to the individual's needs.

Dedication to the further development of the system is illustrated by the commitment of the Government to try and engage the hardest-to-reach groups (adults) in the competence-based education system. One of the ways to do this has been the recruitment of trade union representatives as 'learning agents'. The aim of this activity has been to use trade union representatives as a means of reaching out to those who are least likely to get involved in education and training – due to a variety of reasons, in particular low self-esteem and learning difficulties. This has taken place through the Noste Programme, which is an additional action programme operating from 2003–2009, targeted at low skilled adults aged between 30 and 59. The Programme provides an opportunity to complete upper secondary level vocational qualifications (vocational upper secondary education and training, further or specialist vocational qualifications) or specific modules free of charge.

The National Board of Education has also been active in improving the quality and effectiveness of the competence-based qualification system. The Individualisation of Adult Education and Training project, known as the AiHe project, was initiated in 2000 and continued until 2006. It involved 56 providers which were developing new operating methods and tools to individualise adult learning, in cooperation with workplaces<sup>1</sup>. An important target within the AiHe project was to identify and recognise competences through implementing individualised learning pathways. Providers and labour market experts were testing and evaluating new models and tools together with adult learners.

#### 13.2.1.7 *Links to EQF*

Although Finland has started work on the three-cycle framework for higher education, a parallel development is not foreseen for VET<sup>2</sup>. For this reason an overarching NQF covering all qualifications levels is not seen as an option in the short-term future, although the government has now decided to explore the possibility of developing a NQF. Finland will relate to the EQF without an overarching framework and has set up two expert groups to consider how best to do this. The main reservation about developing an overarching NQF is that the development would require extensive work that could confuse and distract

<sup>1</sup> Refemet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> Bjornavold, J. (2007)

providers from other necessary developments in the field of education and training. However, the learning outcomes approach, that is at the core of VET already and increasingly in general and higher education too, is seen as fundamental for linking Finnish qualifications levels to the EQF, without setting up an overarching NQF.

### 13.2.2 Accreditation of informal and non-formal learning outside VET

The previous section has demonstrated in great detail how established validation of informal and non-formal learning is within the adult education sphere and VET more widely. The Act on Vocational Education (630/1998) makes validation in the field of VET a student's subjective right to some extent. There are provisions in place to enable validation in other parts of the education system too, but these provisions are by no means used to the same extent. In this section we look at these different laws and practices from other educational segments, and provide some information on their take-up.

#### 13.2.2.1 *Upper secondary schools*

Based on an assessment of an individual's competencies, access may be granted to upper secondary schools and / or exemptions even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements:

- Exemptions

The legislative framework on upper secondary schools outlines that studies completed elsewhere, even outside formal education systems, can in special circumstances be accredited. The Act on Matriculation Examination 1000/1994 provides school principals with an opportunity to admit people directly to the final examination of the upper secondary school system - Matriculation Examinations (*Ylioppilastutkinto*) - who have not completed necessary studies. However, it has been suggested that only a handful of people are admitted to these Examinations without completion of necessary studies, and mostly in the case of foreign language examinations<sup>1</sup>.

- Access to studies

The legislation also permits people to apply for upper secondary schools even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements. Although necessary provisions and appropriate legislative frameworks are in place, the number of students whose informal or non-formal learning is recognised as part of an application for general studies at upper secondary schools (academic orientation) remains low. Most of these individuals have been immigrants and Finnish nationals who have lived abroad and then returned / moved to Finland<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Nyssölä (2002) Koulun ulkopuolella opitun tunnustaminen. National Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

The upper secondary schools with vocational orientation accept a greater number of candidates without standard entry qualifications than upper secondary schools with a general (academic) orientation. Approximately four per cent of people starting basic vocational education each year are chosen through the 'flexible student selection' that allows individuals to demonstrate their competencies and experience in the field in which they are aiming to study, while the legislation permits up to 30 per cent of students in any subject area to be selected on this basis<sup>1</sup>. In 2001, this came to 1,698 students and in 2002 some 1,770 students entered basic vocational education despite not meeting the standard entry requirements<sup>2</sup>.

#### 13.2.2.2 *Polytechnics*

- Access to studies

According to the Act on Polytechnic Studies 225/1995, individuals can be accepted to polytechnics if they can demonstrate that they possess the competences required to complete the course they have applied for. Nevertheless, in higher education the emphasis has traditionally been more on accreditation of previous studies than on validation of informal and non-formal learning. In 2001 only 144 people were chosen through 'flexible student selection'. In 2002, the figure was slightly higher (188 people) but it is still less than one per cent of all students.

- Exemptions

The Act on Polytechnic studies 351/2003 states that individuals may be exempt from part(s) of the study programme if they are able to show that they have gained relevant knowledge through other studies (formal or non-formal), hobbies or work experience. There is limited evidence to suggest that competencies gained in previous studies and employment are taken into consideration in polytechnic adult education, as the students' average study period in polytechnic adult education is usually slightly shorter than study periods in 'regular' polytechnics<sup>3</sup>.

- Pilot project on further and specialist polytechnic qualifications

Between 2001 and 2005 the education authorities ran a pilot project on further and specialist polytechnic qualifications (*ammattikorkeakoulujen jatkotutkintokokeilu*). This pilot project, based on Decree 645/2001, provided individuals who possessed a polytechnic degree *and* three-years of relevant work experience with an opportunity to enter study programmes on further and specialist polytechnic qualifications.

<sup>1</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

<sup>2</sup> TAYH database

<sup>3</sup> Nyysölä (2005) Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems.

### 13.2.2.3 *Universities*

There is separate legislation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in universities (Act 645/1997, Decree 115/1998 and Decree 794/2004). This legislation permits people to apply for universities even if they do not meet the standard entry criteria (do not have appropriate formal qualifications). Individuals can be considered if they can, by other means, demonstrate that their prior learning (formal, informal or non-formal) has provided them with the necessary knowledge and competencies required for the successful completion of the qualification.

Evidence implies that the number of students whose informal or non-formal learning is officially recognised and consequently accredited during a university application process remains low. Exact information on the take-up is limited but data from the 2002/2003 semester shows that 335 individuals applied through 'flexible student selection' (0.5 per cent of all applicants), of which 76 were accepted (0.3 per cent of all applicants)<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the flexible student selection to mainstream study programmes, universities also receive applications to other study schemes, for example, special master's degree programmes. The share of students who had their competencies validated – mainly competencies gained at workplace – during an application process to the special study programmes was 7 per cent in 2001/2002<sup>2</sup>.

Universities have been free to determine to what extent they utilise the opportunities that this law provides them with. Overall, the use of validation methods has varied from one university and faculty to another<sup>3</sup>. Traditionally teacher training faculties have been most active in this field. For example, the University of Lapland gives students of teacher training courses an exemption from the handicraft course if they can prove that they have learnt necessary competencies through hobbies and other activities.

The latest Decree (794/200) governing validation in the higher education sphere came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2005. This decree brought a real impetus for the development of more coherent and reliable validation methods for the sector. A committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education in 2006 to review practices used by different higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding recognition of prior formal learning and validation of informal and non-formal learning<sup>4</sup>. This committee prepared 25 recommendations for the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

<sup>2</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

<sup>3</sup> Lehtikoinen et al (2007) Aiemmin suoritettujen opintojen ja aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen korkeakouluissa. Opetusministeriö

<sup>4</sup> Lehtikoinen et al (2007) Aiemmin suoritettujen opintojen ja aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen korkeakouluissa. Opetusministeriö

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the study took into consideration of recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

In brief, the committee concluded that it should be every HE student's right to be able to have their learning (formal, informal and non-formal) validated. Hence, they recommended that HEIs should develop a consistent, reliable and transparent system for the recognition of prior learning, which is easily accessible to students, academic staff and stakeholders. Prior learning should be assessed in two different stages; during an assessment of eligibility for HE and during an assessment for exemptions. With regards to students, the study recommended that the methods applied should allow students to clearly demonstrate the range of competencies they possess.

#### 13.2.2.4 *National Certificate of Language Proficiency*

The National Certificate of Language Proficiency is a test aimed at adults to measure their practical language skills, regardless of how and where their linguistic proficiency has been acquired. The tests measure language skills in practical situations in which an adult could be required to speak, listen, write or read a foreign language. Certificates are awarded by the provider organising the test and the person assessing the candidate.

The Act on language tests was passed in 1994 and the first national certificates of language proficiency were granted in the same year. Some 22,000 people were granted a Certificate by the end of 2003<sup>1</sup>. The test can now be taken in 9 different languages and there are over 100 educational institutions arranging tests. The following table displays the continuous increase in the popularity of the tests.

**Table 13.2 Number of National Certificates of Language Proficiency acquired since 1994**

Year	Certificates acquired	Year	Certificates acquired
1994	1,408	1999	2,209
1995	1,949	2000	2,487
1996	1,938	2001	2,275
1997	2,188	2002	2,467
1998	2,191	2003	2,865

Source: Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University

The National Board of Education developed the National Certificate in Language Proficiency test with help from its language examination committee, which has 9 members (most with language teaching experience) and has a 3-year mandate<sup>1</sup>. The committee monitors the tests at providers approved by the National Board of Education.

### 13.2.3 Computer Driving Licence

The Finnish Information Technology Development Centre (TIEKE) together with the education and labour administration and labour market organisations launched in 1994 a Computer Driving Licence (CDL) that has since become a widely acknowledged proof of information technology skills, not only in Finland but all over the world. More than 144,000 people have obtained the licence in Finland and over four hundred educational institutions in the country have been granted a permit from TIEKE to carry out tests and grant the certificate. Four different types of certificate have been developed to match the different levels of know-how and skills most often required in the information society.

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) has now been introduced in some 130 countries<sup>2</sup>.

#### Example – CDL

There are currently three levels of testing, which measure the candidate's skills, ranging from beginner to advanced user: General user (@) certificate; A certificate; and AB certificate.

There is soon to be a new level, for competence in wireless communication. Candidates can start with the lowest (@) certificate, and move on to the higher levels, with the AB certificate representing advanced skills.

The examination takes the form of a skills test arranged by training organisations (e.g. schools, universities and workplaces). The two lower-level tests can be taken in Finnish, Swedish and English. The advanced (AB) test can be taken in Finnish and Swedish.

*Source: Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.*

TIEKE is the managing and developing body behind the initiative, and is responsible for granting the permit for providers to arrange the test and to grant the certificate. The development work of the CDL was initially co-financed by the Ministry of Education. The development of the European Computer Driving Licence was partly financed by the European Leonardo da Vinci programme. A Committee, consisting of representatives from educational institutions, social partners and national education and employment authorities, leads the development work of the Licence.

The CDL tests have no official standing in Finland, and are not covered by legislation, but are, however, widely known and accepted in the labour market.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ecdl.fi>

#### 13.2.4 Private Sector

Due to the simple fact that social partners and individual companies play such an integral role in the competence-based qualification scheme, the involvement of the private sector in the validation of informal and non-formal learning is very practical and strong. In the previous section we have already also illustrated that their engagement in the system stretches from national to local level. In this section we describe their role in greater detail and also provide some examples from individual companies.

##### 13.2.4.1 *Social partners*

In relation to the motive for being involved, the labour market organisations have a vested interest in the competence-based qualification system as it has been created to meet the needs of the labour market. Their involvement extends from planning and design of the system to actual implementation. In practice this means that education and training policies and related laws, including those related to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, are negotiated in tripartite working groups and committees. For instance, the Adult Education Council of Finland, which is an independent expert advisory body of the Ministry of Education, has social partners as members. The task of the Council is to prepare reports on adult education & training and adopt positions on future policy priorities.

Another two important tripartite advisory bodies dealing with validation are the Advisory Board for Educational Cooperation and the Council for Labour and Education Affairs. Social partners are also represented in the education and training committees of the National Board of Education and sector specific education committees organised by the Ministry of Education.

The overall involvement of social partners in education and training at local (and regional) levels has increased in recent years with the expansion of the competence-based examination system (as well as with an increase in practical, work-placed training). At local and regional level it is the role of tripartite qualification committees, appointed by the National Board of Education, to supervise the organisation of the competence-based tests and confirm approved qualifications<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, Alvar, which has the task of facilitating and further developing the operation of the competence-based qualification system, has a steering committee consisting of 22 different social partner organisations and representatives from the National Board of Education and Ministry of Education.

<sup>1</sup> VET providers nominate local boards (representatives of employers, employees, VET providers, teachers and students of the field concerned) to ensure the quality of vocational skills demonstrations. The board decides on the arrangement and assessment of skills demonstrations and awards appropriate certificates.

#### 13.2.4.2 *Individual companies*

A growing number of companies are making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system. They are using the broader framework of the system to recognise skills and competences that their employees have acquired at work and in other parts of life (in formal, informal or non-formal settings). We have found a range of different companies which are active in this field. The companies / organisations range from public to private employers and social enterprises, from large to small businesses and from traditional manufacturing businesses to companies competing in new markets. Some examples are:

- **Nicemedia** is a social enterprise in Pukkila specialising in IT support and sales, web development, training etc. This small enterprise has helped several of its employees to officially qualify through the competence-based qualification system. Validation of learning gained in the workplace has been at the heart of the whole practice.
- The Ministry of Education awarded the 2007 apprentice / competence-based qualification quality prize to **Are Oy**. Are Oy is a family-owned real estate / construction company employing in the region of 1,500 workers mainly in Finland, but also in Russia, Estonia and Latvia. The company has trained a considerable share of its employees over the past decade through the apprenticeship and competence-based qualification scheme. Continuing training and validation of prior learning have become a key HR and business strategy for the company.
- **Finnair**, the Finnish airline, has established schemes especially in the technical and maintenance side of their business.
- **Fortum Gas**, which is a leading gas company in the Nordic area, has extensive experience in providing employees with an opportunity to obtain an official qualification that matches the key competences they have learnt in the work place (in the field of chemistry and management).

Finally, in the last Inventory we introduced Koskisen Oy, which since the early nineties has been developing training and assessment methods in order to recognise and, at the same time, broaden the skill levels of its employees. Their initiative has not only benefited the employees and the company itself but it has had a wider impact on the industry sector. The experience from Koskisen Oy is presented in the box below<sup>1</sup>.

#### Example – Koskisen Oy

Koskisen Oy is a manufacturing company in the field of wood production. During the past 10 years some 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employees) have been able to validate the skills and learning they have acquired at work and have obtained an official qualification.

The company offers 'in-house' training, which together with work experience provides employees with an opportunity to attain one of a range of nationally recognised competence-based qualifications (various wood production and management qualifications).

The skills are assessed by a team that consists of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives. The assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. All the participants require 1-2 years of work experience.

The validation and certification has had significant individual, company and industry level impacts:

- Individual benefits (employees):
  - Improved self-confidence.
  - Broadened and improved skill-base.
  - Greater understanding and adoption of work processes and tasks.
  - Opportunities for higher pay and grants.
  
- Benefits to the company:
  - Multi-skilled, motivated, committed, adaptable employees.
  - The company has succeeded to transform itself from a basic manufacturing enterprise into a high value-added production company – the highly skilled workforce has been the fundamental base.
  - Transformation towards a team-working culture – staff members increasingly work together and are able to replace one another during absences.
  - Move towards a more equal, less hierarchical employee structure due to increased skill levels.
  - National level recognition for its human resources policies.
  - Excellent working environment and low staff turnover levels (turnover levels have reduced by 35% in ten years).
  - A number of national certificates / awards (e.g. award for good employer, best apprenticeship scheme provider of the year, best place to work 2004 'Suomen parhaat työnantajat 2004' - 2nd position and the only awarded manufacturing company)
  - In spite of the major role of education and training, the productivity levels have always remained high. During the early training periods, the productivity of each participating employee slightly falls but in the longer term significantly improves as a result of new skills and motivation.
  
- Wider impact:
  - Has helped to raise the status and credibility of the wood production industry.
  - The largest companies in the same industry (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) have now also introduced similar procedures.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Interview with Esa Kallinen from Koskisen Oy.

### 13.3 Third Sector

Like the public and private sectors, the third sector has also been relatively active in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. Liberal adult education (non-certificate-orientated learning) has a strong foot-hold in Finnish society, thus the way in which formal education institutes and employers take into consideration learning which has taken place within the non-formal education sphere is of both great interest and importance to a range of different stakeholders.

Below, the first section discusses two more established examples of co-operation between formal education establishments and third sector organisation in the field of validation. The second section summarises information from Lauri Savisaari on the youth initiative, the Recreational Activity Study Book.

#### 13.3.1 Validation within the liberal adult education system

##### 13.3.1.1 *Background*

Non-formal learning, mainly in the form of liberal adult education, has a long tradition in Finland. The liberal adult education system offers non-formal (non-certificate-oriented) studies that provide adults with opportunities to develop themselves in liberal adult education establishments without degree-related or occupational goals, for example, in foreign languages, IT, physical education, social studies, arts and music.

The objectives and content of liberal adult education are not decided by national policy or curricula; such decisions are made by the liberal adult education institutes independently or together with the communities behind these institutes. Typical liberal adult education establishments are folk high schools, adult education centres and study centres (*kansalais- ja työväenopistot, kansanopistot ja opintokeskukset*). The essential characteristic in liberal adult education is that participation is voluntary. The study formats range from evening classes to full-day and weekend courses.

##### 13.3.1.2 *The importance of validation within the liberal adult education system*

In 2003 Jukka Määttä carried out a large-scale study on validation of learning gained within the liberal adult education system<sup>1</sup>. The results are based on a survey of folk high schools, adult education centres, study centres and other liberal adult education institutes.

The study found that the issue of identification, recognition and accreditation of non-formal learning is of great importance to the third sector organisations engaged in education and training. About 59 per cent of respondents stated that the validation of non-formal learning

<sup>1</sup> Jukka Määttä (2003) Tunnusta ja tunnista opittu! Vapaan sivistystyön opitun tunnustaminen formaalissa oppilaitoksissa Selvitys muodoista, käytänteistä, yhteistyösuhteista ja ongelmista.

was a 'very important' issue for them. Only one respondent did not see validation as an important topic.

One of the key questions for the survey was to find out the way in which individuals benefit from validation of learning gained within the liberal adult education institutes. Over forty per cent of all the providers of non-formal learning stated that studies in their institutes give 'application points' for individuals who wish to continue studies in the formal education system (in many formal education institutes the demand exceeds the supply, thus the candidates have to go through an application process, based for example on a point system and/or tests). In addition, a small minority of respondents reported that completion of certain courses guarantees a direct admission either to entry examinations or to the course itself. With regards to the latter, most of these cases are based on a systematic co-operation between providers of non-formal training and formal educational establishments.

With regards to the validation of non-formal learning leading to exemptions, an overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they were aware of formal educational establishments which provided full or partial course exemptions for those who had successfully completed courses through non-formal learning<sup>1</sup>. Usually these exemptions were in the field of handicrafts, IT, arts, religious studies and languages.

#### 13.3.1.3 *Challenges*

According to the Ministry of Education, in order to further develop methods for the validation of non-formal learning within liberal adult education provision, the providers of non-formal education need to describe the content of their courses better<sup>2</sup>. A thorough understanding of learning outcomes is vital for the validation process, but currently the level of detail varies greatly from one certificate and one provider to another. Jukka Määttä identified the lack of information on the course content as a problem too. He called for a more methodological and careful documentation of (non-formal) course contents and recommended that liberal adult education providers should issue certificates more systematically. However, according to him the main challenge is to convince formal education providers to acknowledge the value of non-formal learning provided by third sector organisations and other providers. On the other hand, he also points out that any development work in this field must respect the autonomy and independence of the many educational providers from the third sector, and the target groups that they cater for.

<sup>1</sup> This finding somewhat contradicts the statistics held by public authorities (see section 2.2).

<sup>2</sup> Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

#### 13.3.1.4 *Practical examples*

One of the most effective ways of developing systems and mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal qualifications is a close collaboration between providers (non-formal and formal) to ensure complementarity between local non-formal and formal education provision. Such co-operation in Finland is common in certain sectors and /or in more remote areas. In remote areas finding complementarity between formal and non-formal learning can not only make economic sense but can also ensure a greater variety of courses in a given locality. The Northern Lapland educational networking project (*Tunturi-Lapin alueen koulutuksen verkostoitumishanke*) can be given as an example.

##### **Example - Northern Lapland educational networking project (*Tunturi-Lapin alueen koulutuksen verkostoitumishanke*)**

Northern Lapland is one of the most remote and sparsely populated regions in the European Union.

The aim of this project was to increase collaboration between regional providers of non-formal education and formal educational institutes as a way of expanding the regional course portfolio. The project has involved ten upper secondary and other formal schools / institutes and four providers of non-formal education.

As a result, the consortium has developed a wide range of courses that play on the strengths of all different providers taking part in the project. The local residents benefit from the project by having a bigger variety of courses to them as the courses taken within the non-formal education can be counted towards formal qualifications.

Another example can be found from the field of arts and handicrafts.

##### **Example – Handicrafts and arts in Mid-Finland (*Käsi- ja taideteollinen yhteistyö Keski-Suomessa*)**

The Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School (*Keski-Suomen käsi- ja taideteollisen oppilaitos*) and the Institute representing employees in the Jyväskylän region (*Jyväskylän kaupungin työväenopiston*) have had a method in place for the validation of non-formal learning since 1992. These two educational (formal and non-formal) establishments have worked together to ensure that the students of the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School can access official validation for the studies that they have completed at the Institute representing employees in the Jyväskylä region. In other words, a successful completion of one of the textile courses of this third sector Institute leads to an exemption at the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School.

This has been established by close collaboration between these two establishments. The textile courses at the Institute were created in consultation with staff from the art school. A director of the school has also personally attended some of the courses of the Institute to learn about their content and to assess complementarity between their own courses and those of the Institute.

Today the students of the Institute receive a certificate upon a successful completion of one of their courses, which are officially recognised by the Mid-Finland Handicraft and Art School.

#### 13.3.2 Recreational Activity Study Book<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest efforts to promote the validation of non-formal learning was the creation of Recreational Activity Study Book in 1996. The study book was developed by Youth

<sup>1</sup> Information quoted from Lauri Savisaari (2005) Recreational Activity Study Book. European Inventory 2005.

Academy, which is the main youth NGO in the country. The study book is a portfolio / CV of learning experiences in voluntary and leisure activities. The book serves young people as a tool for making all the experiences and learning outside formal schooling visible. It is also an instrument for identifying and crediting non-formal learning when applying for a job or further education.

#### 13.3.2.1 *Concept*

The Recreational Activity Study Book system is feasible for the documentation – and recognition – of both qualifications and competencies acquired by participating in youth voluntary activities. More focus is, however, placed on the competencies. That is because the study book system is centred on the individual learner. In the study book, more emphasis is put on the development of each young person's personality rather than the actual qualifications of the skills required in particular job requirements. The underlying idea is that by participating in youth voluntary or recreational activities, young people do have a chance to acquire key competencies with regard to personal development, such as social, communicative etc. competencies.

There are no criteria for the measurement of learning outcomes or performance, nor are there any public examinations held to assess the competencies acquired by the young people. There are several reasons for the openness and "non-measurability" of the Finnish study book system. First of all, subjective perceptions of learning outcomes or competencies acquired should not be of marginal validity, as they often are in systems depending on public examinations. The second reason for the openness and flexibility of the study book system is the appreciation of the voluntary nature of youth informal and non-formal learning which has already been mentioned. By formalising the system, the basic motivation for participation in youth activities, i.e. the joy of being, doing and learning together, would be endangered. Youth Academy tries to encourage the representatives of the formal education system to recognise and value the learning and competencies young people acquire outside school, as well as to cooperate more with organisations offering young people meaningful learning environments. But the issue is always approached from an individual learner's point of view, not the point of view of the formal educational system, for example. The third reason for keeping the study book system informal and flexible is that by doing so, all young people can gain access to it and collect entries from various learning activities. The Study Book is not only targeted to those young people who are active in one or another youth organisation. Competencies can be acquired and things can be learned in various situations and settings, even the non-organised ones<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, even though the study book system is developed by Youth Academy and its twelve member organisations (major Finnish youth and sports NGOs), it is open to all young people, and the content is designed in a way that all young people "fit" in to be able to make use of it.

### 13.3.2.2 *Content of the study book*

The study book itself is divided into nine categories, according to the nature of the learning activity. The categories are:

1. Regular participation in leisure activities;
2. Positions of trust and responsibility within NGOs;
3. Activities as a leader, trainer or coach;
4. Participation in a project;
5. Courses;
6. International activities;
7. Workshop activities (apprenticeship);
8. Competitions; and
9. Other activities.

### 13.3.2.3 *Accreditation*

The educational institutions involved in the system have a written agreement with Youth Academy on how and to what extent they value and credit the entries in the book. It is essential to bear in mind that accreditation and validation of the learning experiences documented in the study book is always individual and case-sensitive. The system does not aim for direct accreditation in formal education in any way. It is of great importance that the voluntary nature of participating and learning in voluntary youth activities, whether organised or not, will not be endangered.

### 13.3.2.4 *Outcome*

The Youth Academy has a written agreement with 250 formal educational institutions on how to value and credit the entries in the book. Over 80,000 Study Books have been distributed so far<sup>1</sup>.

The Youth Academy carries out biannual surveys on how the Study Book is actually used and how the product could be developed. The main results from the surveys have been to find out that, although some young people actually have used the book when applying to further education or a job, most of the study book users are somewhat passive in using the book. The most important function for the Study Book users seems to be that the book is a black-on-white documentary for themselves on what has actually taken place in their youth.

The educational institutions involved in the Recreational Activity Study Book system have not always found it easy to use in recognition and valuing previous learning experiences of young people. This has mostly to do with the fact that the book is structured according to the nature of voluntary free-time activities rather than according to the curricula of different formal educational institutions. A more competence-based approach would suit the

<sup>1</sup> Nuorten Akatemia ([www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)), September 2007.

educational institutions better, and probably some young people as well. However, it has been a strong strategic – and even ideological – decision by the Academy and its member organisations that the Recreational Activity Study Book should be structured upon the activities, not the competencies. This has to do with the more general question in youth work and youth policy about to what extent can youth work focus on the employability of young people. The answer to that question has been – at least this far – that youth work focuses on the development of the individual, not merely on employability issues.

## 13.4 Conclusions

Methodologies and practices for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland are common in all three sectors that we have analysed in this study. Since the nineties, public authorities have believed that education and training policies should take advantage of non-formal education and also consider other, informal spheres of life (work, civil society activities and hobbies) as learning environments. The first third-sector initiatives in the field of validation date back to the early nineties, and even if the engagement of private sector has been more recent, today their role is practical, strong and important.

With regards to the **public sector**, the Finnish legislation makes validation in the field of VET a subjective right for students to some extent. In fact, recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning has become an established feature of the VET and adult education system, through the development of the competence-based qualification system. The competence-based qualifications not only aim but also succeed, on a systematic basis, to identify, recognise and accredit informal and non-formal learning of the participants. Validation in almost all cases leads to a shorter study period among adult learners. Indeed the main aim of validation is to shorten study periods, rather than fully remove formal learning; a considerable majority of participants prepare themselves by undertaking some form of formal training, which is usually tailored to the needs of each individual.

There are legal provisions in place to enable validation in other parts of the education system too, but these provisions are by no means used to the same extent yet. Only a small percentage of candidates to universities, polytechnics and upper secondary schools have their competencies successfully validated as the focus among these institutes still remains on formal qualifications. However, the learning outcomes approach that is at the core of VET already and increasingly in general and higher education too, is driving the validation agenda forward. For example, there have been significant developments in the HE sector since the last Inventory. The latest Decree (794/200) governing validation in the higher education sphere came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2005, bringing real impetus for the development of more coherent and reliable validation methods for the HE sector. A committee was also appointed by the Ministry of Education in 2006 to review practices

used by different higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding recognition of prior formal learning and validation of informal and non-formal learning.

With regards to the **private sector**, through the competence-based qualification system the involvement of social partners and individual companies in validation has become practical – and their engagement in the system stretches from national to local level.

Like the public and private sectors, **the third sector** has also been active in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. However, the further development of methodologies in this sector is challenged by complexities around ensuring on one hand the rigidity and validity of the assessment methods and the needs of the target groups on the other.

## 14.0 France<sup>1</sup>

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By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 14.1 Introduction

The 2005 Inventory<sup>2</sup> showed that France is one of the EU countries at the forefront of the development of the validation of formal and non-formal learning. France was in fact the first Member State to introduce legislation with respect to validation, when in 1934 a law was introduced to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience.

There has been growing concern in France about the need to recognise individuals' skills and competencies since the 1980s, when the country suffered from high unemployment rates, particularly among young people and those lacking qualifications. The importance of the validation of experience and skills has thus been recognised through policy initiatives and confirmed by legislation, including most recently the 2002 Social Modernisation Act and the 2003 cross-sectoral agreement on lifelong learning, confirmed by law in 2004. Initiatives such as the *Répertoire National de la Certification Professionnelle* (RNCP – national repertory of vocational certificates) have been set in place on a national level, with collaboration from relevant stakeholders, including the social partners, and support for their implementation at a regional level. Measures have also been taken to identify and address issues and problems with the existing methodologies and practice, in order to ensure that the systems in place best meet the needs of end users.

There is also a clear European dimension to the activity in the sphere of validation in France. Some of the initiatives implemented on a national level have been set in place as a response to European policy cooperation recommendations – the RNCP, for example, is in line with the recommendations by the Directorate General for Education and Culture for the transparency of qualifications.

The following sections provide an update to the 2004 Inventory and examine developments in policy and initiatives within the sphere of validation of non-formal and informal learning in France.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the France chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Simon Roy

<sup>2</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting, 2005, European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

## 14.2 Public Sector

### 14.2.1 Historical background

After the 1934 law relating to the engineering diploma, further progress in the 1950s facilitated the recognition of an individual's competences rather than qualifications in order to obtain a promotion in the workplace. Then in the 1970s, a new pedagogical approach moved towards the modularisation of training and suggested exemptions to some parts of the curriculum or parts of courses. This practice was referred to as either "positioning" (especially in the context of the ministry of labour continuing training) or ECAP (*évaluation des compétences et aptitudes professionnelles* – or professional skills and competences evaluation). ECAP permitted many workers to valorise the "learning outcomes" they obtained through their experience in a work situation or through short continuing training courses developed by their firms at different times of their working lives.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1980s, a trend in national policy proposed to increase the number of people entering higher education and in 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to higher education (HE).<sup>2</sup> The process, termed 'VAP 85' enables any person aged at least 20, who ceased their initial studies a minimum of two years ago, to apply for a place on a HE course. Any form of training, experience acquired through paid or voluntary work and knowledge or skills acquired independently of training can be taken into account in their application.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of 'VAP 85' is to enable an individual to take up studying again through exemption of the qualification normally required. It is based on a portfolio, which is assessed by a Pedagogical Commission. Today, 'VAP 85' is still the most used procedure in Higher Education.

In 1986, the Ministry of Employment created a network of over 100 publicly-run skills assessment centres (*Centres Interinstitutionnels de Bilans de Compétences*, CIBC). These centres were designed to enable individuals to analyse their skills and the opportunities open to them and, on this basis, to define a personal training or occupational plan. At this stage, the objective of the initiative was not to provide summative validation<sup>4</sup>, but rather to provide guidance and promote training opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

<sup>2</sup> in 1985

<sup>3</sup> Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop

<sup>4</sup> There were, in any case, no defined standards against which to judge an individual's skills

The CIBC network is still in operation and has assisted clients in the development of over 70,000 personalised skills audits or *bilans de compétences*.<sup>1</sup> The work of the centres is informed by collaboration with other relevant stakeholders such as social partners, sector representatives and chambers, which demonstrates the strong commitment to collaboration amongst key stakeholders within the sphere of validation in France.

A law passed on the 31st December 1991 gave all workers with at least five years professional experience<sup>2</sup> a legal right to obtain a *bilan de compétences*. The same law introduced the right to 24 working hours paid leave to undertake the process at an accredited centre (including, but not exclusively, the CIBC). The system is financed by a combination of compulsory employer contributions and direct subsidies from central government. The *bilan de compétences* is also available to those out of work.

In 1992, further legislation<sup>3</sup> enabled the concept of *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* ('VAP 92') to be used for exemptions for qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture (secondary and higher education). People with five years' work experience could apply for exemptions by submitting a portfolio detailing the activities undertaken and skills (competencies) gained through their experience, which was then examined by an assessment panel (*jury*). In 1999, this law was extended to include qualifications delivered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

Within the 2002 "Social Modernisation Act", this model of validation was extended to include all the main types of qualification (*certification*) used in France and allow complete qualifications to be awarded on the basis of knowledge gained through experience. This broadened concept of VAP, referred to as *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)* or Validation of Prior Experience is examined in more detail in the next section.

The developments outlined above have created a legal and educational environment in France where non-formal and informal learning is taken into account through both summative and formative approaches. These approaches are described in the following two sections.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from the website of the Fédération Nationale des CIBC, [www.cibc.net](http://www.cibc.net), June 2007

<sup>2</sup> And having worked for the same company for at least 12 months

<sup>3</sup> Law no. 92-678 of the 20 July 1992 promoted by the Ministry of Labour, followed by decree no. 93-538 of the 27 March 1993

#### 14.2.2 The Current Situation: Summative Approaches– *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE)

The 2002 legislation on the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) places more emphasis on summative validation (the award of certificates) than the previous concept of *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (VAP). Whereas VAP was designed to allow professional experience to be taken into account alongside more traditional means of assessment in the award of formal qualifications, VAE can be used as a basis to award full qualifications, rather than just units or “parts” of a full diploma. VAE is also the main system in France for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

The 2002 law made access to validation of knowledge gained through experience a right for everyone with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience (compared to five previously). Non-formal and informal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally-recognised qualification, which are recorded in the national vocational certifications directory (RNCP), overseen and documented by the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle* (National Vocational Certification Commission), presented in the box below.

##### **The Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle – CNCP**

The National Commission for Vocational Certification (CNCP) was created in January 2002 by the Social Modernisation Act, the same legislation that set in place the concept of VAE. The body had three key objectives:

- to establish and maintain a National Register of Vocational Qualifications (Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles, RNCP);
- to oversee reform and updating of qualifications (diplomas and certificates) on the basis of developments in education and the labour market;
- to provide recommendations to organisations that deliver vocational qualifications and provide information about the relationship between different types of qualification.

The Commission is composed of 43 members: ministerial representatives, social partners, experts and representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and the Regions. It has also set up a specialized Commission to examine requests to include qualifications in the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles. The body functions on the basis on a national secretariat and a network of regional “correspondents”.

More information about the Commission can be found at: <http://www.cncp.gouv.fr>

The RNCP was created in 2002, on the initiative of the state but with the participation of social partners. Its purpose is “to catalogue all existing certificates in order to be able to establish bridges and equivalences between them, with a view to promoting employee mobility and preparing career plans”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Third follow-up report 2005

Qualifications contained in the RNCP are awarded by a variety of bodies, including national ministries, social partners and chambers of trade, commerce and industry. Diplomas awarded by private bodies must be evaluated by the CNCP before they can be classified in the *Répertoire*, whereas qualifications delivered by the State are automatically included. The registration of private qualifications in the RNCP is valid for 5 years, after which time, the awarding body must again apply for registration. State qualifications remain indefinitely in the RNCP, without need for re-registration.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 2006, the RNCP contained over 3,500 'fiches' describing vocational qualifications, over 1,300 of which had been registered by request and subject to an evaluation by the CNCP (the remainder were qualifications provided by national ministries, which were included automatically).<sup>2</sup> Today, there are over 4,100 'fiches' in the database.<sup>3</sup>

All qualifications listed in the RNCP can be obtained through either formal, informal or non-formal means, provided that the individual can demonstrate the capacities and knowledge required to receive the certification. Credits can be obtained for professional skills acquired through paid, unpaid or volunteer work, as long as the individual has at least three years of relevant experience.

With regards its third objective, the CNCP remains committed to the development of a new framework of qualification levels and has commenced work on this, in collaboration with relevant partners. At the end of 2006, it was hoped that a firm proposal for such a framework would be finalised during the course of the year 2007.<sup>4</sup>

#### 14.2.2.1 *VAE Methodology*

The decrees following the April 2002 Law outlined the basic principles of the procedure for VAE, which can be listed in five main steps:

- 1) information about the process of VAE;
- 2) decision on the validity (*recevabilité*) of the application (in terms of duration of experience related to the content of the qualification);
- 3) development of a portfolio or "dossier" by the candidate describing his or her experience. This may include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a simulated situation and other evidence. The candidates may be mentored and financing can be available at this stage in the process;

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Employment, 2007, 'La validation des acquis de l'expérience', last updated 28.02.07, available at: [http://www.travail.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques/fiches-pratiques/formation-professionnelle/validation-acquis-experience-vae-1074.html?var\\_recherche=validation re-registrati](http://www.travail.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques/fiches-pratiques/formation-professionnelle/validation-acquis-experience-vae-1074.html?var_recherche=validation_re-registrati)

<sup>2</sup> La Lettre d'Information CNCP, No. 1 Autumn/Winter 2006

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Labour, 2007

<sup>4</sup> La Lettre d'Information CNCP, No. 1 Autumn/Winter 2006

- 4) interview/dialogue with a 'jury' – at the request of the jury or the candidate;
- 5) deliberation and decision from the jury based on the documents produced and their own observations.<sup>1</sup>

The French education system is based on **one single system of qualifications**, rather than separate systems for those qualified through VAE and those qualified through formal routes. Diplomas/certificates/degrees awarded by the different education institutes do not state whether the qualification has been obtained through VAE or formal route - this is currently quite different to many other countries in Europe.

#### 14.2.2.2 *Assessment*

Assessment takes place at accredited centres, where a *jury* or board evaluates the individual's skills in relation to those required to obtain the qualification.

The VAE procedure is organised by the relevant bodies with responsibility for the certifications – procedures can thus vary according to the awarding body involved. According to one recent report, there can be certain 'challenges' in implementing validation methodologies and it will take some time for the stakeholders involved to fully adopt the process. Two main methods are used to assess skills gained through experience: examinations (*'mise en situation'*, a practical examination method used by the Ministry of Labour only) and the assessment of portfolios. For the portfolios, assessment panels are called upon to attribute "value" to an individual's experience, which may vary considerably in nature, depending on the context in which it was gained, and is difficult to formalise and assess against specific standards. Moreover, assessors are generally more used to formal examination procedures, and in many cases have not received detailed training on how to implement such assessment methodologies.<sup>2</sup>

The decree indicates that a jury must be constituted and chaired in accordance with the general regulations and those for each type of qualification. One quarter of the membership must be qualified representatives of the occupational sector and half of these must be employer representatives, half employee representatives. There must be an equal representation of men and women. Staff from the company where the candidate is employed may not be part of the jury. Advisors who have helped the candidate put together his/her portfolio also cannot be a member of the jury (except in higher education).

The jury's decision can be an award related to a whole qualification or a part of a qualification. In the latter case, the jury must indicate which knowledge and skills will be assessed later in order to award the full diploma/certificate.

<sup>1</sup> Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

The legislation brought new practices in assessment: there is no certification without a future plan; future plans may be those of an individual or the individual with his/her company or organisation; and the jury's role has changed from one of sanction to a more positive role of giving value to the candidate's experience and help for candidates to develop further. This is particularly pertinent when only part of the qualification has been awarded - the jury has to propose ways in which the candidate can obtain the whole qualification (this may be a mixture or further experience, courses, seminars, projects etc).

The arrangements also imply new competences for the relevant stakeholders; fewer trainers and more "designers"; more tutors; increased guidance: for access, for producing the portfolio, and for completing the qualifications.

A further notable consequence of the introduction of the validation system in France has been the modularisation or breaking down into units, of diplomas and degrees. As a result, qualifications can be obtained progressively, either through examinations over a number of years or through validation of experience. Where an individual's initial VAE assessment leads to only partial award of the desired qualification, the modules awarded are valid for five years, during which time the remaining modules can be obtained via initial or continuing training, apprenticeship or VAE.

#### 14.2.2.3 *VAE and Higher Education*

With specific reference to higher education, VAE is not a new concept. We have already seen that as early as 1934, it was possible to obtain a higher engineering qualification (DPE) through the validation of professional experience. The 2002 Law on Social Modernisation made it possible to be awarded part of or a full degree through VAE (while the earlier 1985 decree had already facilitated applications to HE based on validation of prior learning and prior professional experience).

Candidates apply to the institution which awards the qualification they wish to obtain and a jury, specific to each degree, carries out the VAE assessment based on the analysis of a dossier compiled by the candidate and an additional interview. Candidates are also entitled to tailored support and advice, provided by university schemes for further training and adult education. This aims to enable the candidate:

- 1) to better understand the VAE approach;
- 2) to determine more precisely how the degree corresponds to their own path and vocational experiences, and
- 3) to identify the strongest features of their experiences before their appearance before the jury.

The 2002 legislation has had significant consequences for higher education in France and has required certain changes to be made, for example with respect to renewing the degrees and the development of tools and support to assist candidates in drawing up their dossier. In addition, the rapid increase in demand for VAE at Higher Education level has necessitated the implementation of measures to ensure the practical organisation and implementation of the procedure.<sup>1</sup>

The number of individuals having to apply / meet the jury more than once during their VAE application is greater in higher education than in further education. The Université Paris-sud 11 can be given as an example of this:

#### The Université Paris-sud

Université Paris-sud 11 is a university with over 27,000 students. In 2006, the university had 110 VAE candidates of which 38 received their qualification on their first attempt and just under 60 candidates were recommended by the jury to take further formal or non-formal training as a way of qualifying for the degree<sup>2</sup>

The Ministry of Higher Education and Research is strongly committed to developing VAE in higher education and attaches a strong importance to a development in quality. There has been an increasing focus on the concept of the recognition of competences within higher education, and this approach in fact is relevant for several current reform projects – the introduction of the *licence-maîtrise-doctorat (LMD)*, the trend towards increased modularisation of courses and the adoption of the diploma supplement.

Projects supported by the European Social Fund, with a value of 1.5 million euros per year, have been implemented with the aim of helping universities to put in place the

<sup>1</sup> Towards the European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, National Reports 2004-2005, France

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by Georges Michalesco, Université Paris-sud 11

necessary frameworks to deliver VAE.<sup>1</sup> In fact, structures for the implementation of VAE have been put in place relatively quickly as a result of collaboration in a national network through the *conference des directeurs de services universitaires de formation continue*<sup>2</sup> which began in 2000-2001. Universities which had more experience in VAE as a result of the 1985 decree and the introduction of VAP shared their learning with those which were new to VAE and as a result, many universities had structures in place to implement VAE soon after the 2002 legislation was introduced.

While respecting the culture and autonomy of each institution, an important process of harmonisation was carried out in the higher education sector, in order to ensure equal treatment for all applicants. For example, a website was set up and a national training plan devised for staff involved, which was delivered to 900 participants.

Nonetheless, a 2005 report produced by Professor Albert-Claude Benhamou<sup>3</sup> also made recommendations for improvement to the provisions currently in place for VAE in higher education. The report suggested for example that the resources currently allocated to VAE, both in terms of personnel and in terms of finance, were insufficient and that more action needed to be taken to ensure that sustainable actions are implemented to ensure the predicted future increase in demand can be met.

#### 14.2.2.4 *Impact*

At first, validation did not receive a real welcome from those teachers who were given the responsibility to develop VAP. There was strong opposition to this initiative because it was feared that it would decrease the value of the qualifications delivered - even now such fear still exists. Many people believe that only formal learning in a training centre can produce valid learning outcomes for individuals.<sup>4</sup>

However, trust in the concept of validation gradually increased and today it can be said that the introduction of VAE in France has been relatively successful, in particular in terms of public opinion.<sup>5</sup> Since its creation in 2002, there has been a considerable increase in demand from individuals with no or few qualifications, seeking to take up this offer of a 'second chance' and to progress towards a higher level of qualifications. A total of over 50,000 qualifications were awarded between 2002 and 2005 (10,709 in 2002; 17,724 in 2003 and 22,660 in 2005).<sup>6</sup> In 2005, over 3,000 candidates were awarded a full

<sup>1</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Conference of Directors of University Services for continuing training

<sup>3</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

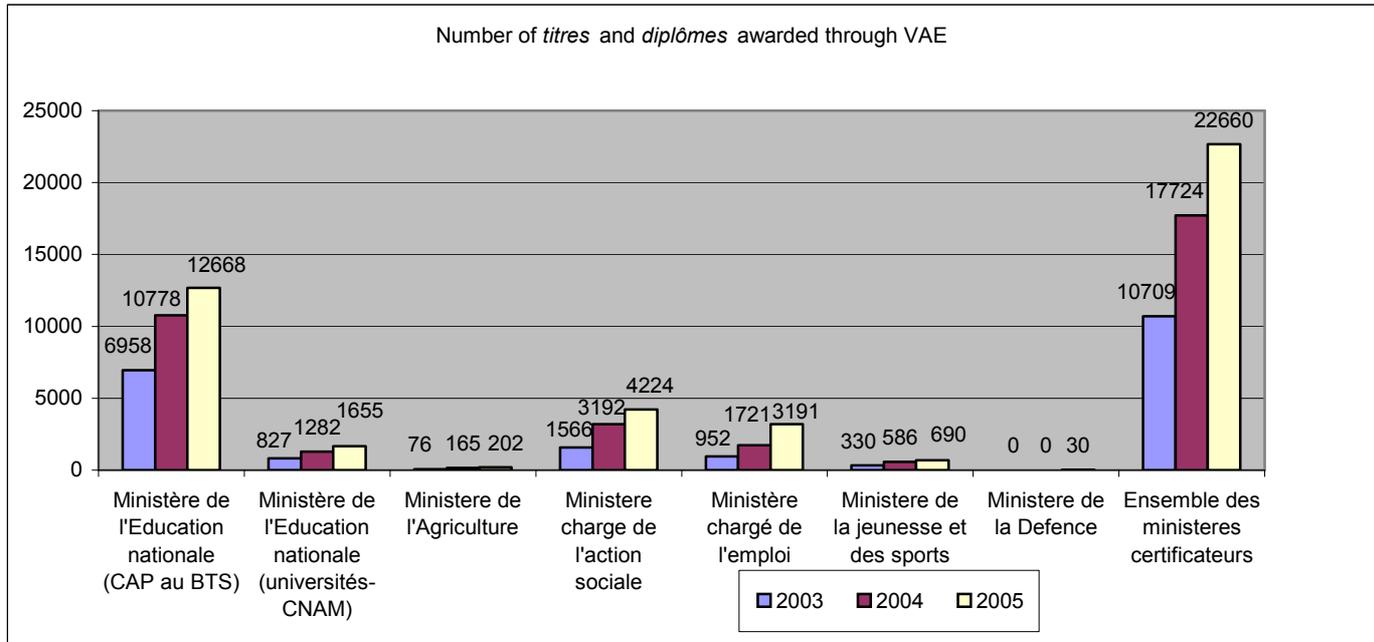
<sup>4</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

<sup>5</sup> 'Education et Formation 2010', Rapport National France 2007

<sup>6</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

qualification by the Ministry of Employment alone – almost twice the number in 2004.<sup>1</sup> 5600 university degrees were obtained through VAE during the period 2002 - 2006 (7882 partial degrees were delivered during the same period).<sup>2</sup>

The table below shows the number of *titre* and *diplôme* qualifications awarded via VAE by the national Ministries during the period 2003-2005.



Source: Charraud, A-M, *The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007*

Despite of the rapid increase in the take-up, when compared with the total level of certification delivered in France, only a small number are delivered through VAE (more than 1,500,000 certificates are delivered each year against less than 300,000 through continuing education and around 30,000 through VAE).<sup>3</sup>

VAE is currently concentrated in certain sectors and for a small number of qualifications – over a quarter of the qualifications delivered in 2004 and 2005 related to professions in health and social care. Around 4,000 of the 30,000 qualifications obtained through VAE are university degrees. Candidates are also predominately women: only a third of applicants were men in 2005 (although this is increasing – in 2004 men accounted for only 10% of applicants). Its success is said to depend upon the level of take-up on a regional

<sup>1</sup> Bonatti, C. (DARES), 2006, *Premières Informations, La Validation des Acquis de L'Experience au Ministère chargé de l'Emploi, en 2005: davantage de candidats dans les métiers de l'industrie et du bâtiment, Ministère de l'Emploi de la cohésion et du logement*

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>3</sup> Charraud, A-M., *The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007*

and local level, as well as by the general public – the importance of informing the public on VAE is emphasised.<sup>1</sup>

The table below shows the profile of the candidates involved in a VAE process in 2004:

		Ministries in charge of...				Total
		Agriculture	Labour	Universities	Education	
Sex	Men	69	12	60	41	32
	Women	31	88	40	59	68
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
Age	Less than 30	8	12	10	14	Unknown
	30 to 39	47	30	65	68	
	40 to 49	37	41			
	50 and +	8	17	25	18	
	Total	100	100	100	100	
Status	Job seekers	15	72	19	25	31
	Salaried	85	28	80	74	68
	Non active	0	0	1	1	1
	Together	100	100	100	100	100
Levels of qualification	V	30	81	0	24	43
	IV	33	17	0	34	21
	III	37	2	17	42	45
	II	0	0	59	0	8
	I	0	0	24	0	3
	Together	100	100	100	100	100

Source: DARES – Ministry of Labour – March 2007

<sup>1</sup> ibid

#### 14.2.2.5 Further development of VAE

Several reports have been produced in recent years which have identified problems and inefficiencies within the existing French VAE framework. Professor Albert-Claude Benhamou's 2005 report "*La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes*" called for a simplification of the existing VAE framework and for measures to improve the coherence and transparency of the systems in place.<sup>1</sup> Some of the problems and issues identified in his report include:

- the burden placed on the actors involved, as a result of considerable growth in demand for VAE;
- the need to streamline the number of qualifications offered through VAE, in order to achieve increased transparency and to ensure that the systems are able to operate more efficiently;
- the need to develop a single internet portal for VAE (this has already been achieved – see below)
- the problem faced by the unemployed in order to find funding for support in developing their application for VAE (this has already been achieved – see below);
- the importance of forming partnerships between the Ministries which award certificates through VAE, which the report suggested could be overseen by a national VAE 'agency';
- the importance of forming partnerships with the private sector;
- the need for a new information campaign.

The literature also shows that the organisations and institutions responsible for implementing VAE are insufficiently equipped in terms of resources and expertise. The division of responsibility across the various bodies involved was reported in 2005 to require more precise definition and the need for increased financial support (e.g. state investment in a single point of access information platform) was emphasised.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that the organisations involved in administering VAE are struggling to meet the increasing level of demand, despite recruitment of additional staff.

Other reports have also identified both that individuals encounter barriers to access to VAE. Poor information, difficulties in putting together a dossier and the costs involved were cited as the principle obstacles to individuals in studies carried out for the Ministry of Employment which were published in 2006.<sup>3</sup> As a result, while requests for information

<sup>1</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Vilchien, D., Audige, TI, Debeaupuis, J., Segal, P., 2005. Validation des acquis de l'expérience: du droit individuel à l'atout collectif. Report no. 2005067, June 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Etude "la VAE dans les entreprises un atout collectif?" Etude des pratiques dans des TPE & PME-PMI – DGEFP (January 2006); no. 230 of the CEREQ newsletter "La VAE, quels candidats, pour quels diplômes?" (May 2006)

regarding VAE have increased considerably, only a small number result in an actual application.<sup>1</sup> Other barriers include those listed below:

- There are not always diplomas or degrees available which correspond to an individual's experience.
- The quality of information and guidance can vary. Experience-validation procedures are relatively recent and not all social actors or personnel managers have an in-depth knowledge of the procedures.
- The VAE procedure can be lengthy. Certain ministries (Agriculture, Education, Universities, Youth and Sport and Social Action) use a detailed application procedure which relies on the individual being able to put their career into perspective and to have a good level of writing skills.
- Some individuals prefer not to take up the dispensations from training. They may choose to take up the training course as they feel they do not have the appropriate theoretical knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of such barriers to access, studies published in 2006 revealed that 50% of the 70,000 individuals who went to *Points Relais* for advice on VAE did not proceed any further than seeking advice.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, there is a considerable problem in finding suitable jury members, who have the time to take part in the VAE procedure. This is particularly the case for sectors characterised by a high number of micro and small businesses. This is because usually half of the jury members should be from the private sector, but it is difficult to get experienced workers from the sector to find time to attend these jury sessions, particularly if it means more competition may be created for them as a result. For example, in the hairdressing industry half of the VAE jury members should be professionals. However, hairdressers from the same region (particularly if the region is one of the more sparsely-populated) are sometimes reluctant to attend these juries because the more qualifications they award, the more people have the possibility to set up their own salon in the region (thus creating more competition). On some occasions in certain sectors / regions there have been significantly lower success rates than in others, precisely because some jury members have been reluctant to award qualifications as a means of protecting their own business interests. In these cases national authorities have had to intervene and try and find professionals from outside of the region.

In February 2006, the Ministry of Labour was assigned responsibility for taking forward the development of VAE. Validation was identified by the Prime Minister as a key tool in the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid*

<sup>2</sup> Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Labour, 27 June 2006, 'Validation des acquis de l'expérience: cinq mesures pragmatiques pour simplifier la procédure', available at [www.travail.gouv.fr](http://www.travail.gouv.fr)

fight against unemployment and a target was set to increase threefold the number of individuals gaining certification through the VAE process. A specific committee was set up under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour and working groups were organised with the main ministries involved.

A '*Plan VAE*' was set in place in September 2006, with the objective to remove barriers to the validation process. It is based on five key measures:

- a national information campaign based on two main services: the internet portal [www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr)<sup>1</sup>, which became operational in February 2007 and a helpline service "39 39", together with a communication campaign to inform the public of the right to VAE;
- simplified administration procedures, including one unique form for all VAE candidates, regardless of the qualification they are applying for;
- guaranteed payment of expenses for members of the assessment boards;
- payment of the costs of VAE for the unemployed;
- the implementation of a local policy for the development of VAE.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the national agency for job-seekers (ANPE) has developed tools to increase interest in gaining certification through VAE. The *Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois* or ROME (National repository of skills descriptions) will be linked to the RNCP in 2008, in order to improve the guidance on offer. Furthermore, considerable efforts are being made to raise awareness among private companies.<sup>3</sup>

It is positive to see that monitoring and reporting systems have been effective in highlighting problems and suggesting how the system of validation in France can be improved. The future impact of VAE in France will therefore depend on the success of the *Plan VAE* and it will be important to maintain a comprehensive system to monitor and evaluate the success of this initiative.

<sup>1</sup> This website, specifically dedicated to VAE, has contributions from all the ministries and other stakeholders involved.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

### 14.2.3 Formative Approaches - The *bilan de compétences*

Alongside the new system for VAE, the well-established concept of the *bilan de compétences* continues to play an important role and more than 70,000 skills audits have now been carried out.<sup>1</sup>

Since its introduction, the *bilan* has been conceived as a formative guidance and counselling tool, rather than a summative assessment and validation instrument. This is made clear in the objectives set out in the legislation governing the *bilan*, listed below.

#### The Bilan de Compétences

The Bilan de Compétences permits the identification and valorisation of:

- professional and personal competencies
- abilities and potential
- interests and motivations

with the objective to:

- draw up a career strategy
- support an external or internal 'mobility'
- develop competencies within a profession
- design a training path
- prepare a validation of experience<sup>2</sup>

Following an analysis of the expectations of the candidate and their skills and abilities, the *bilan de compétences* results in a synthesis document drawn up by the professional counsellor employed by the accredited centre. This document summarises the rationale for the assessment, the competencies and aptitudes uncovered and how these relate to the objectives of the candidate. Finally, advice is given on necessary steps to reach the objectives in question. In the context of VAE, the *bilan de compétences* will remain a useful step for many individuals to take to assess their skills in advance of seeking VAE. As such, the *bilan* is an "upstream" instrument within the VAE system.

### 14.2.4 Role of Sub-National Public Authorities

A process of decentralisation began in France during the 1980s and intensified during the 1990s. As a result, the regions in France have a central role in vocational training and are responsible for many aspects of the day-to-day management of adult education provision and upper secondary education (they are responsible for *lycées*, or upper secondary schools, for example). Regional employment and vocational training co-ordination committees were set up in 2002, in order to promote the co-ordination of vocational training policy and action and to ensure a better harmonisation of vocational training and employment policy through co-operation between the many organisations involved. These committees are made up of state representatives in each region, regional assemblies,

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from the website of the Fédération Nationale des CIBC, [www.cibc.net](http://www.cibc.net), June 2007

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the website of the Fédération Nationale des CIBC, [www.cibc.net](http://www.cibc.net), June 2007

management and labour organisations, and regional chambers of agriculture, commerce, industry and trade.<sup>1</sup> The August 2004 law relating to liberties and to local responsibilities further widened the regions' responsibilities in vocational training.<sup>2</sup>

Since the introduction of VAE, many regions have been very active in developing tools to assist both candidates and professionals working in the field and called upon to implement the new system. All regions have established a co-ordination centre (*Cellule Régionale Interservices – CRIS*) for VAE within their training information service and a network of information points within existing establishments (*Points-Relais-Conseil, PRC.*) The CRIS, as well as managing the PRC, disseminate the new concept of VAE to a wider audience – more detail of their work in partnership with private sector actors is given in the next section.

## 14.3 Private Sector

### 14.3.1 Sector Initiatives

#### 14.3.1.1 *Role of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry*

In 1998, the national network of Chambers of Commerce and Industry launched the *Association pour la certification des compétences professionnelles*<sup>3</sup> (Association for the Certification of Professional Competencies, ACCP) to validate non-formal learning acquired in the workplace. The ACCP obtained European Standard EN 45013 for the certification of individuals and established a system of certification based on *Certificats de Compétences en Entreprise* (CCE).

CCE certification is available to employees, on the basis of a portfolio submitted to an assessment panel (similar to other forms of VAE). However, the certificate is not a formal diploma of qualification (which often have an impact on remuneration within the French system of collective bargaining), but rather a standardized means to gain recognition for workplace skills.

<sup>1</sup> Cedefop, Thematic Overview, The French vocational education and training (VET) system

<sup>2</sup> Cedefop, Thematic Overview, The French vocational education and training (VET) system

<sup>3</sup> Association for the Certification of Vocational Skills

The ACCP defines the standards against which the CCEs are awarded and in 2004, certificates were available in the following fields:

- Secretarial and Personal Assistant skills
- Sales
- Remote Sales (Vente à distance)
- Customer Service
- Management
- Office IT skills
- Maintenance
- Hotel Reception
- Communication

More information on the certification methods and standards used, refer to the ACCP website: <http://www.acfci.cci.fr/emploi/accp.htm>.

In a report published in 2005, a representative of the Assembly of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry noted that the introduction of VAE had not only meant that qualifications awarded by the Chambers had been modularised but had also led to an increased linking up of their training to professions and skills, rather than to training reference frameworks. VAE had thus led the Chambers to make the training they offered more transparent for candidates and had improved the recognition of their training through certification.<sup>1</sup>

#### 14.3.1.2 *Role of the Social Partners*

The social partners play an important role in the implementation of the new framework for VAE established by the 2002 Law on Social Modernisation. Between 2002 and 2005, they financed 111,200 validation actions benefiting workers within the framework of the apparatus for individual training leave. During the same period, the sectors also created numerous vocational qualification certificates (CQPs) to recognise acquired skills and competences.<sup>2</sup>

A national cross-sectoral agreement on employee access to lifelong learning was finalised on 5 December 2003 and confirmed by law on the 4 May 2004. All national and cross-industry level employer and worker organisations participated in the agreement. The law reforms French VET for employees of the private sector and includes:

- an individual right to training for employees;

<sup>1</sup> Mme Leboniec and Mme Schaap from the ACFCI, in Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002), p. 42

<sup>2</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

- the possibility for employees to attend training courses outside working hours;
- a “professionalisation’s contract” for young and adult job seekers providing for sandwich courses or programmes which facilitate integration (validation of learning or vocational skills analysis);
- an increase in the levels of contributions to be provided by individual firms.<sup>1</sup>

The agreement particularly recognises the issue of the ageing population in France and has prioritised access to VAE action for all workers with twenty years of professional activity or who have reached their 45<sup>th</sup> birthday. Employees who meet these criteria and who have a minimum of one year’s service with their current employer are entitled to a skills review.

At the end of June 2005, more than 250 sectoral agreements were concluded in application of the 5 December 2003 national cross-industry agreement. These agreements define the conditions for implementation of forward-looking observatories of trades and qualifications for each professional sector. They also define vocational training priorities as provided for in the agreement. They deal with themes such as the implementation of arrangements for VAE and the issue of certificates.<sup>2</sup>

Social partners have also collaborated on a regional level with the CRIS to raise awareness and provide information regarding VAE among their representatives. For example, information days have been held by the CRIS to inform and train representatives of the CFTD (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*) in the Centre and Loire regions.<sup>3</sup>

Some sectors have developed specific qualifications processes for their employees, for example steel, chemicals, automotive, industry, sales etc. Sector certification may be obtained through validation of experience but few sectors have developed this to date.<sup>4</sup>

On 15 February 2007, a national agreement on the development of VAE was signed by Minister-Delegate Gérard Larcher, with the employers’ organisations MEDEF, CGPME, UPA, UNAPL and 16 professional sectors. The signatories confirmed their commitment to this essential tool for the recognition of competencies.

<sup>1</sup> Cedefop, Thematic Overview, The French vocational education and training (VET) system

<sup>2</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

<sup>3</sup> Les Entreprises et les acteurs socio-économiques face à la VAE, Actions, projets, animations des Cellules Régionales Inter-Services (CRIS), February 2006

<sup>4</sup> Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop

### 14.3.2 Examples from Individual Companies

At company level, many companies have facilitated their employees' access to validation of experience-based skills, either through an individual initiative or on a collective basis.<sup>1</sup> However, the importance traditionally attached to formal diplomas in France and the importance for the individual of having credible, transferable qualifications has meant that there has been limited development of standards and certification at the level of the firm.

Large companies, such as the state railway SNCF and the national postal service *La Poste* have shown a willingness to play their part in the development of VAE:

*"SNCF...is fully committed to the priorities of the framework of actions for lifelong learning. Actions taken relate notably to creation of a skills institute, internal initiatives for validation of experience-based skills, and a mechanism for vocational advice and guidance."*<sup>2</sup>

*"La Poste carried out a sociological study on traditional postal skills. Among other things, this study identified new or "undervalued" aspects of these skills. The project and its main findings were the subject of presentations to trade-union organisations. The results of the work will be incorporated into assessment tools and will also serve to build career plans."*<sup>3</sup>

The importance of support from private enterprises was recognised in a report produced in 2005 "*La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes*".<sup>4</sup> This report suggested VAE should be made a contractual obligation for enterprises, to guarantee employees the chance to take on increasingly complex tasks in order to work towards higher qualifications.

There is evidence that businesses are increasingly beginning to understand the importance of VAE and the management of people's professional experience. As a result, several companies have launched VAE projects. Danone, for instance, launched a major VAE project in 2003 entitled EVOLUANCE. 750 employees, on 39 sites, have been involved in the programme which offers them a chance to validate the skills they have gained at work through 38 state-recognised qualifications. Peugeot is another company that has really 'utilised' VAE and is now trying to find ways to introduce similar systems in their plants / offices in Eastern Europe. Other examples of private sector VAE initiatives include the textile industry, the tobacco industry group SEITA, AXA insurance and the Banque de France.

<sup>1</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2005

<sup>2</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2005

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

In addition, the regional CRIS have worked with several public and private enterprises to support them in the development of VAE initiatives. These include enterprises of all sizes, although the very small enterprises are less represented. CRIS activities in the private sector have included informing employees about VAE, awareness-raising among human resources directors and supporting VAE projects which have been set in place by enterprises. Freescale Semiconductor is a good example of a private company working with the CRIS, as outlined below.

#### VAE in the company 'Freescale Semiconductor Toulouse'

In Toulouse, the PRCs worked with Freescale Semiconductor to implement a project to provide information on both a collective and individual basis for its employees. The project's priority target group was the 880 employees working as operators but the project had the potential to reach out to the entire Freescale Semiconducteur Toulouse workforce, which totals 1900 people.

Following an internal communication campaign run by the company's Human Resources department from January to March 2005, the PRC developed two information tools: one for managers and a second for employees. In June 2005, four information meetings were organised by the PRC, which were attended by 225 people. 11 on-site visits then enabled 48 employees to access information on an individual basis. Around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through VAE.

These activities were funded by the FONGECIF Midi-Pyrénées<sup>1</sup> and Freescale.

## 14.4 The Third Sector

There were 12.5 million volunteers in France in 2003 (which equates to 27% of the population aged over 18).<sup>2</sup> For many, volunteering is seen as a way to develop or acquire skills which are not required within one's professional life.

The value of voluntary experience has also been recognised through legislation: on July 6, 2000 the Ministry of Youth and Sports modified a previous law of July 16, 1984 related to the organisation and promotion of physical and sport activities. Following the 2000 amendment, qualifications required for teaching and training in a professional perspective in the field of Youth and Sports can now be validated through professional or voluntary experience. The 2002 Social Modernisation Law then extended the validation of voluntary experiences to all domains of associative activities. Individuals must be able to show that the skills they have acquired through a minimum of three years' voluntary work are of the level required by the certification.

<sup>1</sup> FONGECIF: Fonds paritaire interprofessionnel régional agréé pour la Gestion du Congé Individuel de Formation et du congé bilan de compétences.

<sup>2</sup> Halba, B. 2004. AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences, Report for France

A report<sup>1</sup> produced by the “AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences” project funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme judges that in the area of VAE within the voluntary sector, the question of financing is a key problem. The report suggests that one possible solution to this might be to consider the validation of voluntary experiences as a form of vocational training – which is already funded for volunteers by both the National Council for the Associative Life (*Conseil National pour la Vie Associative*, CNVA) and by the regions.

Some examples of good practice in the assessment of voluntary experiences in France are highlighted in this report. These include:

- **A guide on the assessment of professional and voluntary experiences in the field of Youth and Sports.** The guide is edited by the Ministry for Sports and the Ministry for Youth, Education and Research. It outlines a basis for the procedure which should be followed to assess, value or validate an individual’s skills and qualifications in order to obtain a specific diploma. The guide is addressed both to the individual volunteer and to the assessment jury.
- **Two working groups** initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2003. They focus on two specific issues: volunteering and building competencies and volunteering and professionalism.
- **A notebook to record voluntary skills.** The notebook has been supported by the National Union for University Clubs (UNCU) since 1998. The notebook can be used to provide evidence of the voluntary activity of the UNCU’s members.
- **A notebook to record voluntary activity.** The National Olympic Committee (CNOSF) devised this notebook, which can be used to quantify the number of hours spent on voluntary activity and the activities carried out. The Ministry for Sports also collaborated in the development of the notebook.
- **A study to assess the voluntary experiences of the volunteer members of the ARIA association.** ARIA (*Association de reflexion, information et d’accueil des familles de militaires en activité*) is the Association for Reflection, Information and Accompanying for the families of military staff. The study carried out by ARIA aimed to identify, value and assess the knowledge, expertise and behaviour gained through volunteering for the association. Following completion of the report, a tool was devised for the assessment of the members’ experiences. The impact of this tool on the members’ experiences in the labour market was then analysed and finally, in 2006, a label was to be proposed for ARIA to be used both within and outside of the association.

The report also identifies certain gaps in the sphere of VAE within the voluntary sector. For example, it suggests that guides similar to the one produced for youth and sports

<sup>1</sup> Halba, B. 2004. AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences, Report for France

would be useful for the other areas in which associations are active. It raises the question of who will take on the role of identifying and assessing skills developed by volunteers and calls for this to be carried out externally, with the involvement of the public authorities and the private sector.

## 14.5 Conclusions

As outlined in the previous sections, France has put in place a detailed legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, implemented mechanisms to oversee the process of “certification” and developed dense networks of guidance, assessment and validation centres throughout the country. Action within the sphere of validation has benefited from a strong national lead on the development of legislation and supporting frameworks and initiatives, carried out in partnership with relevant stakeholders from both public and private sectors.

One of the major challenges facing the system is to gain credibility in a country where particularly high importance has traditionally been attached to qualifications gained in formal education, often at the expense of skills acquired through professional experience. A culture shift may be required to allow greater value to be attached to vocational skills and to bring the formal education system and non-formal learning closer together.

Equally important is to gain buy-in and support from the private sector and from the public. The success of validation relies on firms providing support to their employees, to enable them to develop their skills and competences through professional experience and then to access validation processes in order to gain recognition for this experience. Strong awareness-raising campaigns among the public, combined with effective information and guidance are also vital, in order to facilitate access to validation for all.

In addition, the stakeholders involved need to be clear as to their roles and responsibilities within the VAE process. Assessors need to be fully trained on what they have to identify and value in order to grant award of a certification.

There is an ongoing commitment to the development of VAE in France, with the introduction of new actions continuing into 2007. These include the *Plan VAE*, to overcome the barriers to access identified in 2006 and the national agreement on the development of VAE, signed by Minister-Delegate Gérard Larcher, with the trade unions MEDEF, CGPME, UPA, UNAPL and 16 professional sectors in February 2007.

Each year, around 20,000 individuals are able to gain certification for their skills through VAE<sup>1</sup> and this number is likely to continue to increase, provided the barriers to access are

<sup>1</sup> 'Education et Formation 2010', Rapport National France 2007

resolved, together with a formal recognition on the part of employers of the its importance. The success of the actions in the area of VAE will rely on a continuation of this level of commitment and partnership-working, the allocation of sufficient resources to maintain and improve the initiatives in place, and a comprehensive system of monitoring and evaluation to learn from the progress made to date in order to inform future action.

# 15.0 Germany<sup>1</sup>

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## 15.1 Introduction

Germany does not yet have a country-wide system for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. There is currently a diverse set of validation procedures in different educational sectors, each with specific aims and objectives.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany is different from validation in most European and non-European countries. In other countries it is frequently associated with an entitlement and hence “true” recognition, so can be expected to be correspondingly widespread. In contrast, in Germany developments to date have been below political level<sup>2</sup> and have mostly been geared towards the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning and to its evaluation - as an essential pre-requisite for recognition. An essential cause of the comparatively low significance of formal recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences appears to be rooted in the German system of vocational training and continuing education and training itself, which is largely integrated with the employment system and provides for progressive vocational development. On the other hand, because of the high practical element great significance is attached to experiential learning, especially in dual training. This makes Germany one of the European countries where the education system traditionally includes a component of ‘learning on the job’.<sup>3</sup>

Existing approaches at political level have a comparatively narrow scope. There are approaches in Germany that address recognition or partial recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences. Research has shown, however, that the information and data available on these approaches is very limited and has not been prepared scientifically. There is often a low level of awareness of the approaches themselves and for this reason they are relatively little used. The complex education system in Germany, with many responsibilities and legal regulations contributes to a lack of clarity for individuals, whilst making the development of further recognition procedures more difficult.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Germany chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Prof. Erwin Seyfried

<sup>2</sup> BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) (Hrsg.), 2004, Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes, at [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Hippach-Schneider, Ute; Krause, Martina; Woll, Christian, 2007, Berufsbildung in Deutschland. Kurzbeschreibung, publ. by Bousquet, Sylvie, Cedefop Panorama series 136, Luxembourg

Nevertheless there are some legal regulations for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

In the past there has been little need for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. The formal education system was able to provide the required highly qualified workforce.<sup>1</sup> Today, economic, technological and societal changes pose new challenges to the German education and training system. Increasing competition in a globalised world, fast technological change, a shrinking and ageing population and an anticipated shortage of skilled employees in the near future all require cross-professional mobility and continuous learning. Individuals are challenged to take responsibility for their own education in order to tackle these new challenges. Non-formal and informal learning as part of the lifelong learning initiative are gaining momentum within this context.<sup>2</sup>

The wide range of recent initiatives which have been undertaken by the public, the private and the third sectors show the relevance of the topic in practice, which in turn bring the issue to the national policy agenda. The scope of the validation initiatives to date has predominantly been related to vocational competences, but there are also approaches that take into account informal learning in other (non-vocational) contexts.

However, a series of policy initiatives aiming to strengthen lifelong learning do now emphasise the value of non-formal and informal learning and it is anticipated that future developments will continue as part of the goal to strengthen the individual's responsibility and self-organisation capabilities in continuing education, which includes non-formal and informal learning.<sup>3</sup>

## **15.2 Public Sector**

### **15.2.1 Overview of progress to date**

Identification, assessment and recognition of competencies, skills and knowledge acquired through informal or non-formal learning has in recent years become a subject of growing importance in Germany and is viewed within the contexts of promoting disadvantaged persons and improving permeability of educational pathways. On the one hand it is intended to open access to the various educational routes; on the other hand it is intended to overcome the strict separation of different sectors of the education system in the country. Furthermore the use of all abilities was codified in the coalition agreement of the government in 2005 to avoid a lack of skilled workers in view of demographic change.

<sup>1</sup> BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) (Hrsg.), 2004, Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes, p. 134, at

[http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) (Hrsg.), 2004, Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes, p. 11, at

[http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 23

Isolated approaches to validation have existed for a longer period, not least triggered by the educational-political developments of the European Union. There has been an increasing number of initiatives to test procedural methods and to systemise these widespread approaches since the middle of the 1990s.

For example, in 1997 the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*BMBF*) concluded a project to reform vocational education and training (*Reformprojekt Berufliche Bildung*). As a result of this project, it was anticipated, for example, that more practically orientated qualifications and additional qualifications would contribute towards opening up the formal qualification structures. Another component of the project was the trial of modularised post-qualifications supported by the use of portfolios.

In 2000 the Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (*Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung - BLK*)<sup>1</sup> started the model-experiment-programme “Lifelong learning”, financed by the federal government and the *Länder*, aiming to change the learning culture. 22 projects from all educational sectors participated in the programme and one of the objectives was the research and promotion of self organised and informal learning. The programme ran until 2005.

Between 2001 and 2007 the programme “Learning Culture for Competence Development” (*Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung*) was carried out, aiming at the construction of efficient and continuous learning structures, including informal learning, with consideration for competition, local requirements and competence development of employable people.

In 2004 the BLK published the “Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany”<sup>2</sup> as an approach to consolidate the diverse developments and as a starting point for further developments. The main purpose was to show how learning can be encouraged and supported for all citizens at all stages and areas of their lives. Therefore it is structured according to the different life phases: children, adolescents, young adults, adults and the elderly, and it focuses on developments that are deemed to be essential to promoting lifelong learning. In addition to self-directed learning, competence development, networking, modularisation, learning guidance, and a new learning culture/popularisation of learning and equal opportunities, the inclusion of informal learning is cited as being of primary importance.

<sup>1</sup> The BLK doesn't exist anymore due to the federalism reform in 2006. Its follow-up institution is the Common Scientific Conference (*Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz*)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blk-bonn.de/papers/heft115.pdf>

In recent years, several studies and comprehensive reports directly addressed to or covering certain aspects of validation of informal and non-formal learning have been produced by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*BMBF*). These include, for example,

- *Das informelle Lernen. Die internationale Erschließung einer bisher vernachlässigten Grundform menschlichen Lernens für das lebenslange Lernen aller*<sup>1</sup> (Informal Learning. International Conclusions for Lifelong Learning for all),
- *Expertenberichte des Forum Bildung. Bildungs- und Qualifikationsziele von morgen - Vorläufige Leitsätze des Forum Bildung*<sup>2</sup> (Education Forum Expert Report. Objectives of Education and Vocational Training in the Future),
- *Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung. Inhalte - Ergebnisse – Perspektiven*<sup>3</sup> (Learning Culture. Content. Evidence. Perspectives),
- *Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens – ProfilPASS* (Further Education Pass with Certification of Informal Learning)<sup>4</sup>,
- *Schlussbericht der unabhängigen Expertenkommission Finanzierung Lebenslangen Lernens: Der Weg in die Zukunft*<sup>5</sup> (Final Report of an Independent Expert Commission on Financing Lifelong Learning. The way for the Future).
- *Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX. Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland*<sup>6</sup> (Integrated Joint Report on the Situation of Continued Education in Germany),

In Germany informal learning is furthermore a central element of initial vocational education and training through the dual system. Apprenticeship in companies facilitates competence development on-the-job by a distinctive reference to practice. Although there are difficulties in providing school leavers with apprenticeship training positions and with the necessary preconditions in terms of personal attributes, in reality nearly 55% of each year group with widely differing qualifications<sup>7</sup> undertakes an apprenticeship. The transition routes from vocational training preparation to vocational training and from initial training to continuing or upgrading training are already becoming more flexible and linked

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/das\\_informelle\\_lernen.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/das_informelle_lernen.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/expertenberichte\\_des\\_forum\\_bildung.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/expertenberichte_des_forum_bildung.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abwf.de>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.profilpass.de>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/schlussbericht\\_kommission\\_III.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/schlussbericht_kommission_III.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/berichtssystem\\_weiterbildung\\_neun.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/berichtssystem_weiterbildung_neun.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

more closely with each other and can be used in a flexible manner.<sup>1</sup> The 2005 Vocational Training Reform Act improved moreover the access to examinations for those who have not progressed through dual education and training (External student's examination – see below).<sup>2</sup>

In the course of ECTS<sup>3</sup> and the introduction of Bachelor- and Master Degrees as an element of the Europeanisation of the university sector, learning outcomes are gaining in importance in the higher education (HE) sector in Germany. Beyond that, access to HE is possible for skilled and qualified employees without the traditional university entrance certificate. Following the federal reform in 2006, developments in the sector are outside the responsibility of the Federal Government. Although access and degrees can be regulated nationwide, it is possible that the *Länder* deviate from that.

### 15.2.2 Overview of existing initiatives

A series of important public sector initiatives have been implemented over recent years. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the *Länder* Ministries of Education are the main actors in the public sector for the promotion of the topic of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Key initiatives include the External student's Examination (*Externenprüfung*), Continuing Education and Training in IT (*IT-Weiterbildungssystem*), access to higher education for qualified workers (*Hochschulzugang für qualifizierte Berufstätige*), Credit of vocational competences towards higher education study programmes (*Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge - ANKOM*), the Learning Culture for Competence Development Programme (*Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung*) and the *ProfilPASS-System*-initiative.

Moreover, in May 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research established an innovation forum for vocational education (*Innovationskreis Berufliche Bildung*)<sup>4</sup> and an innovation forum for continuing education (*Innovationskreis Weiterbildung*)<sup>5</sup>. Key experts from these sectors worked on the development of the vocational and continuing education system in Germany, including the validation of informal learning. The innovation fora are expected to support the Ministry by elaborating a set of recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

<sup>2</sup> Seidel, S., Bretschneider, M., Kimmig, T. et al., 2007, Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, within the framework of the OECD activity 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'

<sup>3</sup> European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/IKBB-Broschuere-10\\_Leitlinien.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/IKBB-Broschuere-10_Leitlinien.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/empfehlungen\\_innovationskreis\\_weiterbildung.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/empfehlungen_innovationskreis_weiterbildung.pdf)

### 15.2.3 The External student's Examination

Important legislative provisions relating to the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*) and Section 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (*Handwerksordnung*). Under these provisions, individuals can be admitted to a final examination for a qualification in a recognised apprenticeship trade which would normally require formal training, providing they can provide evidence that they:

- have been employed in the occupation for which they wish to take the examination for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training<sup>1</sup>, or
- can demonstrate, by producing certificates or by some other means, that they have acquired the necessary vocational proficiency for admission to the examination.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign qualifications and periods of employment abroad may also be taken into account. Furthermore training in a vocational school or other educational establishment is a prerequisite for admission to the External students' Examination (*Externenprüfung*) if this educational pathway is equivalent to vocational training in a recognised apprenticeship.

In 2005, over 7% of candidates for these qualifications applied via the External student's Examination (*Externenprüfung*). Most 'external applications' (80%) were for professions in the 'industry and commerce' sector, while the 'domestic' sector is the second most important (11%). However, in most training sectors, external candidates generally have a lower examination pass rate than candidates as a whole.<sup>3</sup> One exception is the agriculture sector where for years candidates with relevant work experience have been more successful than candidates following the regular training pathway. This supports the argument that experiential learning is particularly relevant in this sector and highlights the success of people with work experience who gain qualifications at a later stage of their working life.

The aims of the validation provisions in the vocational qualification system are:

- to support equal opportunities,
- to support mobility,
- to accelerate study periods and create cost reductions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Periods of employment also include training periods in another relevant apprenticeship trade

<sup>2</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

<sup>3</sup> Seidel, S., Bretschneider, M., Kimmig, T., et al., 2007, Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, within the framework of the OECD activity 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'

<sup>4</sup> Seidel, S., Bretschneider, M., Kimmig, T., et al., 2007, Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, within the framework of the OECD activity 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'

In the 1990s, a study was conducted into External students' Examinations.<sup>1</sup> This study showed that in general, the decision to take the examination was made by the individual and was not at the request of the employer. Individuals indicated that by taking the examination, they had achieved better opportunities for promotion, improved flexibility and mobility in the labour market.

#### 15.2.4 Continuing Education and Training in IT

In 2002, a new, national Continuing Education and Training (CET) system was introduced in the sphere of IT. This system was developed through close collaboration with employers, employees and politicians. The system permits among other things the acquisition of further qualifications<sup>2</sup> for participants without a qualification in one of 29 new IT occupations. It also permits the transfer of credits to courses at both Bachelor's and Master's level.

Access to the IT CET system is possible for candidates who give evidence of:

- a vocational qualification for an occupation in IT, or
- a vocational qualification for another occupation followed by a year's work experience in IT, or
- at least four years' work experience in IT (a contract of employment for at least 35 hours per week).

Further, candidates who demonstrate *"by means of certificates or some other means that they have acquired qualifications that justify their admission to certification"* can also be admitted.

In September 2006, according to an interim analysis conducted by CERT-IT Berlin, around 47% of participants in the IT CET system were 'lateral entrants' – one in three had completed vocational training in another field and 6% had no vocational qualification.

#### 15.2.5 Higher Education (HE)

##### 15.2.5.1 Access for qualified workers

The first steps towards opening up access to HE were already taken in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, people with vocational qualifications but without an appropriate entrance qualification from school may be admitted to higher education in two ways: via the second and third educational pathways. Measured against the number of people qualified for admission via the first educational pathway, university access for those with vocational

<sup>1</sup> Hecker, 1994, Ein nachgeholt Berufsabschluss lohnt sich allemal – Externenprüfung in der Praxis, In: Berufsbildung in Wissenschaft und Praxis (6) p. 27-33

<sup>2</sup> In general, a vocational certificate and a minimum term of practical employment are pre-requisites for further training examinations

qualifications represents only a small proportion. The second educational pathway<sup>1</sup> via, for example, evening classes, full-time and part-time adult education centres, examinations for external students and the gifted, and the third educational pathway, via accreditation on the basis of work experience, account for 3% of all first registrations and thus play only a marginal role in access to higher education (slightly higher for students at universities of applied sciences (5%) than for those at universities (2%)).<sup>2</sup>

Adults with work experience can gain general school certificates constituting an entrance qualification to higher education at a later stage via the second educational pathway, for which the legal foundations are the education-law regulations of the individual *Länder*. Depending on prior education at school, the objective of the examination and the intensity of tuition, the course duration ranges from one to four years. The pre-requisite for most schools is a completed vocational qualification and/or employment or work experience. Periods of unemployment or running the family home may also be credited towards these periods.

The Framework Act for Higher Education (*Hochschulrahmengesetz*) provides that “persons with vocational qualifications” may provide evidence of qualification for higher educational studies “according to more detailed provisions of *Länder* law, also by other means” than relevant school education.<sup>3</sup> Higher educational studies via third educational pathways without prior acquisition of the general higher education entrance qualification have been possible in all *Länder* and most study programmes for some years. In accordance with the independence of the *Länder* in cultural and educational matters in the area of higher education, there are widely varying procedures which have been summarised by Land for interested parties and the expert audience.<sup>4</sup> In broad terms, with the higher education entrance examination (aptitude test), the direct access and probationary studies, there are three models of access to HE by the third educational pathway.

There are a whole host of studies that, ultimately, arrive at very similar conclusions and counter the objection to the further opening up of access to higher education, that workers without a higher education entrance qualification are not sufficiently capable of university studies. Examinations of indicators of the course of university studies and their

<sup>1</sup> Only qualifications associated with a higher education entrance qualification will be covered here, not the other school certificates that are possible via the second educational pathway.

<sup>2</sup> Heine, Christoph; Kerst, Christian; Sommer, Dieter, 2007, Studienanfänger im Wintersemester 2005/06. Wege zum Studium, Studien- und Hochschulwahl, Situation bei Studienbeginn. HIS: Forum Hochschule (1), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> § 27 Framework Act for Higher Education (*Hochschulrahmengesetz*)

<sup>4</sup> [www.wege-ins-studium.de](http://www.wege-ins-studium.de) and Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Hrsg.), 2006, Beruf, Bildung, Zukunft. Informationen für Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer 2006/2007 and Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der KMK, Synoptische Darstellung der in den Ländern bestehenden Möglichkeiten des Hochschulzugangs, status February 2006. The web sites of the competent *Länder* ministries also contain information.

conclusions show that students entering from the world of work have no greater difficulties and no verifiably lower results than other students.

#### 15.2.5.2 *Credit of vocational competences*

A number of initiatives are in place to widen access to Higher Education by implementing credit procedures in Germany. One of these initiatives is 'Credit of vocational competences towards higher education study programmes' (*Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge – ANKOM*).<sup>1</sup> The overriding purpose of ANKOM is to increase access to, and transfer opportunities within, educational pathways. Transfers between educational establishments should be facilitated and existing qualifications and competences acquired in different contexts should be taken into account. Methods to enable the recognition in higher education study programmes of competences that people with vocational training have acquired in training and CET and at work and that are equivalent to the performance requirements of the respective study programme are being developed and trialled in eleven regional development projects.<sup>2</sup> In an initial project phase, for example, proven qualifications and competences are identified as study equivalents that can be credited towards bachelor's or master's study programmes. In a second step, the projects need to build on this to develop transferable credit procedures and tools. The focus is on qualifications and competences acquired in formal and non-formal routes, for example the vocational training and CET system. Moreover, competences learned by informal means, for example at work, should also be included and reviewed for their capacity to be verified and credited.<sup>3</sup> Individual procedures are already applied as models in institutions of higher education. No statement can yet be made as to how widespread this is. In addition to the procedures developed within the project themselves, aimed towards credit for learning outside institutions of higher education, the evaluation that accompanies the process plays an important role in ensuring the quality of procedures, their dissemination and acceptance.

#### 15.2.6 Learning Culture for Competence Development

Another initiative under development by the public authorities was 'Learning Culture for Competence Development' (*Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung*), financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the European Social Fund (with about EURO 100 million in total) which was implemented from 2001 until the end of 2007. The study focused on developing and testing efficient continuing learning structures in companies and strengthening individual professional competences.

<sup>1</sup> <http://ankom.his.de>

<sup>2</sup> See BMBF (2005): Richtlinien für die Förderung von Initiativen 'Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulzugänge'

<sup>3</sup> <http://ankom.his.de/modellprojekte/index.php>

With regard to validation of informal learning, the initiative aimed to find means to integrate informal learning in a more effective way within the system of continued education. The initiative consisted of about 200 interrelated projects on: measuring competencies; organisation of learning by learners themselves; the implementation of different types of in-company learning cultures; the maintenance of competencies through activity-related, continuous learning in a social environment and on transformation of institutions for further vocational training into learning services providers.

All the material produced during the programme can be accessed on the Association for Research in Professional Development (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Betriebliche Weiterbildungsforschung e. V. - ABWF*) website.<sup>1</sup>

#### 15.2.7 Competence Models

In 2006, the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - DFG*) resolved to launch the six-year priority programme entitled “Competence Models for recording individual learning outcomes and for reviewing educational processes” (*Kompetenzmodelle zur Erfassung individueller Lernergebnisse und zur Bilanzierung von Bildungsprozessen*).<sup>2</sup> Within this programme, it is planned to fund over 20 research projects geared to recording competences. The individual research projects were launched in autumn 2007.

#### 15.2.8 The ProfilPASS-System

A trend has developed over the last few years towards recording and documenting cross-cutting skills as a form of social recognition, for example recognition taking place below the official regulatory level. Recording (using either an open or closed recording system) mainly makes use of training passports which are primarily intended for recording any non-formal and informal learning undertaken. Many of these passports are aimed at individual target groups while others cover individual functional areas.

The first stage of that initiative, led by the former *Bund-Länder* Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (*Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung - BLK*), was a study on the feasibility<sup>3</sup> of introducing a *Weiterbildungspass*<sup>4</sup> on a national scale based on the analysis of existing instruments.

During the second stage, from November 2003 to August 2005, a recommendation of the feasibility study was implemented - a model pass, the *ProfilPASS* and a guidance concept

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abwf.de>

<sup>2</sup> further information can be found at <http://kompetenzmodelle.dipf.de/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

were designed and evaluated. Both elements form the *ProfilPASS*-System<sup>1</sup>. This system reviews, documents and assesses informally acquired competences regardless of the means and the field of learning. As an additional function, it was intended to identify educational, professional and life goals of an individual and to motivate the pass owner to realise these goals.

*ProfilPASS* is a developmental instrument based on user self-assessment supported by professional guidance. It takes into account all learning settings in which learners may acquire competencies during the course of their lives. The assumption was that many individuals can only be guided towards knowledge of their competencies and the value of them through critical reflection on their own lives. Skills and competencies are derived from these activities by a process of abstraction, and then assessed on a four-level scale:

- Level 1: activities which can be carried out under another person's supervision or by following instructions;
- Level 2: activities which can be carried out autonomously in familiar conditions;
- Level 3: activities which can be carried out autonomously in a different context (other situation, conditions, location, work context);
- Level 4: Activities which can be carried out autonomously in a different context, explained and demonstrated to others.

The *ProfilPASS*-System is not integrated with the formalised education and employment system. It is in fact helpful in making an individual's qualification history clearer, as a tool to increase motivation and to clearly set out competences possessed. However, the evidence provided by the *ProfilPASS* is likely to bring increasing benefits in job interviews or internal promotions. It also reflects the context in which individual competences were acquired (e.g. the nature of work) and it facilitates employees' mobility. The benefit is mainly acceptance and value on an individual level.

In line with the findings of the evaluation, the *ProfilPASS for young people* was developed which, following a pilot and evaluation, has been available nationally since May 2007. It is currently being rolled out as a target group-specific supplement to the *ProfilPASS* -system.

In the meantime more than 25,000 *ProfilPASS*es and *ProfilPASS*es for young people have been awarded and 1,700 advisers have been qualified by the initiative.

<sup>1</sup> Information for users and advisers can be found at <http://www.profilpass.de>

### 15.2.9 Federal Employment Agency Assessments

The Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit – BA*) carries out an assessment procedure which has considerable importance within the framework of labour market policy. This procedure is part of the Federal Employment Agency's support and mediation activities and assesses the individual opportunities of the unemployed relative to the needs of the labour market. It includes ascertaining professional and personal characteristics, together with the circumstances that are likely to make integration more difficult for the individual. The individual assessment of an unemployed person's opportunities and appreciation of their past history is regarded as a pre-requisite for providing advice on individual job-seeking strategies by the job centre. Informally-acquired competences, both from work experience or activities in a social environment, become very important in the job placement process.

A crucial aspect of that procedure is the lack of analysis of the individual competencies that have to be estimated by the job-seekers themselves. This very subjective self-evaluation has extensive consequences for the further case management.

### 15.2.10 National Qualifications Framework

In 2005, Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in conjunction with the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz - KMK*), informed the European Commission that Germany intends to develop a national framework for vocational and general education. These plans are also being put into concrete terms in the work being carried out by the ministry's task force on innovations in VET (modernising training regulations, managing transition from school to work, facilitating progression from initial into further and higher education, opening up the German system to Europe). At a meeting on 14 December 2005, the Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BIBB*) - Germany's 'parliament for vocational training' - also advocated in its advisory opinion on the Commission's draft, the development of a qualifications framework in Germany that encompasses all education sectors. It reiterated this position at its meeting on 9 March 2006.

A National Qualification Framework (NQF) is on the agenda that will not limit itself to describing academic knowledge and classifying programmes but will be strictly orientated towards competences and vocational proficiency. The envisaged system will classify qualifications in terms of learning outcomes that can be matched to levels of work requirements and skill profiles, without regard to formal certificates or diplomas. In this connection, the NQF is understood as an instrument that can be used to obtain information

that makes it possible to compare learning outcomes that are achieved through different pathways.<sup>1</sup>

#### 15.2.11 Challenges

The 2007 OECD report on 'Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany'<sup>2</sup> identifies a number of strategies and challenges which should be considered in relation to the future development of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Germany. These are listed in brief below:

- There is a need to promote greater understanding of the significance of informal learning – the culture of recognition needs to change at all levels;
- Qualified consultancy support is required nationwide;
- Local information and discussions are required to build up a regional dialogue;
- The ongoing documentation of data should be discussed and decided;
- Existing procedures and approaches should be further developed and integrated – they are currently unsuitable for use on a large scale;
- There should be a clarification of the legal basis for experiential learning;
- A reconciliation of the different positions of the stakeholders involved is required;
- Informal learning should be taken into account in the German qualification framework;
- A fall in standards, hence quality is feared;
- CET providers should be enabled to classify knowledge acquired through formal, informal and non-formal learning and to tailor their courses and teaching methods to this;
- Discussions regarding the validation of informal and non-formal learning should take into account the needs of people with a migration background;
- Public administration should take the lead, by introducing procedures and disseminating its experiences.

<sup>1</sup> Hanf, Dr. G., Rein, Dr. V., 2006, Towards a National Qualifications Framework for Germany, Reflections from a VET research standpoint, taken from the world wide web: <http://www.bibb.de/en/25722.htm#jump05>, last updated 20 March 2007

<sup>2</sup> Seidel, S., Bretschneider, M., Kimmig, T., et al., 2007, Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, within the framework of the OECD activity 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'

## 15.3 Private Sector

### 15.3.1 Vocational Training

Vocational training at secondary level takes place in both the dual system, for example the combination of company-based training and part-time vocational school, and in full-time vocational schools.

In-company training takes place according to the requirements of the training regulations; framework curricula for in-company training are co-ordinated and approved by four-partite Committees including social partners, representatives from the Federal government and the *Länder* schools. School courses are carried out according to the outline curricula and – if applicable – *Länder*-specific curricula.<sup>1</sup> The dual system is the largest educational sector at the secondary level; school-leavers from all types of school take up training places in the dual system.

The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie - BMWi*) or the competent ministry that is otherwise responsible can, in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, grant state recognition to apprenticeships by means of an executive order law and enact training regimes for the apprenticeships. The training regimes set out the goals, duration, content and examination requirements for training in companies. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training develops the draft regulations together with experts from professions appointed by the central organisations of employers and trade unions. There are currently 342 apprenticeship trades in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The responsibility for issuing advice, monitoring the implementation of training in companies, the holding of examinations and the award of certificates/qualifications lies with the “competent bodies” in the dual system, with the respective chambers of commerce and industry as self-regulatory bodies in the training sectors for industry and commerce, trades and crafts and the independent professions, and above all the ministries in the *Länder* for all other training sectors.

At the sectoral level, the German chamber organisations offer validation of informal and non-formal learning through access and admittance to official examinations (External student’s Examination).

<sup>1</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

<sup>2</sup> as at July 2007

On the tertiary level, dual study courses represent an approach to overcome the rigid separation between the vocational and the academic sphere. They allow for both academic and vocational knowledge and skills, for example theory and practice, to be taught in a combined programme based on close co-operation of universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and companies. They follow the example of the vocational institutes on tertiary level (*Berufsakademien*) and provide an even more institutionalised cooperation with the participating businesses compared to the universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*).

### 15.3.2 Social partner involvement

Germany has an approach under which social partners are intensively included in the development of the vocational education and training system concerning nationwide training and advanced training regulations. The German social partners are moreover involved in both the development of a European Qualifications Framework and the setting-up of a national German framework. This also includes the identification of measures for validation of informal, non-formal and prior learning. Furthermore they bring forward the debate and respective projects on permeability within the national education and training systems which also implies creating open learning pathways and access to further training offers.<sup>1</sup>

Collective agreements have been established by management and labour in some sectors and occupational groups in order to grant more security to employees in recognised apprenticeship trades who rely on the qualifications and skills they have acquired by informal and non-formal learning. These agreements place work experience on the same footing as vocational qualifications and count it, suitably modified, towards the determination of pay. Some examples of these agreements include:

- Agreements made by the collective bargaining association of the allied North-Rhine Westphalia (*Nordrhein-Westfalen*) wholesale and international trade organisation, that require no vocational training for employees in salary group I for the “*performance of predominantly schematic or mechanical activities*”. The two years’ relevant training associated with the second salary group can also be substituted with knowledge and skills proven by at least two and a half years’ practical experience. The same applies to the subsequent salary groups.
- The ‘collective agreement remuneration framework (*Tarifvertrag über das Entgeltrahmenabkommen - ERA-TV*)’ of the metal and electrical industry in the federal state Baden-Württemberg, relates to the duties of the job. Under this, it is immaterial how the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities were acquired. Instead, key

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

competences are recorded in five assessment levels: efficiency, quality, flexibility, responsible behaviour, co-operation and leadership.<sup>1</sup>

### 15.3.3 Informal learning in the private sector

Informal learning in the vocational sector has been explored in different studies in recent years. According to a study commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF*) on continuing education and training in 2003<sup>2</sup>, around 61% of all working people take part in one or several types of informal vocational learning. Self-directed learning via observation and practice in the workplace and via reading work-related texts, reference books or specialist journals were mentioned by 38% and 35% of those questioned. The third and fourth most frequent responses refer to on-the-job instruction or crash-course training by colleagues (25%) or supervisors (22%). Around one in six members of the German workforce takes part in work-related trade fairs or congresses, and about one in eight reported receiving on-the-job instruction or crash-course training from someone from outside their company.

Participation in informal continuing vocational education and training shows similar differences in terms of specific groups as those found within formally organised contexts.<sup>3</sup> Underrepresented groups are employees who have not completed an initial vocational qualification, labourers, foreign and older workers<sup>4</sup>. Both socio-demographic factors and employment-related factors have a key influence on informal vocational learning. For instance, public sector employees are more active than those employed in the private sector. Employees in larger firms participate more frequently in informal continuing vocational education and training than employees in small or medium-sized firms. Above-average participation in informal continuing vocational education and training is noted mainly among employees working in chemicals/plastics (71%), medicine/healthcare (69%), banks/insurance (67%) and other services (66%). Participation rates among employees working in the leather/textiles/food sectors bring up the rear (49%), just as they did in 1997 and 2000. People with a high level of education and younger people are far more frequent participants in informal learning than people with a lower level of education and older people.<sup>5</sup> Informal learning activity declines with increasing age.

<sup>1</sup> Seidel, S., Bretschneider, M., Kimmig, T., et al., 2007, Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, within the framework of the OECD activity 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'

<sup>2</sup> Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX: Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland, BMBF, 2006, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

Work experience, and hence learning on the job is a key factor in employability and job security but can also lead to promotion through the extended transfer of responsibilities, and may also be manifested in monetary terms in the form of pay. Recognition and evaluation of skills acquired non-formally and informally are often based on collectively agreed settlements; standard tools used in the employment system are staff appraisals and employer's references as well as assessment procedures, analyses of potential and profiling.

#### 15.3.4 Progress in the sphere of validation

Reviewing current projects and single activities currently undertaken and implemented by the German private sector, conclusions can be made that there is growing general awareness and demand for methodologies and procedures under which non-formal and informal learning can be validated. This awareness is particularly notable in fields in which specific competencies are essential<sup>1</sup>, for example, mechatronics, IT and multimedia, electrical engineering and the metal-working occupations. In one or another way they are verified either during job application interviews, by employing candidates on a trial basis or by requesting references from previous employers. As there are no standard validation procedures yet, experiments are taking place using a mixture of experiential and competence-based education and training methods, as well as respective validation methods. Three areas are of a particular interest for the corporate sector, taking into consideration validation of informal and non-formal learning: selection of apprentices, selection of personnel and human resource development.<sup>2</sup>

However, the existing systems are predominantly tailor-made for the specific needs of the companies and this discourages others from using them.<sup>3</sup> Companies have some experiences with documenting and assessing informal learning, however, they see themselves at the beginning of this development. There are ideas on how to identify, assess and use informal learning but there are few steps towards implementing them in practice.<sup>4</sup> This is also evidenced by a study on the validation of informal learning in the private sector.<sup>5</sup> Study results show that companies are aware of the issues; however, there is very limited practical application, partly because of the uncertainties related to the contractual matters and salary implications etc. Normally these approaches are used more in large companies than in small and medium sized companies.

<sup>1</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

<sup>2</sup> Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, interview April 23, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, interview, June 23, 2004

<sup>4</sup> BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) (Hrsg.), 2004, Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes, p. 95, at [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Instrumente zur Erfassung informellen Lernens im Prozess der Erwerbsarbeit, 2005, Institut für betriebliche Bildung und Unternehmenskultur IBU, Ansprechpartner: Dr. Gerhard Herz

The scope of these procedures is demonstrated in the Competence Measurement Handbook (*Handbuch Kompetenzmessung*) that consists of different approaches to measure single competences, combinations of competencies or to compile competence audits.<sup>1</sup> Over the last two years, there has been also a growing research interest in private sector initiatives for the validation of informal learning, and in 2005, the Association for Research in Professional Development (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Betriebliche Weiterbildungsforschung e.V. – ABWF*), published an overview of validation methods in German companies.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the German Centre for Productivity and Innovation (*Rationalisierungs- und Innovationszentrum der Deutschen Wirtschaft e.V. - RKW*) developed an interesting online tool (*AQua*), allowing companies to assess the potential for introducing validation of informal learning at work.<sup>3</sup> Specific models for strengthening and recognising informal learning at work are also being developed for the IT sector.<sup>4</sup>

The BMBF project “New requirements for skills in the field of experiential working and self-directed learning for specialised industrial workers” (*Neue Anforderungen an Kompetenzen erfahrungsgelernten Arbeitens und selbstgesteuerten Lernens bei industriellen Fachkräften - NAKIF*)<sup>5</sup>, demonstrated basically the special relevance of validation of skills and knowledge acquired in non-formal and informal ways for unskilled industrial workers. It is based on the approaches to record experiential, on-the-job learning, implemented by the project management agency research centre (*Forschungszentrum*) Karlsruhe - Production and Manufacturing Technologies. This project intended to fill the gap which existed in dealing with unqualified workers, people with learning difficulties or marginalised groups. These groups of people have a special need to document their competencies and competence training sessions as they are wholly fulfilling their responsibilities in terms of operative activities, information and quality processes, process security and industrial safety tasks at their workplaces, but rarely handle formal examination methods or access organised continuing education<sup>6</sup>, for example the assessment of explicit knowledge is of lesser interest to them. They often are “self-sufficient” in explicit and implicit knowledge as well, though not always at a level which is transferable for work purposes. Therefore the documentation of their experiential learning might be the only proof of their knowledge and competencies and the only way for fostering social aspects by encouraging their self-organised learning, competence development and a competence-based culture of learning. An assessment and

<sup>1</sup> Erpenbeck, J., von Rosenstiel, Lutz, 2007, Handbuch Kompetenzmessung, Erkennen, verstehen und bewerten von Kompetenzen in der betrieblichen, pädagogischen und psychologischen Praxis

<sup>2</sup> Edition QUEM, 2005, Kompetenzmessung im Unternehmen, Lernkultur- und Kompetenzanalysen im betrieblichen Umfeld, Band 18

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.rkw.de/02\\_loesung/Tools/rkw-aqua/index.html](http://www.rkw.de/02_loesung/Tools/rkw-aqua/index.html); [www.inflow.eu.com](http://www.inflow.eu.com)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.apo-it.de/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nakif.de>

<sup>6</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

certification of competencies according to the sound and widely recognised methodologies could be analogous to a formally acquired qualification. For unqualified people this is vitally important, indeed almost a matter of survival, because only in this way is it possible to identify, activate and develop the potential competencies they actually possess – at whatever point in their learning biographies these may have been acquired.

## 15.4 The Third Sector

The initiatives of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Germany are relatively new, but have undergone rapid development during recent years. Several different initiatives, mainly regional, can be found from youth and volunteering organisations. A few examples are illustrated in this section.

### 15.4.1 Qualipass

The „*Qualipass*”<sup>1</sup> addresses young persons from twelve years on and it can be used for the documentation of practical experience and the development of competences through practical training, voluntary work, school initiatives, stays abroad, neighbourly help and similar activities. Central elements of the approach are certificates of activities and courses that can be systematically collected in a portfolio and used as a component for job application forms. Another relevant element is a concept of support. Young people have the possibility to choose a person out of their personal environment as a mentor for vocational and life- planning. Both discuss the different certificates concerning personal strengths and develop out of them further steps. The decision on what to do solely remains with the young people. The approach is completed by continuative information that helps young people to configure the transition to adulthood.

The approach was developed, tested and evaluated between 2000 and 2001. It was financed by the Ministry of culture, youth and sport of Baden-Württemberg (*Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport*) and the Freudenberg foundation. At the beginning of 2002 it was implemented in the whole of Baden-Württemberg. The approach is coordinated by a central service centre. In 2005 there were already 39 contact points in different counties all over Baden-Württemberg and by July 2006 200,000 young people had a *Qualipass*.

### 15.4.2 Berufswahlpass

The initiative *Berufswahlpass*<sup>2</sup> was developed as a common approach by seven of the 16 German *Länder*. It focuses on the process of vocational choice and helps to demonstrate that informally acquired competencies are a component in that process. The *Berufswahlpass* supports students in developing an individual plan of learning, in being

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qualipass-info.de>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.berufswahlpass.de>

more proactive and it structures the different elements and steps of occupational choice. The *Berufswahlpass* ring binder consists of three sections. In the first section the particular school concept of vocational choice is described. The central part is the second section 'My way to vocational choice' (*Mein Weg zur Berufswahl*). It consists of a personal profile and personal characteristics, a learning plan and steps for transition. The third section, named 'folder of life' (*Lebensordner*) documents the individual learning results. Furthermore it identifies relevant aspects of young people's life.

On an institutional level the development of particular and systemic school curricula of vocational orientation is necessary. The instrument is available in three versions, aiming at different levels of learning abilities.

The approach was developed within the programme 'School – Economy/Working Life' (*Schule – Wirtschaft/Arbeitsleben*) and is financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the European Social Fund. It was introduced in the school year 2001/2002.

#### 15.4.3 Kompetenznachweis 'Lernen im sozialen Umfeld'

An example of an initiative in the voluntary sector is the Competence Certificate of Learning in the Social Field (*Kompetenznachweis Lernen im sozialen Umfeld*).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand it can be used to reflect and evaluate knowledge, abilities and competencies that are acquired in the field of voluntary work. The initial point is a self-reflection and self-evaluation of different specified competencies based on the analysis of activities that is followed and verified by an external evaluation. The result of that process is a personal 'fund' of competencies. On the other hand it can be used by companies to benefit from the learning potentials of social fields to strengthen innovativeness and to enhance social and civic engagement.

The instrument was developed in a cooperative and dialogue-orientated process with institutions from the area of voluntary work and companies. It was realised by the national research centre for studies on youth (*Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V.*) between 2004 and 2006.

#### 15.4.4 Other third sector initiatives

There are several pass initiatives in the voluntary sector, such as the Hamburg voluntary booklet (*Hamburger Freiwilligenbuch*). They describe the tasks that the pass owner has performed and the duration, which are both certified by a third person or organisation. There are no standards for describing the tasks. Often the attendance of continuing

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dji.de/cgi-bin/projekte/output.php?projekt=354>

education seminars are described as tasks. The assessment of the competences are limited to confirming the existence of competences.<sup>1</sup>

There are other passes like the certificate booklet for honorary posts (*Nachweismappe Ehrenamt*) that give lists which include competences like “ability to work in a team”, “motivation”, “working independently”.

The competence record (*Kompetenzbilanz*)<sup>2</sup> by the national research centre for studies on youth (*Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V.*) shows a higher level of complexity. It derives fields of experiences from family related activities, that are analysed by questions like ‘What have I learned from this?’ and ‘Which competences have I acquired by this activity?’ Different specified competences are assessed on a five level scale, from level 1: ‘I am very good at it.’ to level 5: ‘I am not good at it.’

## 15.5 Conclusions

Due to the federal system in Germany, there is a mixture of responsibilities for education shared by the federal government and the *Länder* governments. In the context of the federal reform these responsibilities have been divided more precisely.

Besides approaches for a ‘true’ recognition of informal and non-formal learning such as the External student’s Examination or the access for qualified workers to Higher Education, that have existed for a long time, many approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany are comparatively new and remain mostly ‘work in progress’. On a non-regulatory level the focus is on research and pilot projects.

Over recent years an extensive range of studies and reports already delivered under the Lifelong learning policy initiative by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as well as the adoption of a Lifelong learning strategy with relevant provisions, show that validation is becoming very relevant and that the attention of policy makers is already given to this issue. Furthermore there are validation approaches in the private and in the third sector.

The main barriers to accumulation, transfer and validation of non-formal and informal learning are a comparatively small pressure to take action to recognise informal learning processes and outcomes and the persisting focus on formal qualifications in previous years. In the light of demographic change and a shortage of skilled workers, immigration and a pre-existing perception of the dual system’s tendency to exclude weaker learners, a

<sup>1</sup> BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) (Hrsg.), 2004, Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes, p. 73, at [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dji.de/familienkompetenzen/DasInstrument.pdf>

stronger demand for change has been seen in recent years. This in turn forces stakeholders to search for new instruments offering lifelong learning and development for all.

All in all there is a variety of approaches for validating informal and non-formal learning in Germany and it can be stated that there are now first ambitions to work on more transparency as a condition for the development of broader accepted solutions.

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## 16.0 Greece

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## 16.0 Greece

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*By Anna Manoudi (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 16.1 Introduction

Even though there are few systems in use for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Greece, the profile of validation has been rising on the national policy agenda over the past few years. Prompted to a large extent by the European policy agenda, but also from a need to rationalise the education and training system in Greece, the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been in discussion for a number of years. This is especially so for the public sector institutions responsible for adult education and VET, but an increasing involvement of the social partners and key stakeholders in the debate can be detected. However, there is still no legal framework for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. These facts can be attributed to both the difficulty of evaluating non-formal and informal learning and to the conflicting interests of professional associations who feel that their professional rights might be threatened<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, the law (passed at the end of 2003 and activated in 2006) for interlinking VET systems is a positive development that is placing the foundations for validation methods in the near future.

### 16.2 Public Sector

#### 16.2.1 Institutional framework

Historically, there has been fragmentation and lack of coordination among the various educational and training streams and levels in Greece. General education, technical vocational education, adult education and initial VET are all supervised by the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs. The initial VET system, supervised by the Ministry of Education was set up from 1992 onwards around Institutes of Vocational Education (IEK) and with the Organisation of Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) as the responsible agency. The General Secretariat for Adult Education (Geniki Grammateia Ekpaidefsis Enilikon, GSAE), under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for lifelong learning in Greece and in turn supervises the Institute of Adult Lifelong Education (IDEKE), responsible for implementing actions in the field of lifelong learning in Greece.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. CEDEFOP.

Continuing vocational training, on-the-job training and active labour market programmes are governed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and its supervising bodies, the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS) and the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). In addition, several other ministries and organisations operate their own systems of vocational education and training at sectoral level.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Protection is active in the field of continuing vocational training through Vocational Training Centres (KEK) and through the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS), the authority and policy maker for the development and implementation of an accreditation system for continuing vocational training. The social partners participate in the EKEPIS processes in a consultative role, contributing to the framing and implementation of policies in the field of accreditation of continuing vocational training. The Ministry of Education and OEEK also remain key players and the Ministry of Education has been appointed as the National Authority for the European LLL Programme (2007-2013).

The effort of EKEPIS, established in 1997, to ensure quality in the provision of continuing vocational training and improve effectiveness of training services in Greece has been evolving step by step through the development of accreditation systems, which were designed upon social dialogue with the active participation of the social partners and key stakeholders and set transparent legislated criteria and procedures.

First, EKEPIS developed the system for the accreditation of Vocational Training Centres (KEK), i.e. ensuring that the accredited training structures have the appropriate infrastructure.

The process moved on to the development of the system for the accreditation of Trainers for Adults and EKEPIS has compiled a Registry of accredited trainers, who have eligibility for employment in EU co-funded programs offered by KEK accredited by EKEPIS. Further, the organisation developed the system for the accreditation of Support Services Professionals, who provide support services tailored to the needs of the social vulnerable groups, and has respectively compiled a Registry of accredited support services professionals, who have eligibility for employment in EU co-funded programs

EKEPIS is also responsible for the accreditation of Occupational Profiles on which continuing vocational training programmes are built. The accreditation of occupational profiles is given in agreement between a representative each from EKEPIS, OEEK, PAEP SA (Employment Observatory Research – Informatics SA), as well as employers' and employees' representatives and a process of accrediting 66 occupational profiles by the end of 2008 is currently being rolled out (see below for further details).

The following step is for EKEPIS to implement the accreditation system for Vocational Training Programs offered by accredited vocational training centres (KEK). Continuing vocational training programmes are accredited on the basis of accredited occupational profiles. EKEPIS aims to accredit 80 training programmes during the first stage of implementation. The accreditation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by the trainees, who have successfully completed an accredited training program is a next step for EKEPIS.

The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs which implements the national policy for education has the overall responsibility and supervises formal vocational education and training, through the National Vocational Education and Training System (ESEEK), established by Law 2009/1992. The Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (O.E.E.K.) that was established within the framework of the National Vocational Education and Training System in 1992, has administrative and economic independence and is the responsible body for the Initial VET provision in Greece.

OEEK Provides initial or supplementary vocational training, establishes and operates the Vocational Training Institutes, determines the curricula of public and private Vocational Training Institutes, recognises and qualifies the professions which correspond to vocational education and training, determines vocational rights of all vocational education and training levels, as illustrated in Law 2009/92, in co-operation with competent Ministries and social partners and finally is the only authority responsible for the certification of initial VET.

A national consultation process has been launched by the Ministry of Education for the development of a National Qualifications Framework and its links with the European Qualifications' Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Policy makers, social partners, national experts and VET stakeholders are all participating in this discussion.

A National LLL Committee has been created, which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH). The Committee is made up of representatives, policy makers and experts from all Ministries and organisations that are directly involved in both the strategic planning and the implementation of LLL policies, along with representatives of various stakeholders, trade unions and members from the HEIs. In addition, Lifelong Learning Institutes have been established in HEIs and in Social Partners Structures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hellas National Report 2007, Education and Training 2010

## 16.2.2 The developing legal framework

Up until 1999-2000, there were few channels of communication or coordination between the systems of initial and continuing vocational training but, at that time and under the pressure of the social partners, it was decided to find avenues for closer cooperation and more efficient coordination. This led to the passing of Law 3191/2003 on developing a 'National System for Linking Vocational Education and Training with Employment' (ESSEEKA). ESSEEKA has been developed to exploit synergies and promote collaboration among the various ministries and numerous governmental agencies and bodies active in the fields of VET and employment in Greece. This was a significant step, at national level, in the direction of interlinking systems and actions in the policy areas of VET and employment: i.e. diagnosis of labour market needs; secondary level vocational education; initial vocational education and training; continuous vocational training; accreditation of vocational training and occupational qualifications regardless of the way acquired; vocational guidance and counselling and linking with the labour market. For each of these sub-systems, roles, responsibilities and coordination arrangements have been explicitly defined. The legal framework provides that the system will be composed of a core National Council, which is to be aided by one steering committee and six coordination committees (one for each sub-system), as well as by a technical support unit.

Even though the ESSEEKA law was passed in 2003, it had remained inactive since then. A first step towards implementation was taken in 2006 by setting up the High Level Committee for ESSEEKA, which will function as the core group that will implement all the other provisions of the Law. The High Level Committee held its meetings during the second half of 2006 and 2007 focusing on operational issues that have necessitated an amendment to the Law, as well as analysis of the six systems, as envisaged in the Law (i.e. recording labour market needs and vocational guidance and counselling).

Another significant step was taken in 2005, when the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Education together promoted the new law on 'Systematisation of Lifelong Learning' (Law 3369/2005).<sup>1</sup> This Law constitutes the first integrated strategy on lifelong learning at national level, in contrast to the frequently fragmented policies of the past. The Law sets out the roles and responsibilities of each type of organisation involved in VET and lifelong learning. It also sets the framework for the establishment and function of the "National Committee for Life Long Learning" (see above), whose role is intended to be the better identification of needs in lifelong education and training, the improved cooperation between actors in lifelong education and training and its link with ESSEEKA. The Chairman of the High Level Committee sits in the Life Long Learning Committee. In particular, the Law sets the legal framework for:

<sup>1</sup> The Law was ratified in July 2005

- the accreditation of occupational profiles to be carried out by EKEPIS in cooperation with the social partners (described in detail further in the box below);
- the accreditation of VET Programs to be carried out by OEEK for initial VET and by EKEPIS for continuing vocational training and the respective certificates.

The May 2005 Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection and the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs led to a number of actions being implemented:

- Studies to describe and record trends in the labour market
- Initiation of vocational profiles' conversion into training programmes and elaboration of pilot mechanisms for validation of prior learning
- EKEPIS has completed the accreditation of Ongoing Vocational Training structures in the existing statutory framework
- Training courses have started for more than 10,000 instructors on the EKEPIS register, who will receive certification upon completion of the courses.

A Joint Ministerial Decision on the creation of Occupational [Vocational] Profiles (566/2006) was issued in 2006. Further, the Ministerial Decision No 110998/2006 regarding a common methodology for the creation of job profiles is considered to be a central and innovative development for VET in Greece.<sup>1</sup>

#### Developing 66 occupational profiles

The process of designing 66 occupational profiles was initiated by EKEPIS in early 2007, with close involvement of the social partners. The occupational profiles cover a multitude of emerging occupations and economic sectors including commerce, tourism, industry and banking. The social partners are actively involved in defining these occupational profiles, the relevant knowledge, skills and competence for each occupation and the learning pathways and training programs that need to be followed in each case. The national level social partners have taken the initiative to coordinate their input for the design of each occupational profile to ensure consistent quality throughout the 66 occupations.

Each profile can extend to the whole range of knowledge, skills and competence gained through education and training required for the specific job profile and in line with existing labour market needs. Priorities for the development of job profiles are justified by existing (and persisting) fast changing job requirements as proposed by employers and employees, as well as national priorities set by the government.<sup>2</sup>

These profiles will subsequently be accredited and training institutions will then be expected to adapt their curricula in accordance with these occupational profiles. This is a significant initiative for Greece illustrating the involvement of the social partners and experts in validation of non-formal and informal learning and in improving the link between training and the requirements of the labour market.

<sup>1</sup> 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

In line with the legislation, training programmes will be accredited on the condition that they are based on the respective accredited job profile. To date, the following programmes have been accredited under priority conditions:

- Training Programme for Trainers for Trainers for Adults.
- Training Programme for Trainers for Adults.
- Training Programme for Trainers for Support Services Professionals.
- Training Programme for Support Services Professionals.

The accreditation system for knowledge, skills and competence will enter the implementation stage after the implementation of the system for the accreditation of training programs. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence will be evaluated and certified upon successful completion of the accredited training program.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, as already mentioned, a national consultation process is underway between policy makers, social partners, national experts and VET stakeholders more widely, in order to develop a National Qualifications Framework in Greece that will fit within the framework of the EQF and ECVET. The formal educational system, including higher education, has already been classified according to the 8 levels of the European Qualifications Framework.<sup>2</sup>

### 16.2.3 Existing methods and instruments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

Currently, upon successful completion of a continuing vocational training program, participants are provided with a certificate of attendance by the accredited Vocational Training Centres (KEK). Such programs are not integrated in the formal VET system and such certificates do not have official state recognition but may have a kind of recognition in the labour market.

The Education Departments of various Ministries and major public corporations also plan vocational in-service training programmes for their own staff. These courses lead to certificates which are taken into account for career development within each Ministry or company.

Informal learning is provided by: the Second Chance Schools for adults who have not completed compulsory education; the Adult Education Centres (KEE); the Parents' Schools (Scholes Goneon); the Centre for Distance Lifelong Education and Training of Adults (KEEENAP). Lifelong learning programmes lead to the acquisition of either a

<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html)

‘Certificate of Training’ (this is awarded for programmes that last for up to 75 hours) or a ‘Certificate of Lifelong Learning’ (awarded for programmes that last for up to 250 hours).

In terms of specific methods for validation, in 2003, the Ministry of Education set up a system of summative assessment, based on examinations to confirm and certify the knowledge of modern languages obtained through non-formal training. The process leads to obtaining the ‘National Language Certificate’ which is not linked to the formal education system, it mainly targets adults and is recognized as a work qualification. This Certificate has adopted the scale of six levels of language competence proposed by the European Council. It can be obtained by Greek native speakers for foreign languages including English, French, German and Italian, while foreign nationals can obtain certification for their knowledge of Modern Greek.

One of the main norms of the assessment is transparency and for this reason detailed information on the certification method is widely available on the internet and through communication with the Ministry and its agencies. The details of the structure and content of the certification procedure are available for the benefit of the language learners, language teachers and employers.

A more recent development is that the System for the Accreditation of Greek Language Competence for Immigrants was established in 2006. The General Secretariat for Adult Education (GSAE) has developed this system which provides for the accreditation and recognition of Greek language competence for immigrants at four levels of competence. Those who successfully complete the final (4<sup>th</sup> level) of the GSAE’s educational programme on Greek language and culture can participate in twice-yearly examinations to obtain a Certificate of Greek Language Competence. This Certificate is a pre-requisite for obtaining a long-stay permit in Greece.

Last but not least, ‘Second Chance Schools’ was introduced in 1997 with great success, to offer adults who had not completed compulsory education, a second chance to do so. Graduates of the second chance school are awarded a Certificate which is equivalent to the Junior High School Certificate. This Certificate is recognised for employment in the Public Sector and allows holders to proceed to higher secondary general education or to vocational training programmes in IEKs, KEKs, and other structures offering adult training.

Individuals who have skills in using computers can obtain certificates from examination centres. These examinations lead to the acquisition of various licenses, such as the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), which is recognized as a formal qualification in both the private and public sectors. OEEK is responsible for the certification of providers of such training and the issuing of the State Certificate.

There are a number of other Leonardo da Vinci pilot projects in which Greek organisations have been partners. For example, Greece was involved in the work on the direction of Learning Outcomes approach, which may help to lay the foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the future (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci pilots EPO – EuroPostman and COMINTER-International Commerce).

### **16.3 Private Sector**

In relation to the private sector, the Federation of Greek Industries / SEV, the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (IOVE), the Greek Business Management Association (EEDE), et. al., contribute in various ways to the consolidation of a coherent LLL platform (PRAXIS Network, ALBA graduate degrees, etc.). The Social partners are encouraged to be involved in various stages of education and VET, such as the development and implementation of the relevant legal framework, via their participation in the National Council of Education.<sup>1</sup>

There is no specific vocational qualifications certification system for assessing and recognising competences acquired through informal or non-formal learning in the private sector. For employers, the absence of a qualifications certification system leads to non-acknowledgement of skills which have been acquired through informal learning.

The following validation of learning acquired through training courses provided outside the formal education system, however, takes place.

- Certification is offered by Private Educational Institutes for courses offered by them but these are not officially recognised by the State. However, certificates of attendance at such courses are an element that is sometimes taken into account by employers to the advantage of candidates who possess such certificates.
- Certain major private companies, including in particular companies in the banking and IT sector, offer certification for the in-house training courses they offer to their own employees.
- There is also some opportunity for acknowledgement of skills via the acquisition of certificates or a licence to exercise certain professions which are issued by a number of agencies.
- The European Computer Driving License (ECDL) etc. is well sought after in Greece and recognised both by public and private sector employers. The number of registered

<sup>1</sup> 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html)

persons in the programme has reached 2.5% of the total population of Greece (this is nearly double the EU average)<sup>1</sup> indicating a high degree of interest in ECDL etc. in Greece. Similar certificates are also provided by private sector companies for various information technology applications in collaboration with IT multinationals (Microsoft, Oracle etc.) Acquisition of IT basic knowledge and skills is recognized by the Supreme Council for Personnel Selection (ASEP) of the Greek State on the condition that the respective certificates (except those acquired through the formal educational system) are awarded by the following certification bodies accredited by OEEK:

- a) ECDL Hellas S.A. (1.2.2006)
- b) Vellum Global Educational Services (22.2.2006)
- c) Infotest (22.2.2006)
- d) ICT Hellas A.E. (22.2.2006)
- e) KEY-CERT (5.4.2006)
- f) ACTA A.E. (17.5.2006)

The learning modules are a) word processing, b) spreadsheets and c) internet services.

The certificates awarded are valid for three (3) years from the day of issue.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.ecdl.gr/ecdlacceptance.aspx>

### 16.3.1 Examples of individual companies

The social partners from Greece have also recommended a number of individual companies that have been engaged in recognising and certifying non-formal and informal learning. As an example, Aluminium de Grèce SA<sup>1</sup> has established a 'Continuing Progress System' where employees record their own existing knowledge, skills and competences through team discussions and through the personal assessment processes. In this way, each employee is closely involved in determining their own and their teams' future skills needs, helping to set out the necessary training which then takes place either in-house or outside the company.

Branches of private companies offering professional certification linked to international sets of standards have also recently started to operate in Greece. As an example, the Staregister company started operating in Greece in 2006 and has since developed an accreditation scheme for professions such as ISO19011 Management Systems' Inspectors and for Consultants on ISO19011 Management Systems.

### 16.3.2 Sectoral projects developed with EU funding

A number of pilot projects within the EQUAL and LEONARDO programmes include elements relevant to the development of methods and tools for the validation of skills and competences in different sectors.

In the Greek context, projects for the ICT and environment sectors have been particularly popular. Within the framework of the European Community Initiative EQUAL (1<sup>st</sup> cycle), four Equal projects ("Technomatheia" promoting the distance accreditation of skills in SMEs, "ENVI-E" for the accreditation of professional qualifications in the environmental sector, 'Spartakos' for the support of unemployed through the accreditation of their qualifications and 'Ifestos' for the use of accredited technical skills as a tool to fight racism) took place from 2001-2005. Further, all of the main VET bodies had an active involvement in the development of the National Thematic Network (NTN) titled "Accreditation of Vocational Qualifications and Skills". The NTN actually addressed the need for developing an accreditation system for occupational qualifications (knowledge, skills and competencies), which would be based on job profiles, in response to the needs of the labour market (small & medium sized enterprises). The outcome was policy recommendations emanating from the pilot application in certain professions. These highlighted the need for a comprehensive and integrated accreditation system, which would be competence-based according to national occupational profiles and standards

<sup>1</sup> Based on information from the 'Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications', Fourth Follow up report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and on brief telephone discussion with the company's Education Dept

and certain were incorporated into the Greek accreditation framework. This can be considered a case of positive impact on policy-making.

Within the framework of EQUAL (2nd cycle: 2005-2008), a project is being carried out on the accreditation of educational packages and the recognition of knowledge acquired through work in IT applications and in technical occupations.

The Leonardo project EPO “European Postmen”, which started in 2004 is co-ordinated by the Hellenic Post Office and involving Greece Continuing Training Centres as well as the Vocational Education and Training Organisation<sup>1</sup>, aims at developing a common competence profile for European postmen involving 15 units and for two different skills levels.

#### **16.4 The Third Sector**

An example of a self-standing validation system of summative assessment is that of a major non-profit association, the Hellenic Business Administration Corporation (E.E.D.E.)<sup>2</sup>. This certification is not part of any formal validation system, but the certificates in question enjoy the recognition of employers. Hence, the validation system offers ‘social recognition’ of the training received. This is because EEDE is widely known for offering quality non-formal training. EEDE offers a number of ‘Post-Graduate Programmes’. The Programmes recognise prior learning, since they are open to individuals who have either a University degree or possess 8 years of work experience.

Over 2,000 individuals have participated in the EEDE ‘Post-Graduate Programme on Business Administration’ since 1989. The Programme lasts for one year and there are 4 thematic cycles. A round of examinations is held after the end of each thematic cycle and there is a requirement to submit a dissertation at the end of the course. If the results of the 4 examination rounds and the dissertation are satisfactory, a certificate is issued to the participant, certifying the knowledge gained and recognises the holder as ‘possessing extraordinary management knowledge and ability’. This certification is not part of any formal system, is self-standing and is recognised in the labour market by employers.

<sup>1</sup> This is an independent organisation that belongs to the Ministry of Education.

<sup>2</sup> The Hellenic Business Administration Corporation (E.E.D.E) is a non-profit association but fees are charged for the postgraduate programmes it delivers.

## 16.5 Conclusions

For cultural reasons, educational attainment is very important for younger generations of Greeks. The Greek society would be very receptive to any initiatives aiming to validate informal and non-formal learning and that would help clarify the complex environment of adult learning in Greece. A national qualifications' certification system has not yet been developed in Greece but the issue is being widely discussed and significant developments have been taking place in recent years. In the Greek legalistic society, it is important that the foundation of relevant legislative provisions have been set in order to allow the creation of systems for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

EKEPIS, established in 1997, has set in train a number of developments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning including developing the occupational profiles on which the continuing training programmes are built. Early 2007 saw the start of a process to design 66 occupational profiles in close cooperation with the social partners. Other bodies have also been active in the sphere of validation, such as OEEK, which is the responsible authority for the certification of qualifications.

Another positive recent development is that the provisions of the ESSEEKA framework law started to be implemented in 2006. This law had been passed in 2003 but had remained inactive since then. This law sets out a framework for better co-ordinating initial and continuing vocational training and linking both systems with the labour market and is expected to help in the direction of developing a national system for occupational qualifications.

The national validation and certification system of Foreign Language competence and proficiency which has been in place since 2003 has been operating successfully. A system for accrediting the Greek Language Competence of Immigrants was also put in place in 2006. European funding, through the Equal and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, has supported a number of pilot projects with relation to the development of validation. European (e.g. European Computer Driving Licence) and private sector (e.g. Microsoft, Oracle etc) systems for validating computer competences are now being used successfully in Greece and have been enthusiastically received both by adult learners and employers.

# 17.0 Hungary<sup>1</sup>

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## 17.1 Introduction

In Hungary, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is still in a developing phase. Although some initial legislative provisions are in place, their implementation is still in its early stages<sup>2</sup> and there remains considerable work to be done. Moreover, in spite of the existence of major legislative provisions, the means of their implementation and control have not yet been developed<sup>3</sup>. The existing practices enabling validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning are scattered and currently, there are more opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning within the adult education system. However, no uniform system, similar to the French VAE, exists<sup>4</sup>.

In its main policy documents in the field of education and training, the Hungarian government refers explicitly to the need to establish a framework for recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, mainly through the introduction of concrete tools such as Europass, the competence card or the adult education card<sup>5</sup>.

The main obstacle in the development and implementation of the coherent system of validation of informal and non-formal learning is the dominance of formal qualifications in Hungarian society. Another significant factor is the unwillingness of training institutions to recognise and validate qualifications and skills acquired outside their own programmes. This unwillingness is particularly strong among higher education providers<sup>6</sup>.

It appears that there has been little action at the level of individual actors within the private and third sectors, perhaps due to an expectation that the state will lead on the development of such an initiative.

It is thus clear that there remains work to be done, in order to further develop and implement the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Hungary.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Hungary chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Cohen Zoon (Ecorys Netherlands)

<sup>2</sup> Conclusion drew on the basis of the stakeholder interviews carried out in the framework of this study

<sup>3</sup> National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.12

<sup>4</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Hungary, published by Cedefop

<sup>5</sup> National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.13

<sup>6</sup> National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.13

## 17.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

### 17.2.1 Legislative provisions

Although there is no uniform system of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Hungary, there are already several elements of such a system. As a result, Hungary is viewed as a country where a legal framework for assessment and recognition of professional experience, including non-formal and informal learning is already in place.<sup>1</sup>

The most important measure that enables recognition and validation of prior learning is one of the provisions of the Vocational Education and Training Act (2001) which stipulates that *adults entering for training may request preliminary assessment of his/her skill level, which the training institution is obliged to identify and take into consideration*<sup>2</sup>. Recognition of prior learning, even in training programmes awarding a state-recognised qualification of the National Qualifications Register (*Országos Képzési Jegyzék, OKJ*), is guaranteed by the fact that the number of teaching hours is not centrally defined (only the maximum number specified in the OKJ) which provides opportunity for the adjustment of programmes to the participants' actual needs.<sup>3</sup>

The Act on higher education<sup>4</sup> does not contain any *explicit* reference to recognition and validation of knowledge previously acquired by informal and non-formal methods<sup>5</sup>; however, one of its updated sections stipulates that *the requirements prescribed by the curriculum do not need to be fulfilled if the student has previously acquired them and can provide authenticated proof of such acquisition. For the recognition of requirements fulfilled based on work experience the institution must obtain proof of acquired knowledge by verbal, written or practical tests*. In this way, there is a formal basis for recognition of informal and non-formal learning, although it does not contain these specific terms. However, as stated at the beginning of this report, there are obstacles on a practical level whereby the higher education providers, namely teachers and managers of the study-related administration, are unwilling to embrace these new methods<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Colardyn D., Bjørnåvold J. (2004). The learning continuity: European inventory on validating non-formal and informal learning – National policies and practices in validating non-formal and informal learning

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education (2005). Report of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Hungary to the 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the EU Work Programme on Education and Training

<sup>3</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Act. Government Decree 79/2006

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education (2005). Report of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Hungary to the 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the EU Work Programme on Education and Training

<sup>6</sup> National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.13-14

## 17.2.2 Recent policy developments

The Hungarian strategy for lifelong learning (LLL) - in accordance with the European concept of LLL - focuses on the concept of knowledge and a broader interpretation of learning, the development of individual competences. The Hungarian LLL strategy was adopted at governmental level in autumn 2005 and is intended to apply for the period ending in 2013, similar to the support term of the EU Structural Funds. Nevertheless it comprises several goals whose implementation is envisaged for 2010, in conformity with the EU Lisbon Strategy. The recognition of informal and non-formal learning is referred to within the strategy as a key area for development.

Another important policy development in Hungary has been the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, and in particular measure 3.2.1, which aims to renew the system of vocational qualifications by decreasing their number in the 21 occupational areas (in OKJ) and linking them better to the occupational (job) classification system (*Foglalkozások Egységes Osztályozási Rendszere, FEOR*), as well as the introduction of the modular system<sup>1</sup>.

A recent policy document setting out the strategy for the economic and social development of Hungary<sup>2</sup> underlined the importance of providing opportunities for validation and recognition of skills acquired either in or outside the education system. To this end, a system of independent examinations is going to be developed, which is also to ensure objective assessment and evaluation.

Finally, the Ministry of Education initiated the drawing up of a concept for developing the national qualifications framework (NQF) in April 2006. The finalised concept emphasises that the framework is to be regarded as a strategic tool suitable for supporting individual learning and career planning on the one hand, and for helping training providers in developing their programmes as a reference on the other; thus aiding a more successful harmonisation of the training outcomes between the various sectors and subsectors (general education, vocational training, higher education). At the same time, devising and introducing the NQF may provide an opportunity to extend the practice of acknowledging the results of non-formal and informal learning and to increase awareness thereof.<sup>3</sup>

Strategic preparation work, based on the above-mentioned concept, is being carried out with the involvement of the ministries concerned. The strategy for devising the National Qualifications Framework must be submitted to the Government in November 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

<sup>2</sup> New Hungary, Freedom and Solidarity, The Programme of the Government of the Republic of Hungary for a Successful, Modern and Just Hungary, 2006-2010

<sup>3</sup> National Report on the Progress in The Implementation of the Education And Training 2010 Work Programme 2005

The introduction of the EQF and the development of a national qualifications framework will mean that the traditions of the Hungarian education and training system must be adapted to an outcome-oriented approach. This is a significant challenge and lies behind the reservations and doubts expressed by the majority of the representatives of the training institutions in Hungary.

The strategy acknowledges the fact that the development of the necessary conditions and the developments themselves will take several years (some experts believe it may take seven to eight years). Based on the agreement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education and Culture, the developments laying the foundations for the NQF, and the development and introduction of the NQF have been integrated at several points into the National Development Plan II for the period of 2007-13.

Background activities intended to strengthen professional support and the wider acceptance of the outcome-oriented approach must also be noted, such as the series of professional events planned in the near future in the framework of a cluster for the recognition of learning outcomes, which is linked to the “Education and Training 2010” programme (workshop and PLA).

### 17.2.3 Current validation initiatives in practice

The procedure of the assessment of the level of knowledge that participants may request in adult training is not regulated by the law, although such services must be provided by accredited adult training institutions. In language learning, for example, applicants can be divided into groups based only on the assessment of their knowledge.

The main method of validating prior learning (including informal and non-formal learning) continues to be the examinations that award state-recognised vocational qualifications<sup>1</sup>. These exams include<sup>2</sup>:

- master examination (mestervizsga);
- training regulated by the public authorities (hatósági képzés); and
- language proficiency examinations where the relevant regulations do not require participation in preparatory training.

Although imported, the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) system is thought to work well in Hungary and is a good example of a method of certifying skills.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that these are the only possible qualifications which can be validated/recognised.

<sup>2</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

The actual methods applied in adult training for prior learning assessment are rather varied, due to the lack of uniform standards concerning even the tests or examination requirements of the modules of a given vocational qualification. Therefore adult training providers usually apply the practical assignments, theoretical examination questions, test sheets of the subject or the module/final exams used in the course of their training programme also to assess participants' prior learning.<sup>1</sup>

#### National Institute for Adult Education – A project on the assessment of prior learning

The National Institute for Adult Education (*Nemzeti Felnőttképzési Intézet*) launched an experimental project (through tendering) with the participation of 50 accredited adult training institutions. The aim of the project was to realise the assessment of prior learning in a uniform computer-based framework, and to obtain information on the practice of prior learning assessment of the participating institutions, namely, on:

- the vocational, subject or module fields in which they apply it;
- the test sheets they use;
- the number of adults participating in it; and
- the results obtained.

The analysis of this information would be used for the improvement of the system, the long-term goals being to make the system of prior learning assessment more uniform and credit-awarding, make prior learning recognisable partly or completely in the training programmes. This would increase the opportunity to adjust training to individual needs and to develop shorter and more efficient training programmes.

The original goals of the project were modified due to the launch of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme Measure 3.5.1. (see above) which involves the development of a large number of modular adult training programmes and materials as well as measuring tools for prior learning assessment in 200 vocations. The experiences and results of the prior project (see above) were be used in this new programme to inform the development of national standards for prior learning assessment.<sup>2</sup>

The three year project ended with very modest results. Less than 100 assessed persons registered in the 50 pilot institutions and there has been no assessment of the project outcomes. The application of the provisions relating to validation of prior learning within this legislation thus appears to be still in the early stages of implementation and the regulation is considered so far to have been relatively 'relaxed'.<sup>3</sup>

#### 17.2.4 Future developments

The implementation of the action plan for the strategy for Vocational Education Development, together with the LLL strategy could constitute a substantial move in the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

<sup>2</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by Eva Tot, Hungarian National Education Institute

<sup>4</sup> Implementing the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005 Progress Report, Hungary

The development and introduction of a modular system of vocational qualifications are prerequisites of the recognition and validation of prior learning in Hungary. Support from the European Social Fund is currently being used to implement the development of the system of new training modules, partial and full vocational qualifications established on the basis of trade group analysis, the creation of the competence-based vocational training structure, the development of the system of documentation for vocational qualifications, the setting up of a system for the assessment and validation of competence-based vocational education and formerly acquired knowledge (through formal, informal and non-formal learning), as well as the drawing up of methods for the measurement of preliminary knowledge, which provide a basis for the system-level introduction of the validation of preliminary knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Again, this development could therefore contribute to progress in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

However, in other areas, further work is required and certain barriers to the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning can be identified. For example, although the 2001 Act on Adult Education provided for the assessment of the level of prior learning and its consideration during training as a right of the participants in adult education, in practice no regulation regarding the means of its implementation or control was linked to the legislation.<sup>2</sup>

Inter-ministerial cooperation and in many cases cooperation between internal departments within the same ministry are in need of essential improvement. In many key areas - including the measurement, assessment, recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning outcomes - the specific education policy measures are still waiting to be introduced. These are typical areas, where a number of ministries are concerned; therefore, further enhancement of cooperation is needed.<sup>3</sup>

In higher education, great aversion to the appearance and introduction of the assessment and recognition of knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning can be perceived (mainly teachers and managers of the study related administration). However, the establishment of validation centres in the framework of the NHDP serves precisely the purpose of making the organisational, methodological and financial conditions available to this end. Apart from the above legal provision, no other measures in this field of higher education have been taken on the part of the Government.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid*

<sup>2</sup> National Report on the Progress in The Implementation of the Education And Training 2010 Work Programme

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

Moreover, Hungary is lagging behind in building the system of lifelong learning (i.e. the creation of a rich range of learning opportunities consisting of elements building on each other). This is because, although the various educational subsectors are becoming increasingly open towards the needs of students and groups interested in the quality of educational services, this, however, results in further divergence rather than stronger links between the elements of the education sector. One element of this backlog is the under-evaluation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning and, as a result, the under-development of means enabling its recognition.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest obstacle is the continuing dominance of formal qualifications in Hungarian society. The other unavoidable factor is that the educational and training institutions at present are not interested in recognising learning activities which are conducted outside their own programmes. Arising from this behaviour, typical of the training system and its players, it is to be expected that the practice of the validation of informal and non-formal learning will develop by integrating into the formal qualification system or will become closely connected with it.

#### 17.2.5 Stakeholders' responsibilities

The following institutions each play a role in the development of the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Hungary.

##### Ministry of Education and Culture

The Ministry oversees the pedagogical, professional and educational efforts in public education. It is responsible for drawing up the necessary development plans, creating the legislation required for such operations and ensuring that the institutions work at the required standard of quality. To this end, it organises pedagogical, professional assessments, examinations and surveys in the field of public education. It ensures that children are supplied with high-quality textbooks by elaborating the order and conditions of schoolbook registration.<sup>2</sup>

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the coordination of the lifelong learning national interministerial working group and the OECD Recognition of non formal and informal learning project.

##### Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

The recognition of skills is a subject, which plays a particular role in making the labour market more efficient. Therefore, the Ministry of Labour cooperates with the Ministry of Education on the promotion of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>1</sup> National Report on the Progress in The Implementation of the Education And Training 2010 Work Programme

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the website of the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture, [www.okm.gov.hu](http://www.okm.gov.hu)

The National Council of Adult Education and the National Vocational Education Council have been integrated under the new Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

### Structural Funds and European Social Fund

For developing and implementing the validation of non-formal and informal learning it is expected that Hungary will partly rely on financial resources coming from these Funds. The role of these funds is also to be found in official policy documents<sup>1</sup>.

## **17.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector**

### 17.3.1 Industry sectors

Hungarian umbrella organisations on a sectoral level have not really started to set up concrete initiatives regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. There are no particular sectors which are currently working on this topic. In general, there seems to be an expectation on the sectoral level that initiatives will be taken by the government and national bodies (ministries)<sup>2</sup>. There seems to be a centralised approach in operation - which is top-down instead of bottom-up (coming from the industrial bodies or industries themselves).

The European institution for craft and small businesses, the Avignon Academy, has developed a tool for small and craft enterprises that is nowadays used in Hungary for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. According to the Avignon Academy, non-formal and informal learning may be easier in small and craft enterprises than in larger companies. First of all, the informal method of acquisition of competency in small and craft companies is prevalent for a large number of competencies. Secondly, the workers of craft enterprises have a high degree of knowledge in competencies even if this knowledge does not correspond to the standardised disciplines. Thirdly, the worker is able to perform an activity even if he is not able to decode which are the elements of standard knowledge related to the activity<sup>3</sup>. With a fair amount of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Hungary, there seem certainly possibilities for this country in expanding the use of systems of validating non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>1</sup> National Adult Training Council, *Tasks to be accomplished in preparation for the accession to the European Union*; discussion paper

<sup>2</sup> This particular information was given by Mr. Nehez Gyozo of the Hungarian Ministry of Education

<sup>3</sup> Source: The Avignon Academy

### 17.3.2 Individual companies

Informal and non-formal learning is usually recognized on the labour market through facilitating access to certain jobs (the requirement of several years' professional work experience is included in most job announcements) and also through promotion.<sup>1</sup>

However, like the industrial umbrella organisations, it has not been possible to identify a significant number of Hungarian companies, which have started to set up processes for the promotion or implementation of the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The companies which are currently working on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Hungary, are primarily West-European multinational companies. They have introduced general international concepts amongst their networks. The Hungarian Ministry of Education hopes the possibilities for Hungarian employees in French (Renault and Danone), Italian (Fiat) and German (BASF) organisations may eventually lead to a greater interest in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Hungarian companies as well. However, foreign companies often have training and skill certification systems which they do not wish to disclose to the public.

## 17.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

So far, there have been very few attempts made regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Hungarian third sector. It would appear that in the years to come, Hungary needs to work on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in both public and private organisations. Activities such as the completion of an infrastructure for the recognition of skills must be fulfilled, before the thoughts regarding the voluntary sector can be presented. In some other European countries we see that only after the introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the public and private sector, the introduction into the voluntary sector can take place. In that sense, the voluntary sector may not be the first step to be taken in relation to the validation of non-formal and in-formal learning.

There are voluntary organisations focusing their work on social groups with a low level of education. These organisations can play an active role in “introducing” the concept of validation, for example through a special procedure, into this unique field of training.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Hungarian ministry of Education is aware of the fact that much of non-formal and informal learning takes place during voluntary work. According to one of our respondents<sup>3</sup>, the ministry assumes that this is a possibility for sustaining efficiency

<sup>1</sup> Refernet overview Hungary

<sup>2</sup> Comment by Eva Tot, Hungarian National Education Institute

<sup>3</sup> This particular information was given by Mr. Nehez Gyozo of the Hungarian Ministry of Education

advantages in the labour market. In the following years targets will need to be set to validate aspects of learning in voluntary work. According to the authorities, a good way for expanding the possibilities of non-formal and informal learning in the voluntary sector are possibly found in the youth sector as in other European countries, the achievements in the youth sector are promising.

Much will depend on the speed of the process in the public and private sector. If Hungary succeeds in developing a basis for non-formal and informal learning in a couple of years, this may lead to an interest for initiatives for the voluntary sector<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J., *The learning continuity*, 2004.

## 17.5 Conclusions

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has not yet developed significantly in Hungary. The first policy outlines have been presented, particularly in the context of Hungary as an accession country of the European Union but so far, there are few concrete examples from practice.

Sectoral umbrella organisations and individual companies are still not involved in setting up initiatives. It appears that these bodies await national initiatives for starting up the implementation of non-formal and informal learning in Hungary.

So far, no developments within the third or voluntary sector have been identified regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Nevertheless, in Hungary this is perceived as a possibility for the future.

In general, Hungary is in the first stages of introducing the validation of informal and non-formal learning between its borders. Although a number of solutions working in isolation can be identified (for instance, the ECDL examination system works with great success), and there are some experimental projects, but there is no unified system or standard process nationwide.

# 18.0 Iceland<sup>1</sup>

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*By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research).*

## 18.1 Introduction

In Iceland, the current qualification framework does not recognise non-formal or informal learning. However, the European policy agenda has influenced the country and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is now looking at developing a new framework, which is compatible with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). It will take an estimated three years before the new 'National Qualifications Framework' is launched but eventually Iceland should have a system in place that is capable of recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning nationally<sup>2</sup>.

Most of the work that has been undertaken on validation in Iceland since the last ECOTEC report was written in 2004 has been carried out by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC). This organisation was launched in December 2002 and has a specific remit to develop methods of validating non-formal and informal learning. Their work is however currently restricted to learners that have not completed upper secondary education and is mostly industry-based. It does not therefore include large sections of the learning population such as schools, upper secondary schools and universities. For these areas of learning, there is currently no common approach to validation.

## 18.2 Public Sector

With respect to public sector initiatives, it is currently the work of the Education and Training Service Centre that is the most significant with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture are overseeing the emerging National Qualifications Framework and this has the potential to provide an overriding framework for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

### 18.2.1 The National Qualifications Framework

The Ministry has recently written a new policy document "Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe" (2007), which details Iceland's position on the development of a new qualification framework.

*"On completion of its deliberations, the discussion group agrees that Iceland should consider the benefits of introducing a corresponding system in this country, while at the*

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Iceland chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Arnbjorn Olafsson (Educate Iceland)

<sup>2</sup> Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe (2007)

*same time designing a system that builds on a shift of emphasis where personal skills are accredited with a standardised methodology”<sup>1</sup>.*

A board has now been appointed and the Ministry plans to commence work on designing, promoting and finally introducing the new system. This work will include developing a reference model for the National Qualifications Framework (which will parallel the EQF), write descriptions of references for skills, knowledge and competencies and identify work methods, evaluation methods and quality references in non-formal learning. With respect to the latter, the Ministry will be working closely with the Education and Training Service Centre.

*“A period of three years must be allowed for the preparation phase. At the end of that period it should be possible to formally introduce the system and to provide the legislation, regulations/rules that will govern the work processes. At the same time the introduction of informal work rules and communication practices on which such systems are based should have been completed. The system shall cover all learning, non-formal and formal and shall be adapted to corresponding systems in other countries. Continued development of the system shall be in co-operation with the university sector”<sup>2</sup>.*

#### 18.2.2 Developing New National Methods for Validation

The Education and Training Service Centre (*Fræðslumiðstöð Atvinnulífsins*) has a service agreement with the Ministry, “... to aid the Ministry in developing methods to validate education and educational progress, including validation and accreditation of non-formal learning and training in co-operation with work life and educational providers. Also, to assist in developing personal portfolios for individuals within the target group [i.e. unskilled workers].”

The target group for the ETSC is currently people with little formal education, but will also later include qualified workers on the labour market.

As such The Education and Training Service Centre undertakes most of the work with industry on validating non-formal and informal learning. Since its launch in 2003, the centre has established itself as a pivotal actor in the development of methods and procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. They have been able to achieve this due to their strong ties with industry, the education system (both formal and non-formal) and the Ministry of Education. The procedures developed will be widely acknowledged in Iceland because of the ETSC’s credibility nationally.

<sup>1</sup> “Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe” (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe” (2007)

## **New Processes and Procedures to Validate Prior Learning**

In 2007, the ETSC published a brochure documenting a common approach to validating non-formal and informal learning. This can be downloaded from their web site<sup>1</sup> and used in a range of educational settings, both formal and non-formal. The processes and procedures followed parallel the common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and are split into five phases<sup>2</sup>, as described below.

1) **Information and feedback.** Before the validation is carried out, the individual is informed about the goals of the validation, the role of the assessors, possible outcomes and the rights of the individual in the process.

2) **Documentation.** The individual looks back on his/her life and documents the competences that he/she has acquired. The individual gathers appropriate documents, such as recommendations from employers, job descriptions, diplomas, certificates, samples and projects. The individual is given access to a counsellor who can provide guidance and support through the whole process.

3) **Analyses.** An interview between the individual and an assessor to decide how the individual's competence measures up to certain qualification requirements. The counsellor that took part in the documentation stage can also take part in the interview.

In some cases it is at this point that the individual fulfils the qualification requirements for a certain part or module and subsequently receives validation and recognition for his/her competence (thus moving straight to stage five of the process). If it is unclear whether the competence is sufficient, a confirmation process is carried out (stage four).

4) **Confirmation.** The confirmation of competence is carried out according to a confirmation plan, accepted by the assessor and counsellor. The needs of the individual should be taken into account, for example by offering more time, using visual examples, technical confirmations, in order for the individual to be able to show his/her competence. It is important to look for other means than the conventional tests to confirm validation and to give the individual the possibility to choose appropriate methods.

5) **Validation and acceptance of competence.** A module is considered validated when it has been documented officially in the name of the individual as finished or passed. It is

<sup>1</sup> [www.frae.is](http://www.frae.is)

<sup>2</sup> ETSC, Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. Available at: [http://www.frae.is/files/{c575619e-c414-411d-be8b-8db0b708d781}\\_validation.pdf](http://www.frae.is/files/{c575619e-c414-411d-be8b-8db0b708d781}_validation.pdf)

important that the validation is accepted by the stakeholders and that they are well informed of the procedure of the validation of competence.

The ETSC therefore has now a common approach to validation, which it is able to apply to a number of projects.

The organisation has been involved in numerous pilot projects in different sectors and has considerable experience now of practically applying methods of validating informal and non-formal learning. These pilot projects are discussed further in the chapter for the private sector (3.0). The following section deals with legal frameworks for validation and examples of practices from other public agencies.

### 18.2.3 Examples of existing initiatives

Since the development of a national approach to validation is in its early stages, there are still examples of validation that occur in Iceland that have not yet been co-ordinated under one framework or one approach. The following are some examples of such initiatives.

#### 18.2.3.1 *Unemployment Agencies*

Unemployment agencies maintain a national database of job seekers. Information in the database includes information about an individual's formal education, work experience, skills and other competencies, such as language skills, management experience, driver's licence, computer skills, artistic talent and practical experience in industrial trades. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Directorate of Labour are responsible for labour issues in Iceland. Local unemployment agencies operated by the Department of Labour are charged with the task of providing information on available jobs and education to those seeking employment.

#### 18.2.3.2 *Enrolment in Upper Secondary Schools*

No comprehensive legislation applies to adult education in Iceland. The Upper Secondary School Act of 1996 however covers several aspects of adult education. Municipal education centres, union study centres and lifelong learning centres work together to prepare adults for re-entry in the educational system and further education. Adults are evaluated according to the requirements stated in the National Curriculum Guidelines. The guidelines state that<sup>1</sup>: *“Schoolmasters at upper secondary level are responsible for assessing and validating the student's previous education – both formal or non-formal. Non-formal education, in this context refers to the knowledge or skills that the individual has acquired through means other than formal education, such as privately run courses or experience gathered on the job market.”*

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture: National Curriculum Guidelines 2004

In reviewing previous studies, schools are expected to ascertain whether students have met the criteria for exemption into new courses or for completing studies at upper secondary level. If there is any doubt as to whether previous studies can be validated, the student has a right to undergo examination in order to demonstrate his actual skills and knowledge.

It has been shown that schools at upper secondary level have had difficulties in measuring or validating adults' work experience and informal and non-formal learning. This prompted the Ministry of Education to encourage schools to go further in validating learning and to try to gain new experiences when assessing individual learning in order to reach an appropriate and fair conclusion as to the proper starting point for each individual's new studies. Thus the schools have been asked to focus on the goals of the study programme in question and the actual skills and competencies of each individual seeking admission or assessment. It has been underlined that individuals have a right to special assessment examinations where there is doubt as to the correct starting point for studies in upper secondary school. The Ministry's policy is that repetition of previous paths of learning should be avoided at all costs.

#### 18.2.3.3 *Access to universities through recognition of competencies*

It is stated in art. 6 of the Law on Universities no. 136/1997 that universities can themselves decide who is admitted for studies at the university in question. Generally speaking, it is required that students have passed matriculation examination or its equivalent. In some cases applicants with substantial work experience who have not completed their matriculation examination may be admitted, but there is little evidence to suggest that any significant number of students are enrolled at universities in Iceland on this basis.

#### 18.2.3.4 *The Educational Gateway*

The Educational Gateway is a web-based environment for responding to the needs of students, teachers, schools, parents and others connected with education. The Educational Gateway includes a sub-site which deals with the validation and assessment of prior learning, where it is possible to find guidelines for self assessing prior vocational education. To begin with the guidelines will primarily benefit those seeking either to certify foreign vocational education and training or certify the vocational education obtained in Iceland for use abroad.

### **18.3 Private Sector**

Due to the work of the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), there have been a number of industry projects carried out using methods to validate non-formal and informal

learning. The following provides examples of this work between 2004 and 2007. These examples were provided by the ETSC.<sup>1</sup>

- **The Car Mechanics and Carpentry Industries**

In these industries there are considerable numbers of workers who have acquired a high level of practical skills but have dropped out of recognised training for various reasons, often because they do not feel that subjects such as Maths, Icelandic etc are relevant to their work. The validation process helps them to obtain the upper secondary qualifications they need by allowing their experience and knowledge to be used towards formal qualifications. In these latest projects as many as 30 carpenters and 20 car mechanics will become trained in their professions by validating their non-formal and informal learning.

- **The Social Work Sector**

This was a joint project between Efling Trade Union and the Education and Training Service Centre. It aimed to validate the competencies of unskilled employees at the Psychiatric Ward at Landspítali University Hospital to shorten the formal study path as social service workers.

- **The Telecomms Industry**

This was a joint development project between Iceland Telecom, Efling Trade Union, Starfsafl (fund for the educational support of low-qualified workers in the greater Reykjavik area), Reykjavik Technical School and the Education and Training Service Centre. The project aimed to develop methods of assessing and validating the competence of individuals with little formal education, who were employees at Iceland Telecom for them to shorten the formal telecommunication technician study path at the Reykjavik Technical School. As a part of this project, special focus was on developing methods for the employer to verify the workers job related skills.

<sup>1</sup> (May 2006) Larusdottir F “A Summary from the Education and Training Service Centre for the NVL Expert-net on Validation”

- **The Construction Industry**

This was a joint development project between Sudurnes Comprehensive College and Sudurnes Centre for Lifelong Learning. The Education and Training Service Centre assisted with methodology and provided tools for the project. The project focused on validating the competencies of construction workers with little formal education for the purpose of shortening their formal construction study path at the Sudurnes Comprehensive College. As a part of this project, special focus was on developing methods for the teachers to verify the workers job related skills.

- **The Engineering Industry**

This was a joint development project between Mímir-símennun Life Long Learning Centre, The Educational Centre of Metal Workers, Borgarholtsskóli Comprehensive College, and The Education and Training Service Centre. The project aimed to validate the competencies of experienced metal workers with little formal education in the purpose of shortening their formal metal study path at the Borgarholtsskóli Comprehensive College. As a part of this project, special focus was on developing methods for the teachers to verify the workers job related skills.

- **The Finance Sector**

Leonardo project led by the Education and Training Service Centre. The Education and Training Service Centre received a grant from the Leonardo Da Vinci vocational training programme of the European Commission for a pilot project entitled “The Value of Work”. The project aims to develop methods to validate the actual skills of individuals in the labour market. Partner countries are Denmark, England, Cyprus, Slovenia and Sweden. In Iceland, Denmark, and Cyprus the pilot project will be applied to bank employees. Standards of competencies will be developed for the validation of skills among bank employees. A handbook will be available containing a description of the various elements of skills, and methods and instruments to assess employees’ skills will be developed. Emphasis will be put on the general applicability of the project to other areas, whereas the methodology will be transferred to other sector in Slovenia and Sweden.

- **The Education Sector**

Joint project between the Occupational Council for Pedagogy and Recreation and the ETSC. Focus on the development of methods and tools for validating the skills of experienced workers with little formal education in the purpose of shortening their formal

study path of assistants in pre- and lower secondary schools, within the comprehensive school system.

- **The Automobile Industry**

Projects in the making: Validation of workers with little formal education within the construction industry for the purpose of shortening study paths.

- **The Unemployed**

A development programme was undertaken for unemployed people in the Sudurnes region. This aimed to assess and validate the skills of unemployed people in order to enter vocational education at Sudurnes Comprehensive College. This was a joint project between the regional Directorate of Labour office, Sudurnes Comprehensive College, Sudurnes Centre for Lifelong Learning and the Education and Training Service Centre. The first students were enrolled in the college fall 2004.

- **Health, social work, childcare and leisure sectors<sup>1</sup>**

In health, social and leisure sectors a methodology was developed to evaluate workers' skills gained in the workplace and non-formal training courses. The professional training board for the sector made a proposal to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture on how individual's work experience and learning gained through non-formal courses could be assessed and then recognised as a credit towards relevant studies. The aim was to shorten the training time. The Ministry has since endorsed these rules and promoted them to upper secondary schools. Considerable interest has been shown by individuals in this method and the representatives of the Ministry feel that it has bridged the gap between formal and non-formal education.

<sup>1</sup> Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe" (2007)

## 18.4 The Third Sector

The following provides examples of how validation of informal and non-formal learning has been achieved in the third sector. This aims to be indicative and not representative of the third sector as a whole.

- **Basic Skills Training, The Education and Training Service Centre**

The work of the Education and Training Service Centre has involved the third sector. The ETSC has written many curricula, both to describe courses of study that are offered and to create new courses. The curricula have been presented to the assessment committee which evaluates to what extent the courses can be used to shorten the duration of further education. This is considered the most effective way to use time and money, both that of the individual and that coming from the public purse. The committee has now developed 13 curricula in 10 learning centres, which account towards a certain number of units in an upper secondary course. Some of these courses are in areas such as basic skills.

- **Mennt – EDUCATE Iceland**

EDUCATE Iceland is a co-operation forum between the educational sector, social partners, local authorities and others interested in education and training. The main focus of the work of EDUCATE is to gather and disseminate information and to facilitate transference of knowledge and competences.

Even though it is not strictly concerned with validation of non-formal and informal learning, EDUCATE Iceland is has been linked with a project aimed at recognising educational providers outside the formal school system called “Accreditation of Lifelong Learning”. The project was a two-year pilot project funded by the European Commission’s Leonardo Da Vinci programme, which finished in the fall 2005. The project aimed to develop a new approach to meet the need for increased transparency and quality assurance in continuing and lifelong learning<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> You can find more information from [www.all-accreditation.com](http://www.all-accreditation.com)

## 18.5 Conclusions

In Iceland, the key agency for taking forward validation of non-formal and informal learning is the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC). They have been very active in carrying out specific projects and devising methods for validating informal and non-formal learning. The result of this work has been the publication of guidelines on how to validate informal and non-formal learning for use by providers and other interested parties. This is a significant step forward in establishing a common national approach to validation.

Currently the work of the ETSC is not supported by a qualification framework, which offers parity across formal, non-formal and informal learning. However, once the National Qualifications Framework has been implemented, the profile of non-formal and informal learning in Iceland should raise considerably. Furthermore there is currently no legislation in place but again, once Iceland does legislate, it will further support the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In the immediate future, there is likely to be further development of quality assurance procedures, more pilot projects carried out and increased lobbying for a national approach to validation of informal and non-formal learning, extending to other areas of learning such as universities and schools. There are numerous examples of validation in Iceland across all sectors but as yet efforts to create a national approach are significant but still in their infancy.

# 19.0 Ireland<sup>1</sup>

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*By Marie Davidson and Anne-Mari Nevala (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

## 19.1 Introduction

The accreditation of prior learning is currently the subject of major debate across all sections of education and training in Ireland. In fact, Ireland was one of the first EU states to implement national legislation relating to the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning. This is documented in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 in the section on 'access, transfer and progression'. This legislation means that any individual has the right to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the purpose of gaining an award or qualification in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or in accessing education and training programmes. Nevertheless, the progress towards developing a national system has been fairly slow<sup>2</sup>.

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a new framework launched in October 2003, which allows formal, non-formal and informal learning to be recognised within one national structure. It is based on standards or learning outcomes and as such allows parity of recognition to be achieved across all forms of learning whether this is achieved in a formal or non-formal setting through the framework. The new framework is therefore compatible with the European policy agenda and will facilitate learner mobility within and between national systems.

## 19.2 Public Sector

Since the early nineties, there has been an increase in the incidence of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) in Ireland – largely in response to demand for certification from employed individuals and employers<sup>3</sup>, the need to meet new regulatory requirements and to respond to a diversified student body (in higher education in particular). These processes were developed in a range of sectors (e.g. construction, childcare, hospitality) and by a range of former awarding bodies (e.g. the National Tourism Development Authority - Fáilte Ireland, FÁS National Training and Employment Authority). These processes, nevertheless, were not unified under any one national system for RPL.

The launch of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in 2003 put renewed and increased emphasis on RPL. This is because the NFQ embodied the idea that: "Equal

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Ireland chapter of the 2005 Inventory by John Konrad (Konrad Associates International)

<sup>2</sup> Coughlan, D (2005/2006) Accreditation of prior learning: an Irish perspective

<sup>3</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

value should be given to all these forms of learning (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal), regardless of source, how it is achieved and when in life it is achieved”<sup>1</sup>. The Framework comprises ten different reference levels with each defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill and competence<sup>2</sup>. The learning outcomes set out in the Framework provide a common reference point or basis for RPL. Over time, the development of new Framework awards (including minor, special and supplemental awards) are expected to provide further opportunities for RPL<sup>3</sup>.

The National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI), which leads the development and maintenance of the NQF, took on the task of promoting a national approach to RPL. The NQAI is the organisation responsible for “promoting the co-ordination and harmonisation of processes for the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers and awarding bodies”<sup>4</sup>. The Authority determined that the recognition of prior learning would be applicable to learners gaining:

- Entry to education and training programmes;
- Credit towards an award or exemptions from specific programme requirements; and/or
- Eligibility for a full award/qualification.

In 2004, the NQAI convened a national advisory group to devise a set of national principles for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education in order to underpin the introduction of policy and procedures for RPL in Ireland. In June 2005, the NQAI published the “Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training”. This aimed to provide a **national approach** to the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, which could be used by education providers, awarding bodies and private sector companies. The principles agreed upon in the policy address the issues of quality, assessment, documentation and procedures for the review of policy and practice. They aim to encourage RPL, to bring consistency to RPL in Ireland and remove difficulties that may confront an applicant wishing to transfer within and between different education and training sectors.

<sup>1</sup> Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training (June 2005)

<sup>2</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training (June 2005)

The principles and guidelines have been utilised to varying degrees by the Irish Universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in developing their policies and procedures for RPL. NQAI recommends that they develop policies and procedures, which have the following elements:

**Review and updating** i.e. in line with the 2005 guidelines and in line with any changes thereafter;

**Operational approaches** e.g. identifying units/modules that can be achieved through RPL, identifying limits in the proportion of learning that can be recognised via RPL, identifying the roles and responsibilities of those that are involved in the process etc;

**Assessment** i.e. by competent persons, given training and support, developing a range of assessment tools etc;

**Applicants** i.e. being fully informed, given guidance and support;

**Communications** i.e. clear information to the learners/applicants, promoting the availability of RPL and regularly publishing information on the extent to which RPL is being implemented, best practice etc.

The main national awarding bodies are HETAC, FETAC and universities. The Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 1999 reduced the number of certifying bodies in Ireland and hence organisations such as the National Training and Employment Authority FAS, the National Council for Vocational Awards NCVA, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority Teagasc and Failte Ireland came under the remit of a new organisation - the Further Education and Training Awards Council [FETAC]. Although these organisations are not the only awarding bodies, they are the main ones in Ireland for qualifications offered outside formal schooling.

Universities enjoy significant autonomy in Ireland and are awarding bodies in their own right. HETAC is the qualifications awarding body for third-level educational and training institutions that are *outside* the university sector (both public and private). Other awarding bodies are the Dublin Institute of Technology and the State Examinations Commission, which makes the mainstream school-based education awards.

The following section describes the policies and procedures for all three above mentioned sectors; further education and training, higher education (excluding universities) and universities.

## 19.2.1 Further education and training awards

The Further Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland (FETAC) functions to make and promote awards, validate programmes, monitor and ensure the quality of programmes and determine standards. It has a particularly large remit since FETAC awards are offered nationwide by a wide range of providers in diverse settings. Hence FETAC awards are offered by Bord Iascigh Mhara (Irish Fisheries Board), Failte Ireland, FAS, Teagasc Centres, Vocational Adult and Communicat Education and Training Centres Institutes of Technology and the workplace.

### 19.2.1.1 *Policies*

In its Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006, FETAC committed to publish a policy on recognition of prior learning in 2005 and to facilitate recognition of prior learning from 2006. FETAC agreed its Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning in April 2005, subject to the development of guidelines to support providers.

The Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning requires providers who register with FETAC to facilitate learners through the recognition of prior learning for access to programmes, exemptions/credit from requirements of a programme and access to full awards as far as they can, subject to the availability of guidelines on recognition of prior learning.

The FETAC RPL policy aims to ensure learners have opportunities to have their prior learning recognised, through providers who are quality assured offering validated programmes leading to FETAC awards. The policy supports the implementation of recognition of prior learning by providers for the purposes of access to programmes, gaining exemptions or credits and in some cases attaining full awards.

FETAC may also in conjunction with providers make awards directly to learners who, on the basis of RPL, can demonstrate they meet the standards for an award.

All providers who register with FETAC can facilitate learners through the RPL programme to support access to full awards, exemptions from programme requirements and access to full awards in accordance with the guidelines. .All learners have the opportunity to have their prior learning recognised through providers that are quality assured.

### 19.2.1.2 Guidelines for assessment of individual's prior learning

The guidelines establish a number of processes for providers in offering RPL. The FETAC RPL model requires providers to<sup>1</sup>:

- Provide information to the learner on entry requirements/exemptions available through RPL;
- Allow the learner to provide evidence of their RPL;
- Ensure providers assess the evidence (using mentors, assessors and external verifiers);
- Make recommendations as to whether RPL should be accepted.

This leads to the provider allowing entry onto programmes or exemptions from some programme requirements.

RPL can also lead to a FETAC award. A summary of the process for determining the eligibility for an award is given below:

Stage	Criteria
<b>1. Award Identification/eligibility of the learner</b>  - FETAC Guidelines available  - Provider/Learner identify a FETAC award	The Award must be as listed in the FETAC Directory of Awards  Eligibility of the learner is established following quick scan of learning outcomes/standards for the award
<b>2. Matching of experience to Standards</b>  - The provider/learner match the individually acquired knowledge, skill and competence to the national standards for an award.  - A mentor may support the learner	The standards for the award must be available and the learners experiences must be clearly and accurately documented against the standards
<b>3. Gathering of Evidence</b>  Evidence is gathered to prove the knowledge, skills and competences claimed by the learner to meet the learning outcomes of the award. The evidence will be collated into a Portfolio.	A portfolio/collection of evidence can conclude: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum Vitae</li> <li>- Certificates</li> <li>- Job Description (s)</li> <li>- References/testimonials</li> <li>- Products/Samples</li> <li>- Evidence from Courses attended</li> <li>- Work place assessment, test results</li> <li>- Interviews</li> <li>- Other</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> RPL: Policy and Guidelines (Draft). Published by FETAC.

Stage	Criteria
<p><b>4. Assessment of Evidence</b></p> <p>An assessment and verification of the individual's knowledge, skills and competences is conducted against the award standards</p>	<p>Assessment criteria for the standards of the FETAC award must be deemed to be met. The evidence in the Portfolio must be assessed in terms of Sufficiency, Validity, Authenticity, Reliability and Currency.</p>
<p><b>5. Recommendation for an award</b></p> <p>A recommendation is made based on the evidence presented</p>	<p>A recommendation is made as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) the learner meets the required standards for the award</li> <li>(e) the candidate almost meets the required standards but needs to provide additional evidence</li> <li>(f) The candidate has not provided adequate evidence to prove he/she meets the standards for the award.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Monitoring</b></p> <p>The recommended outcome is monitored by the provider and FETAC.</p>	<p>As per award requirement, the outcome of the assessment is monitored.</p>

Source: RPL: Policy and Guidelines (draft). Published by FETAC

### 19.2.1.3 *Impact*

In 2006, FETAC launched a **pilot project** to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL. This project involved 9 providers and the evaluation of this pilot has just recently been published, in 2007. The participant providers included former awarding bodies, a college of further education, a sector industry body, a voluntary organisation, a community education provider and two private providers. Hence, although small scale, it aimed to be representative of further education and training.

As a result of the project 50 learners achieved major and minor awards in a variety of different fields and levels of the national framework<sup>1</sup>. Awards were achieved in bar management, childcare, community development, security etc. The drop-out rate was low with only a small number of participants not completing the RPL process. The low drop-out rate was put down to, inter alia, the **careful selection of participants** on the programme. **Employer support** was also found to be critical for effective implementation of RPL.

<sup>1</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

The findings from this project are critical to the future implementation of RPL. A number of **recommendations** have been made, which FETAC will consider from 2007 onwards<sup>1</sup>:

- To build capacity by encouraging providers to network and share experiences/best practice;
- To require all providers to put in place policies and procedures for implementing RPL;
- To ensure that all providers that wish to offer RPL show evidence of being able to do so and be quality assured by FETAC;
- To support providers in streamlining their RPL procedures;
- To require providers who offer short courses as part of their submission for programme validation to identify their actual arrangements for recognising prior learning;
- To monitor providers' RPL activities to ensure consistent application across the board;
- To enhance the current draft guidelines to ensure providers are more clearly informed of RPL requirements and to review and amend the guidelines on an on-going basis;
- To put in place briefing sessions to further assist providers who can show competence and capacity to implement RPL policy and procedures;
- To gather and publish data on the number of learners accessing programmes, gaining exemptions and achieving full awards on the basis of RPL;
- To identify and acknowledge on its website all providers who are specifically quality assured to offer RPL for the purposes of enabling learners to achieve awards;
- To support employees in the workplace in developing "flexible and responsive training provision" as depicted in the policy document "Tomorrows Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy".

The pilot project also brought about some clear **practical lessons**<sup>2</sup>:

- Providers dealing with RPL for the first time require support and advice at all stages of the process: planning, skills audit, evidence gathering and assessment.
- Critical factors for effective implementation of RPL for providers were an appropriate assessment of time required for planning and development of tools; the need for experienced staff; the need for employer commitment.
- Providers find the construction of portfolios difficult. Recommendation was made by an external evaluator of the initiative that sample portfolios would be provided for providers.
- The accurate and clear style and expression of learning outcomes in the awards standards is essential to ensure credibility of RPL; the learning outcomes must be understandable. Learning outcomes that are vague and overly complex can mean that neither the provider nor the learner may be in a position to make accurate judgements.

<sup>1</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

<sup>2</sup> FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

- Assessment interview to complement the portfolio of evidence was found useful. Assessors get to clarify the 'prior learning' of the individual and get a deeper understanding of the individuals portfolio of evidence.
- Individual participants emphasised the need for clear guidelines for the development of the portfolio; undertake personal skills analysis before entering the RPL process; the significance of on-going support from a mentor; appreciation of time required to complete the process while continuing to work full time.

Thus far, FETAC has developed guidelines, piloted the guidelines, published the findings of the pilot study and actually made its first awards to learners using the new RPL system. FETAC will now continue to promote and extend RPL within the further education and training sector, taking the recommendations listed above into account.

## 19.2.2 Higher Education (excluding universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology)

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland (HETAC) is the organisation responsible for awarding qualifications at all levels of higher education, up to PhD level, in general, in respect of Institutes of Technology, recognised institutions and private providers. It sets standards for higher education and training awards, validates higher education and training programmes, monitors HEIs' quality assurance procedures, delegates awarding powers to recognised institutions, ensures student assessment is fair and consistent and protects students where HETAC awards cease to exist.

### 19.2.2.1 *Policies*

In addition to developing policies and procedures for providers who offer programmes leading to HETAC awards, HETAC, like FETAC, also makes awards directly to learners solely on the basis of RPL (in accordance with the Education and Training (Qualifications) Act 1999). It has draft policies and procedures on RPL in place, which update the pioneering policies of its predecessor, the National Council for Educational Awards, on RPL.

In regard to the latter, HETAC published its 'Recognition Policy, Criteria and Process for a Direct Application to HETAC for a Named Award' in March 2006. This document offers supplementary guidance for "persons who have not already achieved academic qualifications for that learning and who can demonstrate that they have achieved the standard for one or more HETAC named awards"<sup>1</sup>.

HETAC has outlined a number of policies, criteria and processes in this document. Briefly these state that:

<sup>1</sup> March 2006 Recognition Policy, Criteria and Process for a Direct Application to HETAC for a Named Award – Published by HETAC

- The RPL process is available to everybody;
- The process is underpinned by quality assurance (ensuring the learner provides evidence of meeting published HETAC standards, that robust assessment of that evidence takes place, that rights to appeal are in place and that HETAC is fully compliant with NQAI guidelines), and;
- Ensures the Higher Education Providers help HETAC in forming an opinion on each learner application.

#### 19.2.2.2 *Procedure for assessment of RPL for direct awards*

The processes involved in RPL include:

- Providing guidance on how to submit evidence e.g. using the Europass CV and the HETAC application form;
- Ensuring quality in the assessment process e.g. involving third party verification, being fair and consistent, involving external panel of expert assessors, compliance with HETAC's published standards etc;
- Putting in place appeal procedures for unsuccessful applicants.

#### 19.2.2.3 *Impact*

An increasing number of providers are now offering RPL for entry, credit and/or exemptions and a number have institutions-wide policies in place. This is being driven by demand from the workplace, and from a more diverse student body as well as supportive changes such as flexible delivery, modularisation and credit systems.

Currently it is unknown how many students have accessed RPL as such data is not collected on a systematic basis. Students that have had their prior learning recognised are treated in like manner to other students This may however change in the future. In respect of direct applications for awards on the basis of RPL, three such awards have been made to-date - an Ordinary Degree, a Masters degree and a doctorate.

#### 19.2.3 Universities<sup>1</sup>

Each of the seven universities in Ireland is self-governing in most matters but legislation does place certain responsibilities on the sector collectively in areas such as equality and access. This latter being quite important considering the role that RPL can and does play in improving access.

It is difficult to get a full picture of activity in RPL across the sector, although, in general, it does appear to be less than for the further education and training and the HETAC sectors. A small number are developing institution-wide policies and in other cases, activity tends to be located in the nursing, adult education and continuing professional development sectors (as well as in some cases, for mature students). A number of recent developments

<sup>1</sup> Quoted directly from Coughlan, D (2005/2006) Accreditation of prior learning: an Irish perspective.

are putting increased pressure on the university sector to develop RPL - including increased pressure to maintain their enrolment numbers and with demographic trends indicating a fall in the number of school leavers it is imperative for systems to be put in place to allow for greater flexibility in the admissions system as well as the need to respond to workplace needs. As in the HETAC sector, the development of credit systems, modularisation and flexible delivery modes all support the development of RPL.

### **19.3 Private Sector**

This section will describe validation in the context of the workplace and employment.

The new National Qualifications Framework provides for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the workplace. All learning can be accommodated from the most basic to the most advanced and includes that achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings.

Currently, employers and the social partners are taking a more active interest in RPL and arguably are key drivers in taking RPL forward. For example:

In the nursing industry, the original requirement for entry into the profession has increased from diploma to degree level, which has created a need for RPL. Now all HEIs that supply nursing courses use RPL to allow nurses returning to the profession to have their knowledge and experience recognised.

In quarry management, the industry needed to up-skill the existing workforce and, with an Institute of Technology devised programmes and used RPL to enable their employees to achieve awards and career progression into positions of project management etc;

In industries such as security, childcare, construction and hospitality, an interest in professionalising the workforce and more significantly for some, the need to meet new regulatory requirements for practice is generating demand for RPL to enable existing workers access newly required qualifications.

In addition, the National Skills Strategy (2007) has a target to increase education and training by one level for 500,000 people by 2010. The Department for Enterprise and Employment and others are interested in the potential role of RPL in achieving this. This will provide a further drive for the use of RPL in up-skilling the workforce.

Below are two case studies of industries that have used RPL recently, one in the construction industry and one in IT. The examples quoted are designed to indicate the range of developments and are not representative of the workplace as a whole.

### 19.3.1 Construction Industry Federation

The Construction Industry Federation is the employer industry association for the construction industry. As part of the CIF/PREP (Performance Recognition and Enhancement Project) the CIF took part in the FETAC pilot project where it implemented an RPL process with employees (and owners) of small and medium sized companies in the construction sector. This project resulted in six construction company employees achieving FETAC awards on the basis of RPL for the first time in Ireland.

A further RPL project has been initiated as a result of this pilot study.

### 19.3.2 The Lionra Network

The Lionra project, involving a number of higher education institutions and companies, commenced in March 2006 and focuses on ICT training for people in employment and developing a common approach to RPL. The project aims to provide<sup>1</sup>:

- General awareness in training in RPL processes delivered in enterprises across the Border West Midlands (BMW) region;
- 250 individuals trained in portfolio preparation;
- 250 portfolios assessed and certification awarded in individual IT subject areas (where merited);
- 20 mentors in industry trained to support staff in portfolio preparation concerning RPL of their IT skills;
- Third level certification of RPL mentoring;
- Three IT subject matter experts trained in portfolio assessment in each participating Lionra Network College;
- Developing a common methodology for RPL.

The project is scheduled to be completed in September 2007 and is on target to meet its key goals. This project has gone some way in developing common RPL policies, procedures and practice, has developed awareness of RPL and its potential and has provided training and common resources to be used in the RPL process. In the future, it is anticipated that the learning from this project (which will be evaluated) will inform future joint initiatives on RPL in higher education and promote the wider development and use of RPL.

## 19.4 The Third Sector

This section will describe validation in the context of the community and voluntary sector.

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Prior Learning: A presentation by Roisin Sweeney (May 2007)

As in other sectors, there have been a number of ad-hoc projects carried out on RPL in the third sector. The following case studies aim to be indicative, not representative of the voluntary sector as a whole.

#### 19.4.1 Citizens Information Board (Comhairle)

Comhairle, now the Citizens Information Board, took part in the FETAC pilot project, 2006, which enabled the Board to gain experience of the RPL process and recognise emerging issues with the implementation of RPL.

Comhairle's motivation for participating in the project included:

- Being able to develop RPL in line with their own training and development services;
- Facilitating their employed and voluntary advisors through the RPL process for the purposes of FETAC achieving awards;
- Being aware of the need for qualifications.

The result of this project was that 6 learners within Comhairle achieved FETAC minor awards at level 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications.

## 19.5 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that Ireland is advanced in that it has a framework and legislation in place for recognising prior learning. It also has national guidelines, which draw from the Common European Principles of 2004, and procedures for the recognition of prior learning in place for both higher and further education, the Awards Councils have policies in place and there is a body of experience of in using these procedures i.e. in designing tools, using appropriate assessment methods, quality assuring the process etc.

The current issues for the different stakeholders involved in RPL are therefore not so much in the development of reliable/valid RPL methods but in promoting and encouraging RPL, bearing in mind the funding and resource implications it has everyone involved. There are a number of barriers to increased use of RPL including broadly, a general lack understanding of the concept of RPL, limited funding and the significant investment it requires of all concerned. There is no national funding of RPL, with the exception of some research funding for HEIs. This means that institutions and providers have to fund RPL through their own funds, which is expensive. The RPL process is resource intensive given the amount of staff time, the fact that the process can be very individualised etc. This may act as a barrier to increased uptake of RPL.

For example, the priority for the NQAI now, drawing on national experience to date and its involvement in the OECD activity (2006-2008) on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is to take stock of developments and consider appropriate targeted actions to promote RPL, taking account of current sources of demand and priorities in respect of education and training in general, as well as the implementation of the national framework of qualifications, which broadly supports the objectives of RPL.

## 20.0 Italy<sup>1</sup>

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By Liisa Kytola and Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 20.1 Introduction

The establishment of a validation system for informal and non-formal learning has become a strong and widely-shared priority in Italy in recent years. All social and political stakeholders are in agreement that there is a need for a formal system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. However, Italy does not yet have a comprehensive national system, comparable for example to VAE in France, or APL in the UK. This is due to various social, political and historical-cultural factors, such as the high value given to formal qualifications. The main barrier is felt to be the lack of national standards regarding qualifications and competences.

Currently, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is under development, which is intended to be over-arching and to enable validation of informal and non-formal learning at all different levels. A common standard system of competences has been set out, which aims to improve geographic as well as the professional mobility between Italian and European regions. The objective of this system is to obtain transparency in the training and education system, to better assess the individual's experiences and to acquire a better match between supply and demand on the labour market.

At the same time, tests of different validation methodologies are being carried out through regional initiatives. The "*Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*" (Citizen's Training Portfolio), an official document which records the skills acquired through training programmes organised by certified agencies and those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, was approved and adopted by National Decree in 2005. This has been promoted on a regional level and it is currently being tested in eleven Regions over the period 2006-2007.

Thus, although there is not yet a comprehensive national system for validation, there is a lot of learning through experience from regional initiatives. However, the results of these initiatives are difficult to compare, due to the lack of a national framework of references. Each initiative is devised and implemented in response to a different context and demands, for example projects range from validation carried out from an internal private company perspective, within the education sector, or as support tool for the unemployed. Good practice from these initiatives will help to inform the implementation of validation on a wider scale in the coming years.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Italy chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Elisabetta Perulli and Massimo Tommasini (ISFOL)

## 20.2 Public Sector

### 20.2.1 Key Public Sector Stakeholders

The bodies responsible for validation in Italy are the Ministry of Education and the Regions. Schools and universities carry out validation of credits to access the education system on behalf of the Ministry of Education. VET Agencies and/or job centres in the regions carry out the validation of credit for a vocational qualification and also for the 'Citizen's Training Portfolio', the *Libretto Formativo*.

At a national level, the Government itself is responsible for designing guidelines concerning the VET and welfare policies. The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education ordinarily convert general guidelines into national Laws and Decrees and design the overall structure, taking into account aspects such as training pathways, qualification levels, duration and access.

Regions and autonomous Provinces have increasingly acquired an important role in the implementation and management of the VET system over the last ten years. At present the Regions are responsible for both the VET and the school system, within a general national framework designed through the recent Law n. 53/2003.

In almost all sectors, a negotiated process of reform has been carried out, involving all the relevant actors such as the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and University, the Regions and the Social Partners.

### 20.2.2 Legal Framework

Labour market and employment service reforms aim to make validation practices more widespread by adopting analytical tools (balance of skills, curricula, etc.) and transparency instruments (personal training booklet, workers' register) to enhance acquired skills and ensure more efficient management of individualised vocational pathways.<sup>1</sup>

In a complex governance framework, the issue of validation of non-formal learning has been institutionally dealt with in several ways through:

<sup>1</sup> ISFOL. Country Report, Italy: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems.

#### 20.2.2.1 *Formal agreements between Government and social partners*

In **1996**, the Government and Social Partners adopted an **Employment Agreement** (which confirmed and upgraded the relevant results of previous negotiations; in particular the July 1993 Agreement), which contains several strategic guidelines for reform of the VET system. The Agreement identifies among its core points the establishment of “a certification system as a suitable instrument to assure a unitary and visible pathway of lifelong learning to every single individual, to allow the recognition of training credits, and to register the effectively acquired competences”.

#### 20.2.2.2 *National laws of decrees*

The most important recent national laws in the context of validation of informal and non-formal learning are the above-mentioned **Law 53/2003**, reforming the VET system (school, vocational training and apprenticeship) and the **Law 30/2003** reforming labour market rules (contracts and job placement services).

The former (Law 53/2003) confirms the importance of alternating school, training and work in the lifelong learning perspective and envisages the creation of institutional devices and practices which would valorise individual learning experiences, irrespective of the context in which they have been developed.

The latter, Law 30/2003 and the successive Decree n. 276/2003, provide for the establishment of the “*Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*” (Citizen's Training Portfolio), an official document which records the skills acquired through training programmes organised by certified agencies and those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. However, it is mentioned that the *Libretto* is not yet a real credit recognition device, but has been established to promote and facilitate credit transfer of competences [i.e. the document merely documents the type of training that the individual has undertaken, but does not assign it any value]<sup>1</sup>. The Regions have promoted the instrument, and it is currently being tested in eleven Regions over the period 2006-2007.

**Decree 276/2003** states that the purpose of the *Libretto Formativo* is to record the experience acquired during apprenticeships, integration contracts, continuing training and work, as well as formal and non-formal skills acquired, in line with EU guidelines.

The *Libretto Formativo* was approved and adopted by the **National Decree of 10 October 2005**.

<sup>1</sup> OECD Project on the Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning, Italy Country background Report, December 2006

### 20.2.2.3 Ministerial decrees

In May **2001** a Ministry of Labour Decree was introduced, entitled “*Certification of competences in the vocational training system*”. The Decree’s new competence certification system aimed to render training programmes more transparent, validate individual experiences, and to assist in matching job demand and supply in the labour market. Competences are defined in the decree as “...*structured clusters of knowledge and abilities normally connected to specific job profiles, which can be acquired through vocational training programmes, work experiences and self-learning, which are valuable also as training 'credits'*”. The Decree envisages that a system of national standards for competence certification will be established, as well as three kinds of Certification devices: the Vocational Training Qualification Certification, the Vocational Training Competence Certification and the Accreditation of Competences Procedure. Also, according to this Decree the “Citizen’s Training Portfolio” (*Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*) should be established by each Region in order to document and register the different certification acquired by individuals.

### 20.2.2.4 Regional legal provisions

In March **2000**, the Government and the Regional Authorities signed an agreement which gave a general definition of the procedures for establishing a national system of vocational competence certification. The agreement ruled that the Ministry of Labour would formulate proposals with respect to the criteria and procedures for certifying the competences acquired by vocational training, in order to ensure the standardisation of certificates throughout the country, and their recognition within the EU.<sup>1</sup>

In January **2004**, an agreement was signed by the Minister of Education and University, the Minister of Labour and Social Policies, the Regional Authorities, and the Autonomous Provincial Authorities of Trento and Bolzano. A key aspect of the Agreement is the definition of a pathway for the governance of the national and local system, involving a chain of ‘cascade’ functions.

On a national level the following responsibilities are envisaged:

- The definition of the general system for the classification of vocational skills;
- The definition of standard general criteria for certifying skills (training booklet);
- The definition of standard general criteria for ascertaining credits (training/training, training/education, education/training);
- The definition of the minimum skill training standards;
- The identification of the minimum accreditation standards for the facilities providing vocational education and training courses.

<sup>1</sup>Di Francesco, G., 2006, New OECD Activity on: Recognition of Non Formal and Informal Learning, Brief Introduction to the Italian Certification System and to the Recognition of Competencies, Paris, 2006

On a regional level the following responsibilities are envisaged:

- The governance of the skill and credit system as well as the related support services;
- The adaptation of skills to the local context;
- The methods and procedures for assessment, evaluation and certification of skills and credits before, during and after the pathways;
- The design standards;
- The detailed definition of the indispensable requisites required from facilities providing vocational education and training pathways.<sup>1</sup>

•  
In April **2004**, an important agreement was achieved by the ‘Joint Conference State-Regions-Local Bodies’ (29 April 2004) concerning the minimum standard of acquired competences/of performance, based on the French “*unités capitalisables*” methodology and affecting 37 professional profiles in Agriculture, Environment, Building, ICT, Manufacturing industry, Transport and Tourism.<sup>2</sup>

#### 20.2.2.5 *Other agreements*

On 25 October **2006**, the permanent conference for the relationships between the State, Regions and Autonomous provinces has ratified an agreement to recognise Minimum Training requirements for technical professional competences for 14 professional roles, on the basis of a common certification recognised by regions and autonomous provinces, as an outcome of experimental pathways. The recognised professional roles are the first step towards a definition of a repertory of technical professional competencies, with a view to establishing a national framework of professional standards. The agreement foresees the adoption of guidelines for final and intermediary certification, as well as methodological criteria for updating minimum national training/education standards.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Education, the president of the Committee of the Regions and the social partners signed an agreement on continuing vocational training (*formazione continua*) in **2007**. The agreement calls for a unified logic of planning together with interventions of continuing vocational training, through the different financial instruments that are available. It also calls for the establishment of a system of certification of competences that could be used for all training activities, including those of the inter-professional training funds. The agreement asks for the parties to reassess accreditation procedures, to arrive at a system of efficient rules across the whole national territory, better fit for quality criteria and

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> VPL, WP3: National Review, Italy. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=78](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=78)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.flcgil.it/notizie/news/2006/ottobre/percorsi\\_sperimental\\_i\\_integrati\\_definiti\\_e\\_riconosciuti\\_a\\_livello\\_nazionale\\_gli\\_standard\\_formativi\\_minimi\\_di\\_14\\_figure\\_professionali](http://www.flcgil.it/notizie/news/2006/ottobre/percorsi_sperimental_i_integrati_definiti_e_riconosciuti_a_livello_nazionale_gli_standard_formativi_minimi_di_14_figure_professionali)

conditions for information that can be used by companies and individuals when they are choosing the most appropriate training.<sup>1</sup>

### 20.2.3 Higher Technical Education and Training (IFTS)

The Higher Technical Education and Training (IFTS) pathways were created by law (Law 144/99) “*to qualify and broaden the training supply for young people and adults, both employed and not employed*”. IFTS pathways are characterised as open options, which are ‘anchored’ to the changing needs of local markets rather than identified training needs. IFTS pathways last for a minimum of two and a maximum of four semesters and are promoted and managed at least by four different VET providers: a school, a University, a training agency and a company. The courses include practical training, ‘on the job’, for at least 30% of each curriculum. Once the IFTS training is successfully concluded, the University partner assures the recognition of a certain number of university credits valid for further enrolling in University academic courses.

IFTS pathways are the first national competence-based certification tool. The certified competences, according to the standard model chosen in IFTS, are considered the result of a training pathway.<sup>2</sup>

IFTS pathways can be accessed on the basis of an upper secondary education certificate. Those who do not hold the upper secondary education certificate can also access IFTS, on the basis of accreditation of competences acquired in previous education, training and work pathways, if they have completed compulsory schooling, taking into account, in particular, the qualification attained during the fulfilment of the compulsory training requirement specified in Art. 68 of Law 144/99. Any previous training credits can also be recognised to determine the length of the individual pathway.<sup>3</sup>

A concrete tool for validating previous learning has been designed in IFTS and has been launched through specific guidelines attached to the regulation documents on 1 August **2002** (Agreement between Government and Regions). The guidelines outline that: validation is meant to facilitate the access to IFTS pathways or a transfer from one system to another; the building of a national competence standard system is envisaged by all the institutional and social actors as a necessary requirement to guarantee the reliability of the validation processes.

<sup>1</sup> Formazione continua: firmato l'accordo

[http://www.flcgil.it/notizie/news/2007/aprile/formazione\\_continua\\_firmato\\_l\\_accordo](http://www.flcgil.it/notizie/news/2007/aprile/formazione_continua_firmato_l_accordo)

<sup>2</sup> Transfine Project, Italy Case Study

<sup>3</sup> The procedures for accreditation of competences are defined by means of the agreements stated in Art. 5, paragraph 3”.

#### 20.2.4 University Reform

The Italian University system is currently involved in a large-scale reform process, which started in 1999 (Decreto n.509 del 3/11/1999). The reform envisages validation of prior learning, including the validation of prior learning as ECTS credits. The reform also redefines the times and procedures for the access to qualifications. The reform is described as radical, its principles being the autonomy of the Universities, the need for flexible training pathways, and the application of a credit system.<sup>1</sup> However, practices for this have not been mainstreamed, nor are there shared guidelines on procedures and results of validation.

This does not mean that the issues of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning are ignored but simply that they are not considered as an immediate priority matter. Nevertheless, some good experiences have been developed, in particular within the IFTS system. The IFTS experience can be considered as a crucial crossroad for increasing the awareness of the importance of validation issues within the university system development.

The Ministry of Education, Universities and Research has further restricted the criteria for the validation of informal and non formal knowledge to be used by universities. In a letter dated June, 1, 2006 to the Italian Rectors (Prot. 149/segr./DGU/2006), the General Direction for Universities in the Ministry reiterated the basic criteria for accreditation of experiential learning. These criteria now are the following:

1. No more than 60 credits out of 180 can be recognised as a result of validation of prior learning
2. Validation can apply only to certified learning (thus, informal and non formal learning are not included), or to learning acquired in university courses; the latter can be short modules, continuing education academic courses, or credits acquired during formal enrolment towards a university degree which, for personal reasons, the student did not complete.<sup>2</sup>

So far, efforts to circulate the principles of APEL (as in the UK) or *Validation des acquis* (as in France) have not been successful in the Italian Higher Education system.

#### 20.2.5 Adult Education (EDA)

The term 'Adult Education' refers to the body of formal (certified education and vocational training) and non-formal (culture, health education, training for associative life, physical and motor education) education opportunities that address adult citizens, are certifiable and the purpose of which is the provision of basic personal competences (for social

<sup>1</sup> Refemet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by Consuelo Corradi, Professor of Sociology, School of Education, Lumsa University (Rome).

visibility) in the fields of transferable basic competences (for the employability of the working citizen).

According to the agreement of 2 March 2000 of the Unified Conference, the objectives of this type of training are:

- To increase the availability of labour force endowed with an adequate basic qualification;
- To foster the assertion of the citizenship rights also in the educational field;
- To increase the number of places for expanding the access to basic-training opportunities throughout the lifetime;
- To create an integrated system for basic training, during the adult years, that involves all the systems as a whole.

EDA, implemented through the Permanent Territorial Centres for Adult Education, creates a new education opportunity. EDA involves the following systems:

- The school system;
- The regional training system;
- The employment-service system;
- The public infrastructure (libraries, museums, etc.);
- The enterprises;
- The non-profit associations;
- The university system.

## 20.2.6 Validation in practice

### 20.2.6.1 *Funding and Support*<sup>1</sup>

During the period 2000-2006, the Ministry of Labour financed (through ESF) a national action to promote principles, models and practices in the field of certification and recognition of competences acquired in different learning contexts, and to monitor the 'bottom-up' innovative processes which emerged from the regional bodies.

The Ministry of Education, within the implementation of IFTS (Higher Technical Educational and Training System), EDA (Adult Education), and right-duty reforms, has also given in recent years an important impulse to the adoption of models and instruments to facilitate the recognition of credits and competences, both entering into the training path and accessing upper levels of qualification.

<sup>1</sup> Di Francesco, G., 2006, New OECD Activity on: Recognition of Non Formal and Informal Learning, Brief Introduction to the Italian Certification System and to the Recognition of Competencies, Paris, 2006

The costs for the existing practices of validation are thus usually incorporated within training projects which form part of the regional actions connected to ESF or other sources of financing.<sup>1</sup>

#### 20.2.6.2 Procedures

As the third certification device envisaged by the May 2001 Ministry of Labour Decree has not yet been formalised, it is today only possible to describe some basic features and trends of the institutional accreditation of the prior learning model in Italy, based on the devices designed in the IFTS and Adult Education Systems.

In Italy these new devices are aimed to facilitate *re-access to VET pathways or a transfer from one system to another*. This means that wherever the accreditation is going to be applied it always has the effect of a "credit", meant to allow the access or a "bonus" (a reduction) towards an education or training path. The devices are thus not simply for the accreditation of work experiences, nor are they for the accreditation of a whole training qualification or education diploma as is the case in countries with more advanced validation legislation and procedures, such as France.<sup>2</sup>

The validation process both in IFTS and adult education is carried out in three steps:

- The first step involves **guidance/counselling**, which involves the active participation of the individual in self-analysis and in the identification of his/her specific training needs. It is carried out by a counsellor operator and produces a basic Individual Project.
- The second step is the **assessment** step, which aims to collect evidence in a systematic way and ensure the possession of specific competences. It is carried out by one (or more) assessors who help the individual to compose a Dossier that includes all the relevant evidence (certifications, declarations, documented information about training, work or other experiences). All this experience is translated into competences in the dossier. The dossier is used to produce a further document, the Individual Portfolio that will accompany the individual also after leaving training.
- The final **certification/recognition** step involves a certification, or access, or a bonus towards a training pathway. This is managed by a Commission in which all the education and training institutions involved are represented. Credits are recognised on the basis of the Dossier.<sup>3</sup>

The most widespread methods for the assessment step of the validation process rely on three systems:

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

<sup>2</sup> Transfine Project, Italy Case Study

<sup>3</sup> Refernet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

- Individual interviews of a more or less structured nature, in which the self-declaratory components prevail
- Self-assessment of elements relating to personal characteristics using purpose-built tools
- Self-assessment using group sessions

There is little recourse to objective tests or to analysis of documents or testimonials by a third party.<sup>1</sup>

### 20.2.6.3 *Activities*

Even though the establishment of a validation system for non-formal and informal learning has become a strong and widely shared priority in the last ten years, there are few effectively implemented institutional practices in Italy at national level.

The regional Authorities launched integrated local or sectoral actions under the ESF programmes for the period 2000-2006. Although these initiatives were disconnected, the Regional Coordination Project played an important role in establishing common qualification and competence standards and learning certificate procedures.<sup>2</sup>

Following the January 2004 Agreement mentioned above, an Interregional Project entitled *“Description and Certification by Vocational Skills and Families – Minimum Standards with a View to Integration between Education, Vocational Training and Work”* aimed at proposing *“an initial reference model for a national skill standard system with a view to integration between education, vocational training and work”* was successfully launched. The Regional Authorities are making a considerable contribution to the gradual definition of the national standard and certification system.<sup>3</sup>

The Emilia Romagna, Piemonte and Val d’Aosta Regions have attempted a self-regulation of their own VET system and promoted some initiatives of validation of non-formal and informal learning addressed to specific target groups.

In certain regions, some significant experiences on certification have been carried out in the field of ‘apprenticeship’. In regions such as Abruzzo, Basilicata, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano and of Trento, the certification for apprentices is issued directly by the regional and/or provincial structure and written on the personal ‘portfolio’. In other regions such as Liguria, Veneto, Campania, Sicilia, Valle

<sup>1</sup> OECD Project on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Italy Country Background Report, Draft December 2006

<sup>2</sup> Di Francesco, G., 2006, New OECD Activity on: Recognition of Non Formal and Informal Learning, Brief Introduction to the Italian Certification System and to the Recognition of Competencies, Paris, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Refernet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

d'Aosta, the certification is given by external communities with procedures defined by the Regions themselves in agreement with the social partners.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in some Regions of Italy, the accreditation of prior experiential competences is a reality, although it is actually practised only for specific populations in response to specific demands. Moreover, in many contexts (Regions, Universities, professional regulation) a number of interesting projects have been carried out.

#### 20.2.6.4 *Emilia Romagna- a regional system for the formalisation and certification of competences*<sup>2</sup>

On April 19, 2006, the Emilia Romagna regional government approved a regional system for the formalisation and certification of competences. It follows the Decision n. 1434 of 12/09/2005, named “*Approaches, methodology and structure for the definition of the regional system for the formalisation and certification of competencies*”. This Act represents the first institutional achievement in Italy, which sets the trail for other Italian regions.

The formalisation and certification process addresses two general categories of users:

- Individuals who have attended (but not necessarily completed) a training path which is to be followed by the issuing of a formal document or a certificate;
- Individuals with experience acquired in non formal settings (on the job) and/or in informal environments and/or holding a declaration issued within a formal training path.

<sup>1</sup> VPL, WP3: National Review, Italy. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=78](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=78)

<sup>2</sup> VPL, WP3: National Review, Italy. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=78](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=78)

The outputs of the formalisation and certification process are:

- the “Ability and knowledge outline”, a document in which the individual’s abilities and knowledge (competencies) are formalised;
- the “Competencies certificate”, a document in which abilities and knowledge (corresponding to a given training standard) are certified, after passing a specific test/exam;
- the “Certificate of vocational qualification”, a document in which abilities and knowledge (corresponding to a given professional qualification) are certified, after passing a specific test/exam.

The process can be followed in a personalised way throughout an individual’s lifetime. It follows these four phases:

- presentation of the request for formalisation and certification;
- verification by means of evidences;
- verification by means of tests/examinations;
- administrative procedures for issuing the relevant documents and certification.

These phases are supplemented throughout by individual guidance and advice, provided by trained staff.

### 20.2.6.5 Context-specific examples of validation initiatives in Italy

LUMSA University ([www.lumsa.it](http://www.lumsa.it)) carried out an innovative project in which a method of validation of previous learning, based on the analysis of a student's biography, was successfully applied for two courses: Educators and Managers of the Third Sector.

#### Graduating Experience, a pilot validation project in the Italian University System<sup>1</sup>

The four key ideas outlined in the University Reform of 1999 - autonomy, learning, flexibility and the credit system - were the central principles behind this pilot project, launched in 2001 at LUMSA university. The title, "Laureare l'esperienza" or "Graduating Experience" stressed the main goal of validation of prior learning, namely the recognition of formal and informal learning in order to obtain a university degree.

As a pilot project, the validation procedure was launched for only two degrees: Educators and Managers of the Third Sector. These are relatively "new" professions that are based on bottom-up practices; very often, workers acquire competences, skills and qualifications through a learning-by-doing process. For educators and for people working in the Third Sector, visibility of knowledge was indeed top priority. However, it was also felt that the university had an opportunity to switch to a new approach to teaching/learning and its social value: from a one-way, teacher-to-student process, to an interactive process in which the acquisition of a university degree is the result of a virtuous circle between academic learning, working experience, practical skills and training. Through its involvement in another project, the university already had a number of networks among social enterprises and social workers. In the validation process, they acted as the main stakeholders for the design, feasibility, and effectiveness of courses.

Students wanting to enrol in an Italian university must have a five-year secondary school degree. For the Graduating Experience project, students were invited to follow three steps:

- 1) Prepare a detailed curriculum of former education, professional experience, vocational training or any type of formal or informal learning that he/she feels relevant. Students were urged to give a very detailed description of experience, and to supply certifications, if any.
- 2) Participate in an interview with the validation Committee set up at the School of Education, in which prior personal experience is assessed. The Committee would open a personal file and quantify it in ECTS. This is the "knowledge capital" by which knowledge is made visible and formally recognized for enrolment.
- 3) Prepare a "study plan" for the degree, which brings together the "knowledge capital" of the student and the list of disciplines and examinations required for that degree by the Ministry of Education. In this way, the "study plan" is a merging between informal and formal frames of reference. Every single "study plan" is approved by the Faculty Committee of the School.

Over the two years of the project, students enrolled in the procedure were mostly people over 30, with five or more years of working experience and a strong motivation for personal and professional improvement. A number of them already held a university degree which was non-specific for their field, but most of them had none. Some students had attended a university and passed examinations, and then dropped out without completing their degree; for others this was their first academic experience. Many were bound for mobility between different jobs or working places.

<sup>1</sup> Corradi, C., Graduating Experience, A Practice of APEL in the Italian University System

The 'Spring Out' project, which took place in the Rimini province, is funded through the ESF Equal Programme:

### Spring Out project

"Spring Out" is an Equal project promoted by Enaip foundation, in collaboration with the University of Bologna. It started in 2004 and will finish in 2007. The general aim of the project is to support and strengthen active policies to improve job opportunities at local level.

The target groups are individuals with mental health difficulties, who are willing to start a professional path towards overcoming their disability.

The programme proposes a set of measures aimed at developing new models for:

- An integrated network of social services in the Rimini Province territory.
- Information desks to provide the target groups with basic relevant information on service availability.
- Support services to entrepreneurship, based on the set up of mentoring services.
- Validation of prior learning processes, which allow individuals with specific disabilities to identify their professional strengths and work on individualised improvement process – with the support of a mentor.

Within the Spring Out project the 'Service for students with special needs' of the University of Bologna has contributed to developing the tool for the validation process, called the "*bilancio di competenze*" (BdC). The BdC aims to value the cognitive and practical abilities of the individuals involved by using a specific methodology and toolset built on the special needs of people with psychiatric disabilities. The BdC methodology also provides individuals with the tools they may need in order to develop their own professional passions. In this respect, the BdC methodology empowers individuals and supports the strengthening of their personal and social autonomy.

The BdC process follows four steps:

Induction. This is the most important phase. Individuals are introduced to the project and to the BdC (approach, aims, tools, expected outcomes). The involved users are grouped; criteria for setting up these groups include individual preferences and availability (especially in terms of time schedule). Gender, age and type of disability are taken into account. After the person has registered, s/he is interviewed to gather the information required for the process.

Testing. In this phase, the participants are involved in individual interviews, for a rather long period (approximately 40 hours). The practitioner (psychologist, educator) guides the interviewee with the aim of eliciting his/her past experiences (in formal as well as in non formal and informal learning contexts), personal and professional strengths, expectations for the professional future. The BdC has been conceived as a flexible toolset, which can be tailored to the characteristics and needs of the individual users.

Feedback. This is the phase when the BdC outcomes are given back to the individual user. The practitioners who have been involved in the particular BdC process elaborate the feedback. On the basis of what emerged during the interview phase, they clearly outline the past experiences and the crossroads that the individual user has encountered, and delineate some hints for further personal development. These 'hints' are presented to the individual and discussed. The rationale here consists in empowering the user and in stimulating his/her own autonomy in decision making.

Monitoring and follow-up. The users who have started their own development process are not left alone. Practitioners from the different involved centres provide them with support and follow-up actions, such as periodic monitoring sessions.

The results of the project can be categorised according to the benefits to organisations, and those to individuals:

For the organisation, two important elements of innovation have been produced:

- The relationship between the involved services and the individual users has improved, reducing the bureaucratic distance which usually slows down these processes.
- The introduction of the BdC practice within the territory of the Rimini Province represents an opportunity to bring together the different competent agencies and to foster their collaboration. In this respect, the Spring Out project represents a relevant experience supporting inter-agency cooperation and dialogue, reducing bureaucracy.

For the target group:

- Better employment opportunities
- Better self-esteem and self-improvement
- Raising awareness about own personal potential
- Better design of individual vocational plans, in a lifelong learning perspective.

#### 20.2.6.6 *Benefits and Target Audiences*

There are no official statistics regarding the population involved in validation processes but, according to a survey carried out by Isfol and the University of Rome, there is widespread awareness of the relevance of non formal and informal learning, especially among young people. Almost 72% of the young respondents (in the 18 - 33 age group) stated that they achieved a relevant part of their competences in a non formal or informal way and half of this population (36% of the whole sample) would access a validation service if it was available.

The most important target groups in Italy with a potential interest in validation are: the employed, the unemployed, young people searching for occupational security or the recognition of their voluntary experiences and immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

#### 20.2.6.7 *Barriers to Implementation*

It is clear that there is strong support for the introduction of a comprehensive, national system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Italy. However, there are certain barriers to the implementation of such a system.

Firstly, there is a strong need for procedural and methodological frameworks which can be used to compare and 'accredit' the different experiences in the sphere of validation so far. In Italy, it is not yet clear what a validation procedure is, who is able or legitimate to offer this kind of service, or what kind of general requisites the procedures should have.

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2006) 08 - Accumulating, Transferring And Validating Learning. CEDEFOP.

Secondly, the individual pilot projects which can be found across the country vary considerably – each region tends to adopt its own model and 'language' for the validation of competences and its own system for training, qualification and certification.

There is also a lack of public awareness of the developments concerning validation of informal and non-formal learning. Individuals are not well informed of political initiatives or training and learning opportunities which might be relevant to them.

Finally, there is a problem of lack of resources to fund the development of new initiatives in the area of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

## **20.3 Private Sector**

### **20.3.1 Social Partner Involvement**

The Social Partners are actively involved in the discussion on the improvement of individual competences and the development of training opportunities. They have a fundamental role in the promotion of acknowledgement and acquired learning, through active participation in the debate and through the management of the system of education and training.<sup>1</sup>

One example of a project that social partners have jointly developed is a research project on competence needs. The objectives of the study were to identify companies' competence needs in 16 different sectors and to provide public authorities with accurate information on long-term labour market trends. Competences needed at company level were identified by means of a survey. More than 80 professional profiles were established, 70% of which are considered "critical" or hard to find on the labour market. The results of the study were intended to be taken into account by public authorities when setting up education and/or training programmes, in order to better match training offers with competence needs.<sup>2</sup>

A second example is the VAI (Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs) project, funded through the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme.

<sup>1</sup> OECD Project on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Italy Country Background Report, Draft December 2006

<sup>2</sup> Social Dialogue on Education and Training, Annex, 2002. <http://www.etuc.org/a/1131>

## VAI, Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs<sup>1</sup>

The VAI partnership is led by EBLA, a bilateral body involving SME associations and Trade Unions<sup>2</sup>. The project, which commenced in 2006, aims to identify, develop, test and fine-tune a methodology and a set of tools (the 'VAI KIT'), suitable to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities existing within European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning. The purpose of this is to create the best possible conditions for SME managers to support the creation of new learning opportunities – internal or external to companies – in a lifelong and lifewide learning perspective. and to valorise individual efforts in lifelong learning.

The VAI project responds to the need expressed by consultants, learning facilitators, SME managers and heads of companies to create tools and methodologies to support SMEs and workers to increase their knowledge base, also recognising the experiences and related competences developed in non formal (e.g. on the job) and informal learning contexts (e.g. leisure activities). Only in this way is it possible for individuals to enhance their continuous effort to be competitive in the knowledge-based economy and society. Furthermore, the VAI approach also provides new solutions which allow evidence to be given for all existing learning processes within SMEs.

The VAI approach addresses employees working in SMEs and micro enterprises, with the objective of valuing and recognising the competences that individuals acquire during work practice and other activities. For this reason, the project provides different tools and methodologies to assess informal learning. The assessment process is explained in a guide on how to describe individual learning pathways and acquired competences. A comprehensive list of criteria is provided and for individual learning recognition, there is an individual acquis chart, based on the European standard for CV.

The key outcome, called the 'Development Plan', affects both the individual and the company. In this process the role of the learning facilitator (FAI) is pivotal, representing the 'trait d'union' between the organisation and the employee. The FAI utilises different tools (belonging to the VAI Model) to support the identification, evaluation and valorisation of competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

The VAI methodology considers three groups of competences: basic, relational and technical competences. The elements that are validated focus on the learning contexts/modalities concerning personal life and work/professional life. All kinds of knowledge, skills and experiences are valued through an original grid for the identification of informal/non formal learning practices that employees already implement within or outside the company. The "User Guide for the Assessment Tool" is available at: <http://www.progettovai.org>.

The VAI Model follows four steps:

### **Information**

1. Inform and explain to the management and the employees that knowledge can occur through non formal and informal learning methods.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from a Leonardo VPL-2 Case Study Grid

<sup>2</sup> Other members are FEDERLAZIO and CAN (associations of SMEs and micro enterprises), FORMARE, ERFAP and SMILE (training agencies, belonging to SMEs associations and/or Trade Unions), EXA TEAM (an SME with expertise in designing and managing European funded projects), SEDA (a technological partner), CRIA (a Spanish consulting firm, with strong expertise in local development and enterprise creation), CEEFIA (a French training agency, with consolidated expertise in competencies development), IAGO (a UK-based consulting firm with expertise in local development and European funded project management) and CKP: an organisation in the Czech Republic active in local development and social enterprise creation.

2. Explain the benefits generated by the implementation of non formal and informal learning methods.

### Identification

1. Identify existing non formal and informal learning practices in the company.
2. Identify non formal and informal learning practices that could be implemented in the company.

### Evaluation

1. Organise the results of the evaluation step.
2. Analyse the effective non formal and informal learning practices at an individual level and/or a global level.

### Valorisation

1. Design the development plans for the company and the employees
2. Valorisation of the non formal and informal learning practices inside the company.
3. Valorisation of the competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

Validation of prior learning allows recognition of the variety of competences that individuals/workers develop throughout their professional and social life. For SMEs and micro enterprises it is particularly important to identify workers' strengths and competences, regardless of the formal training and education paths they have attended.

## 20.3.2 Action at company level

For many years, training represented an "extra" offered by management to employees and collaborators, often used for the vocational updating and professional growth of the employees. In reality, it was considered more a cost than an investment. At present, while in-company training has by now become an almost routine practice, formalised in the National Collective Labour Agreements, new challenges and opportunities are presenting themselves for businesses, in terms of recognition of the competences acquired on the job, or in other non-institutional training situations.<sup>1</sup>

Today, lifelong learning and the quality of skills and competences are no longer seen as linked to only growth and competitiveness of the company and individuals, but are increasingly seen as essential strategic factors for a company. Many Italian large and medium companies have recently established programmes and invested resources in competence management and validation, often through specific information system and software (for instance SAP).

The relevance of learning in the workplace is also underlined in the laws (Laws 53 and 30/2003) regarding VET and Labour Market reform. In both of these laws apprenticeship contracts are considered as one of the possible pathways (the other being school and vocational training) to accomplish the "Right-Duty of Education and Training", established for young people under 18.

<sup>1</sup> Transfine Project, Italy Case Study

The multiplication of contract types (temporary jobs were introduced only in 1997 in Italy) and the increasing importance of flexibility in the labour market have rendered recognition of individual competences increasingly relevant - both from the point of view of companies and individuals. Company representatives have also expressed an increased demand for competence transparency in new recruits in order to optimise recruitment and access activities.

Unfortunately, there remains a gap between policy and practice, and assigning real value to learning in the workplace. In addition, for enterprises, new initiatives affecting methods of assessment, optimisation and management of human resources, also generate implications for labour contracts and negotiation and can produce negative effects. According to a research study carried on by the University of Rome "La Sapienza" Sociology Department (see Viteritti, 1999) one of the central problems for companies lies in procedures: who (institutions, enterprises, VET providers) assesses and recognises the skills acquired and how? In practice many companies use internal standards and parameters but several problems arise when such standards and parameters, which are considered proprietary tools, have to be made visible and in some way "exportable". Because of this, a potential system of validation should ensure individuals that their skills are widely recognised without hindering company autonomy. A strong and negotiated public co-ordination is considered necessary to ensure the enlargement and diversification of "recognised learning contexts" without violating firms' HR management prerogatives.

The above research study underlines that investments in in-company training are generally increasing, although there has been a reduction in staff attending traditional learning, such as training courses, in favour of work-based learning (such as learning centres, social exchanges, rotation and integration of functions and skills). These methods are now becoming common for all levels of employees - until recently they were limited to employees at higher levels of management. Also, as shown by several "local network agreements", school/company co-operation is becoming increasingly widespread (Formez, 2004). Agreements, partnerships and projects for specific training and practice or study periods, involvement of companies in guidance, link- and service-desks, are diffused throughout the country, promoted by enterprises or by industrial and local associations.

In conclusion, despite the increased importance of on-the-job learning within companies, a broad and shared definition of validation practices has not yet been reached, that would match new types of learning to traditional VET paths.

The enterprise associations (such as the National Craft Confederation or SME associations) as well as single research institutes have been devoting efforts to translate important pilot experiences of analysis and identification of competences carried out in single corporate contexts into the wider industrial system. Pilot projects have been implemented at both national (Ruffino, 2001; ISVOR FIAT, 1999) and transnational level

(i.e. through several different Adapt and Leonardo projects). The challenge is now to diffuse such best practices and capitalise what has been learned from them, promoting more extensive and homogeneous actions.

An example of a validation project which has been implemented in the private sector is the 'Investing in People' project, funded through the ESF Equal Programme:

#### Investing in People Equal Project<sup>1</sup>

'Investing in People' was a project funded under the second round of the Equal ESF programme. It was set up in response to a problem of unemployment in the Italian province of Macerata, as a result of the restructuring of private companies, particularly in the shoemaking industry.

The Investing in People project plan was to act on workers' adaptability by using their workplace as a 'laboratory' where they could highlight and validate the competences they had through informal and non-formal learning. This plan was based on the Dutch validation system, or EVC (Erkenning Verwoven Competenties - Recognition of Acquired Skills). In order to transfer the learning from the Dutch experience of EVC, an important task was to adapt the system to the local circumstances in Macerata.

The main activity of the project was to try out the EVC methodology in the three partner companies within the project. Beneficiaries were chosen within each company from the specific target groups (workers over 45, or disabled) and underwent the three initial stages of the validation procedure: assessment, portfolio completion and drafting of a Personal Development Plan (PDP). Following this, the beneficiaries were given tailor-made training, based on the PDP and finally, their competences were validated by the company.

The Equal programme includes within each project specific funding for 'dissemination and mainstreaming' activities. Thus, the pilot project is now being tested and validated. At the same time, mainstreaming activities are being carried out towards other provinces, regional and national authorities in order to seek support for the creation of conditions to enable the project to be viable in the long term (e.g. wider recognition of the method used, involvement of different actors).

<sup>1</sup> Investing In People, Province of Macerata, Equal Round II

## 20.4 Third Sector

In Italy, training provided by the third sector, especially by Catholic associations, is quite prevalent and valued. The revision of the V Chapter of the Italian Republic Constitution in 2001 (concerning State/Regions governance general principles) formally recognised the role of the third sector in developing activities of general interest on the basis of the subsidiarity principle. Despite this, sufficient institutional recognition and validation of the associations themselves does not exist, nor of the competences that participants may acquire through activities with them (Florenzano, 2004).

The types of experiences recognised in the third sector are acquired through the following channels:

**Civil Service:** the national regulation (law n. 64/2001, “Establishment of the National Social Service”) states that competences acquired through the Social Service can be recognised as credits towards vocational training pathways or valuable access requirements to regulated professions. Universities can also recognise such competences as credits. The above regulation allowed the take-up of “agreement protocols” between associations engaged in civil service projects (namely ARCI, FIVOL, Opera Don Bosco) and universities or training agencies, although they did not generate common guidelines assuring validation process and results standards.

The increasing ‘professionalisation’ of charitable organisations, which are more and more involved in institutional services (e.g emergency services, support to people with disabilities, care of elderly people, etc.) causes volunteers to be specifically qualified and skilled.

This is why charitable organisations, especially those with a more consolidated structure and penetration in society, have taken on the role of training providers. An example is the first aid courses organised by the Italian society of the Red Cross. The attendance certificate can result in additional credits for jobs in the health service.<sup>1</sup>

**Voluntary Associations (“volontariato”):** associations operating in the voluntary sector have been very active in claiming their central role in promoting and valuing informal learning and individual cultural development. In recent years a co-ordination Forum (Third Sector Forum) has been established representing all Voluntary Associations ([www.forumterzosettore.it](http://www.forumterzosettore.it)). In 2000 the Forum signed an Agreement with the Ministry of Education stating *“the possibility of a certification of training credits acquired through association activities, with a specific attention to the definition of competences acquired by*

<sup>1</sup> VPL, WP3: National Review, Italy. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=78](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=78)

*young people (also in distance learning), in voluntary activities, in social and cultural enterprises and associations*". More recently (2004) the Forum signed an Agreement with the CRUI (Italian University Rectors Conference) in order to improve cultural and operational relationships between the voluntary sector and Universities.

**Cultural or political activities within Youth Associations:** youth associations joined together in 2003 to create the Youth Forum (<http://www.giovanidelleacli.org/forumdeigiovani.htm>) which includes over 40 different associations sharing common leading themes and demands. One of the goals is the establishment of a framework system allowing the visibility of experiences and learning acquired through participation in youth associations' activities. This framework aims to increase mutual trust between formal VET institutions and youth associations, allowing the development of specific devices for simple (or even automatic) recognition of learning. Some youth associations have experiences in recognition of learning through study visits in foreign countries, which have been validated as university credits on a local basis.

The Third Sector has an important role in developing projects that prevent social and occupational exclusion, for instance, through support to disadvantaged groups in identifying and validating their individual competences (something close to the French "*bilan des competences*"). Isfol carried out a specific research study of these experiences in 2000 (cfr. Isfol, National Employment Program Agency, 2000)

An example of a third sector initiative is the trans-national project 'FAIR', funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, which started in 2004.

#### FAIR project

This project undertook an in-depth study to find out about non-formal and informal learning in the fair trade sector, aiming to recognise skills learnt outside formal learning, and to recognise the role of the third sector in the acquisition of professional competences, through voluntary and work activities. The FAIR project is mainly orientated towards institutions in charge of recognising competences. The aim is to grant/permit organisations to gain instruments and methodologies for validation, certification and transferability of learnt and acquired competences in non formal learning (in the work place, activities in civil society organisations, as well as in informal learning (activities linked to family and personal life).

## 20.5 Conclusions

There has been little significant development in the Italian system of validation of informal or non-formal learning since the previous Inventory was published in 2005. All relevant stakeholders are agreed that a comprehensive national system should be established but that this depends first on the completion of a national framework of reference (National Qualifications Framework, NQF).

Nevertheless, there have been a number of initiatives which will inform the future implementation of a national validation system, across the public, private and third sectors. The official *Libretto Formative del Cittadino* is undergoing trials in regions across the country, private sector actors (both social partners and private firms) have initiated relevant projects in response to labour market needs and in the third sector, the development of validation methodologies is beginning to take place among a number of organisations, including voluntary, youth and civil service bodies. Many of these have been supported by European Funding, such as the Equal and Leonardo da Vinci programmes.

The challenges remains thus to formalise the validation system – to capitalise on the support from relevant stakeholders and collect good practice and lessons learned from the projects and experiences so far. There is a strong need for procedural and methodological frameworks which can be used to compare and 'accredit' the different experiences in the sphere of validation so far. Other barriers to success include the lack of public awareness of the developments concerning validation of informal and non-formal learning and the lack of resources to fund the development of new initiatives in the area of validation of informal and non-formal learning. These obstacles must all be overcome, in order for Italy to join countries such as France, Norway and the UK, where validation of informal and non-formal learning has become an integral and widespread part of their strategies for lifelong learning.

## 21.0 Latvia<sup>1</sup>

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*By Rasa Juciute (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 21.1 Introduction

Since 1991, when Latvia gained independence, there have been challenging situations during the transition from the planned system to a market economy; this has caused a change in the paradigm of the whole educational system. In view of the unstable economic situation and the lack of experience and traditions both in informal and non-formal education, the Ministry of Education and Sciences has had some difficulties in organising and financing informal and non-formal education.

In general, education development policy in Latvia has been designed according to the education development guidelines set by the European and Latvian policy planning documents, such as the Lisbon Strategy, the Bologna Process, the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the UNESCO programme “Education for All”, the European Commission work programme “Education and Training 2010”, the European initiative “2010 – European Information Society for Growth and Employment”, the EU Basic Strategy regarding gender equality, the long-term conceptual document “The growth model of Latvia: People First”, “Long-term Economic Development Strategy”, “Joint Economic Strategy”, Development Guidelines of Sustainable Development of Latvia”, Guidelines for Policy Planning”, Latvian National Action Plan for Employment”, “Guidelines of Sport Policy for years 2004–2009” and “Regional Development Guidelines”<sup>2</sup>.

However, the legislative framework in Latvia does not provide sound lifelong learning policy, administration and funding and, as a result, the existing resources (national, municipal, international, possibly also private) are not managed purposefully in the interindustry context; neither have the criteria been determined for using them efficiently<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, there is no equality in the availability of qualitative lifelong education<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, for certain groups of people, formal as well as informal lifelong education, including second-opportunity education, is not yet available in Latvia<sup>5</sup>. The current legislation framework in Latvia does not define a responsibility for the state to provide opportunities

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Latvia chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Vladimir Menshikov (Laboratory of sociological Researchers, Latvia)

<sup>2</sup> National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme “Education and Training 2010” in Latvia. Riga, June 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

for lifelong learning for the population regardless of age, gender, previous education, ethnic origin, level of income and functional disabilities<sup>1</sup>. As a result the social stratification and the number of the unemployed increase as there are limited learning opportunities for various groups of society such as families with low incomes, people lacking basic skills, young people - particularly in the rural areas and people over 50 years of age (among others)<sup>2</sup>. Adults are so far not recognised as the largest education target group and the system does not offer sufficient opportunities to provide for a long-term productive participation of individuals in the labour market and in civic society. As a result, general, vocational and further education of all degrees insufficiently provide for the knowledge, skills and experience required by employers, which hampers the creation of a highly skilled democratic society for the competitive knowledge-based economy<sup>3</sup>.

With regards to non-formal and informal education and learning, there remains an absence of a legislative base and a national concept in Latvia. On the other hand, by the end of the 1990s, within the framework of the concept of lifelong learning more attention has been paid to informal and non-formal learning. As regards the question of validation (it is necessary to note that in Latvia the term “validation” or its equivalents have not been used until recently) Latvia remains at the stage of experimentation and uncertainty (across Europe, countries at a similar experimental stage (to a varying extent) accept the need for initiatives but are still uncertain whether and how this could influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis). At present it is possible to point to the fact that the inclusion of Latvia into the common European area promotes the rapid understanding of the wide range of problems connected with validation, and it prompts possible solutions to them. The experience of other countries should be taken into account in Latvia - this will enable the development of a Latvian system be informed by developments in other Member States

In general the current situation concerning the validation of informal and non-formal education in Latvia can be viewed with optimism as there are already concrete further developments at the planning and design stage. In fact, the operational strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2007 – 2009 stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications. Moreover, despite the passive position of the state structures and objective impossibility of full financing, the number of initiatives at a decentralised level is growing slowly, but steadily. The initiatives indicate the necessity to change the present situation and demonstrate that the educational system needs to meet the requirements of the market and open society.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme “Education and Training 2010” in Latvia. Riga, June 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## 21.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

Provisions for lifelong learning, and especially the validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, are not yet very widely integrated into the laws, strategic documents and action plans in Latvia. The main area of attention has been the regulation and standardisation of formal education and its development.

However, several specific validation initiatives have been implemented in practice for a while already, such as the development of a teachers' qualification and a certification of knowledge of the state language. These are mainly based on or have a very strong integral part of assessment and validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

According to statistical data<sup>1</sup>, in 2002 8.2% of the population of Latvia aged 25-64 participated in education and training; about 1% of people older than 45 were involved in formal education. The age groups 25-34 and 35-44 were the main age groups participating in non-formal learning and informal learning, which also attracted more than one third of people aged 45-64 and one fifth of people of retirement-age. Therefore the possibilities for wider assessment and validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning would be very relevant in Latvia. Actions already taken by large private companies individually show that such a need is evident in the private sector too and this will be explored in greater depth in the relevant section of this chapter.

In terms of the general legal framework, a number of laws on education have been passed since Latvia gained independence: the Law on education (1991), (1998), the Law on higher education (1995), Laws on Secondary and Vocational education (1999), the Law on innovations fund in the field of education (2002), and one of the most recent – the Guidelines for the Development of Education for the period of 2007-2013” (approved by order No. 742 as of 27 September, 2006).

### 21.2.1 The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning

One of the first strategic documents concerning lifelong learning - a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning - was adopted in December 2004 along with the document “Developing and Implementing a Lifelong Learning Strategy” which set the action plan for its implementation. A more recent document is the National Development Plan for 2007-2013, which also contains general provisions for lifelong learning. The very recent and most comprehensive document to date was adopted on 23 February, 2007 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia - “Guidelines for Lifelong Learning for the years 2007–2013” with the

<sup>1</sup> *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems. Country Report: Latvia.* European Training foundation. Contributing to the report: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. 2005.

long-term aim of providing for lifelong learning according to the population's interests, their abilities and the social and economic development needs of the regions. The document defined actions to create a learning society in Latvia and with the help of education to improve democracy as well as the welfare of the society and international economic competitiveness. The Guidelines define the main target groups and their needs; directions for lifelong learning policy actions; policy results and their indicators; responsible institutions and the necessary resources for the implementation of the guidelines. Although the implementation of the guidelines of the lifelong learning policy is attributed to the Ministry of Education and Science and institutions subordinated to it, a wide range of stakeholders have contributed to the development of the document: policy experts from all ministries, regions and non-government organisations as well as social partners<sup>1</sup>. It is envisaged that implementation of the lifelong learning policy will be conducted annually, according to the quantitative indicators defined in the Action Programme, due to be adopted by 1 June 2007.

The establishment of a lifelong learning structure, with the help of purposefully organised formal and informal systems of further education, including the introduction of a system for the recognition of learning acquired through non-formal and informal education are among the main measures for the implementation of the lifelong learning policy defined in the Guidelines.

The guidelines also foresee the improvement of non-formal and informal education for pupils as well as adults. According to the latest data, the number of pupils involved in interest education programmes increases every year; in the school year 2007, 240,273 pupils were involved in programmes of interest education<sup>2</sup> – this figure accounts for 62% of the total number of pupils in general, special and vocational education institutions<sup>3</sup>.

#### 21.2.2 Validation developments prior to the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning

The process currently in place for the certification of non-formal learning is for each non-formal educational institution to determine the conditions for the issue of certifying documents. These documents are issued only on behalf of the educational institution<sup>4</sup>. It is then for employers to determine whether this document of non-formal education is sufficient in order to occupy a certain position. Professional associations organising the continuing education of employees and employers themselves choose which non-formal educational programmes are recognised. Larger enterprises have staff training plans in

<sup>1</sup> *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia*. Riga, June 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Opportunities for children to develop their special talents in sports, art, music and other areas

<sup>3</sup> *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia*. Riga, June 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Thematic Overview. *The vocational education and training (VET) system of Latvia*. ReferNet. Europe Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. 2005.

which it is stated which non-formal educational programmes the particular specialist has to master.

Some initiatives have been undertaken at the level of the Ministry of Education and Science. For example, in the document passed by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2001 “The Concept of the Development of Education for 2002 – 2005”, the chapter “The development of educational possibilities for adults, providing professionally oriented lifelong learning supply” proved that Latvia had started to move in the direction of a so-called “Modular approach” in respect of the validation of informal and non-formal education. The concept declares the following basic regulation: “To promote the inclusion of different social groups into education, it is necessary to work out the modular educational programmes for all levels of education for full-time tuition, extra-mural, and correspondence tuition”. The following actions were foreseen in order to implement this regulation in practice:

- to create a credit point system and to introduce it into the programmes mentioned, promoting its compatibility with the academic system of credits transfer;
- to work out the basic directives for the evaluation of the work of evening schools.

### 21.2.3 The validation of informal and non-formal learning in the context of the Strategy for Lifelong Learning

Some general developments have been made in order to set the foundations for lifelong learning and herewith the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For example, as part of the national programme “Developing and Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategy”, there were 6 simultaneous projects elaborated at the regional level with the aim to establish regional support systems and capacity-building for implementing and enhancing the lifelong learning strategy.<sup>1</sup> Also, the Vocational Education Administration, which is supervised by the Ministry of Education and Science, has set up a working group which is developing a methodology for non-formal education recognition and skill evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

The responsibility for the education of adults has been assigned to local governments, in which the centres of continuing education were created. With the support of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, the NGO “Latvian Adult Education Association” was created. It is the basic coordinator (umbrella organisation) and initiator for questions of informal and non-formal education in Latvia.

<sup>1</sup> *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems. Country Report: Latvia.* European Training foundation. Contributing to the report: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by Baiba Ramina, Head of the National Observatory

The latest report from the Ministry of Education regarding progress towards the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme describes developments in the area of the development of professionally-oriented and informal education for adults. Most of these do not relate to actual validation activities and are more focused on the provision of professional and informal education, although the report does state that a methodology has been developed for the assessment of the knowledge and professional skills acquired informally and for the possible awarding of credits.<sup>1</sup>

The operational strategy of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2007 – 2009 was issued in July 2007. One of the sub-priorities of this strategy is dealing with the supply, accessibility and quality of Lifelong Learning in the country. The document also stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications.

#### 21.2.4 Further professional development of teaching staff

In accordance with the “Law on Education” (point 14, paragraph 15), adopted in September 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science accepted an instruction on “The receiving of professional pedagogical education and the order of professional perfection”. According to the document, workers in the educational sector (except for higher educational institutions) can receive pedagogical education by further education or self-education. The instruction precisely defined an amount of time (contact hours) an applicant should spend for the acquisition of the course.

This is a one-year process consisting of different training modules. The process however starts off with a procedure to validate participants’ prior experience, skills and relevant activities in the field. This is done by candidates stating information about their relevant work experience as a teacher. The candidates have to prove the length of their work experience and also have to send their teaching material, teaching methodologies and any other information about relevant courses or activities in the field. Then the Special Certificate Commission (which is made up of representatives of the Ministry, vocational institutes and social partners) assesses which modular exemptions participants may get.

Participants are not likely to be exempt from all modules and they may have to do some projects or attend courses. Participants are then assessed by written exam and presentation. The Commission and the Ministry of Education have made an agreement with specific training institution to carry out relevant courses.

Those who pass the final examinations then receive a nationally recognised certificate which is signed by the Ministry of Education. This however does not replace the official

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

teacher qualification which can only be obtained by attending higher education institutes. But the certificate provides exemptions for those wanting to continue studying to become an officially qualified teacher.

The main reason for such an initiative is a lack of qualified staff engaged in the educational sector. Validation is used to stimulate the inflow of a new staff, to expand career opportunities and to raise the qualifications of working teachers. The certificate does not mean a salary increase for those who obtain it but provides them with an official certificate and thus the 'right' to work in schools. They also gain the opportunity to study further, to have some of their previous experience recognised and at the same time obtain exemptions for their further studies.

#### 21.2.5 Validation of knowledge of the state language

In September 2000, under the patronage of the Ministry of Justice "The Law on the State Language" was accepted. This law rigidly regulates all spheres where the use of the state language is obligatory. In its turn, the resolution No. 296 of the Cabinet of Ministers (Regulations of the necessary extent of the state language knowledge for the performance of professional and official duties and the order of the state language skills examination) rigidly regulates the necessary level of the Latvian language knowledge, which is necessary for the performance of one or another professional and official duties, and also determines the procedure of the language knowledge examination. All the procedures concerning the estimations of the level of the state language knowledge are assigned to the State Language Centre (Valsts valodas centrs). The examination of the state language knowledge is divided into three parts:

- An interview – a commission evaluates conversational skills of a person discussing the topics related to his/her work, profession or position (time period 6-7 minutes);
- Examination of reading skills: a person does reading tasks;
- Examination of writing skills: a person does writing tasks.

The first part of the examination is essential, because during the interview it is possible to define a possible level of the language knowledge. Reading and writing tasks are given according to the defined level. In addition, during the interview listening skills are examined.

**Table 21.1 Accordance of the results of the state language attestation and the ones of the central examination at school:**

	Language attestation	School
The lowest level (I)	I A	F
	I B	E
The middle level (II)	II A	D
	II B	C
The highest level (III)	III A	B
	III B	A

According to the results of the examination process, a person receives a certificate of knowledge of the state language, where the level of the language knowledge is designated. In accordance with one's desire this level can be improved.

In that way, if a person has not received official education in the Latvian language, then, having finished courses or learnt the language independently, s/he has a right to validate the education received in an informal or non-formal way. In 2001 12,460 people (6397 of whom were unemployed) received the certificate. In 2002 this number was 10,051 (6,142 of whom were unemployed) and in 2003 it was 10,110 (5,321 unemployed).

Although the basic reason for such an initiative lies in political motives (in Latvia 20.4 % (data of the year 2005) of the inhabitants are non-citizens - the basic aim of the law is preservation and development of the Latvian language) the validation promotes social integration, an improvement of the situation of the labour market and stimulates learning of the state language.

#### 21.2.6 Public Initiatives - Conclusion

Despite the most recent developments, which still are at the planning and design stage, in the development of the Latvian education system, the most attention has been paid to formal education and learning. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the legislative base in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal education is still insufficient and basic laws are lacking. The actions already being taken and implemented in practice show the relevance and the demand for such initiatives to become more widespread in the future.

### 21.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

Latvia aims to increase the role of social partners in order to promote their involvement in defining the state infrastructure for lifelong education and learning. It is expected that their involvement for example in the redesigning of vocational education would bring tacit and explicit knowledge, informed by practice and result in a better match with the needs of the national economy and regional demands. To promote co-operation with social partners, regional vocational education and employment councils (RVEEC) have been created in Kurzeme, Southern Latgale, Vidzeme and Zemgale. Agendas for the RVEEC have been designed and approved in the Trilateral Co-operation sub-council of Vocational Education and Employment.

Private sector employers have not traditionally been engaged in training issues but now, they have already been involved in the design of vocational standards and the assessment of the quality of vocational education, in the accreditation commissions of education programmes and institutions and examination commissions of vocational qualifications.

The recently adopted National Strategy for Lifelong Learning contains provisions that are assigned to the private sector as being among the main contributors in order to promote lifelong learning. It defines several measures to encourage employers to increase the number of employees studying with their support<sup>1</sup>.

International experience testifies that some sectors need regular investment into employees' education and development more than others. Primarily the sectors are finance, insurance, real estate, transport, services and high technologies. In the sphere of manufacture, public health services, agriculture and construction these investments are traditionally less. The situation in Latvia develops in a similar way. Although several individual companies have set up validation procedures for employees, a systematic and comprehensive overview of industry sectors on a national level is not available yet.

Although the progress of informal and non-formal education validation on the part of public authorities has been slow, the situation in the national economy has developed more dynamically. First, due to the introduction of the market mechanisms under the conditions of the free market, the intensity of the services offered in the sphere of education regulate supply and demand.

Surveys show that enterprises use various methods in relation to training their employees. At present the most popular forms are scheduled training, instructing and self-education.

<sup>1</sup> *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia.* Riga, June 2007.

In 2003 the Central statistical bureau of the Republic of Latvia carried out an investigation of 3500 Latvian enterprises concerning their employees' training. The published data testifies that only 53 % of enterprises provide training. The highest percent of the course participants was fixed in the sphere "financial intermediary" - 46 %. In its turn, a survey of entrepreneurs, carried out by the newspaper "Dienas bizness", showed that 68 % of the enterprises participate in seminars, and only 41 % seldom attend. In turn, in 2002 the company Mercuri International carried out a survey of more than 100 representatives of the leading Latvian firms which showed that in approximately 40 % of cases enterprises organise their own employee training and development. A distinctive feature of Latvia is that the greatest attention is paid to the development of personnel in the companies with foreign capital and joint ventures. These enterprises introduce traditions which are characteristic for their native country.

Large enterprises create their own educational centres and programmes. Up to April 2003 "Lattelekom" Ltd. (an enterprise which was a monopolist in telecommunication services for a long time) had the most powerful educational centre. After losing monopoly status the centre was abolished and its functions were handed over to two newly-created commercial structures: "Spring Valley" Ltd. (training and expert opinions in the field of management and personnel management) and "Komunikāciju grupa" (courses, programmes and expert opinions in the field of telecommunications, computers and clients service).

Banks (Hansabanka is among them) have their own educational centres as well. In 2006 95.7 % of Hansabanka employees were involved in training; each of the employees devoted at least 8 days to the training.

Unfortunately, at present, more detailed and qualitative information on industries is not available. But on the whole it is possible to conclude that the number of courses, seminars and other kinds of employee training are growing and their quality is improving. Nevertheless, at present some enterprises are forced to use the services of foreign firms, as what local firms can offer is limited. Local businessmen have started to understand the importance of investment into their employees, because in the long run it is reflected in their well-being. However, the high price of the services firms offer to organise courses and seminars remains a serious problem.

There is clearly an awareness of the importance of enabling employees to develop their skills and competences but it remains to be seen how actors from the private sector will respond to this by developing initiatives for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

## 21.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

The Latvian Adult Education Association, LAEA<sup>1</sup>, is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, which unites adult education providers in Latvia – both individuals and organisations. It was founded in 1993 with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia and the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. The highest decision making body of the LAEA is the General Assembly of its members. The General Assembly elects the Board, the Chairperson of the Association, who is also in charge of duties of chairing the Board, and the Audit Committee, for a two-year term. The Board manages activities of the Association in between general meetings.

LAEA has been a member organisation of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) since 1995, joining the European Prison Education Association and European Adult Education Research Association (ESREA) in 1997. The aim of LAEA is to promote development of non-formal adult education systems and to participate in life-long learning policy making, thereby promoting development of a civic, democratic and open society in Latvia.

Since its establishment LAEA has gained valuable experience in organising various activities on local and national levels. LAEA has created a co-operation network of adult education providers from all towns and districts of Latvia, prepared trainers, elaborated and approved training programmes, training and methodological materials.

In cooperation with local governments, different funds and European institutions LAEA fulfilled a great number of programmes and projects on informal and non-formal education in Latvia. Unfortunately, none of the projects has been devoted to the problem of validation yet. Nevertheless, LAEA is the organisation which actively adopts European experience and informs the society, forms public opinion and stands up for the creation of a legislative basis on the state level.

There is currently a lack of evidence of initiatives to promote the validation of informal and non-formal learning developed by actors from the third sector in Latvia.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.laea.lv/65/view.aspx>

## 21.5 Conclusions

Presently, it is obvious that informal and non-formal education in Latvia should become an equal component of the whole system of education, which is determined by the needs of the socio-economic developments of the state. Brief analysis of the situation show that the development of processes, connected with the promotion of lifelong education and learning have entered a new phase with the adoption of National Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Latvia. The need to create and develop wider procedures and infrastructure for identification, assessment and validation of competences and knowledge acquired through informal and non-formal learning is included into the strategic document and expected to be addressed in the nearest future in more comprehensive approach. Although, the concept is rather new, the European experience is being taken into account, the number of enterprises and organisations is growing and personnel policies are oriented towards the introduction of validation processes.

At present the state policy regarding the validation of informal and non-formal education and learning seems to have made some initial progress, though the major work is still ahead. The basic initiatives are at the level of formal education. It seems that these questions are not resolved in full for several main reasons:

- there are still a lot of other issues to be addressed in the society, and consequently informal and non-formal education is not considered as the priority;
- the development of new areas in education is considered a necessity but optimistic – the sector is subject to financial and resource shortages and lacks financial resources for teachers' salaries, for programme accreditation, for educational establishments' repair and maintenance.
- the concept is rather new and it is difficult to foresee its results and effect.

It is therefore likely that the outputs and impact from any activities in the sphere of validation will not be visible until the long-term in Latvia.

## 22.0 Liechtenstein<sup>1</sup>

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*By Roland Blomeyer (Blomeyer and Sanz)*

### 22.1 Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning does not currently play a major role in Liechtenstein politics. The country is very small (160 square km / 35,000 inhabitants) and has few human resources available for developing this area. To illustrate this, each year some 300 students graduate from vocational education and training establishments and at the end of 2004, there were some 1,100 students in vocational education and training. Moreover, due to its small size Liechtenstein has a strong orientation in the field of education towards Switzerland. Liechtenstein is taking over Swiss vocational training regulations and a large proportion of the Liechtenstein youth are educated in Switzerland or Austria. Any methods to validate non-formal and informal learning, therefore, will tend to come from Switzerland or Austria.

### 22.2 Review of existing initiatives

Currently there is only limited experience with validation of non-formal and informal learning in Liechtenstein.

One mechanism for validating informal learning is laid down in Article 31 of the Liechtenstein Vocational Education Act and is based on a Swiss regulation. Article 31 of the Liechtenstein Vocational Education Act grants access to the apprenticeship final examination to people who have not formally passed through the dual system of vocational training.<sup>2</sup> For this the individual must have worked in the occupation for which the examination is to be taken for twice the number of years as the duration of the formal training period (i.e. 6 years of work experience for a 3-year apprenticeship training in the dual system).

Two sets of stakeholders are involved in granting permission to participate in the final examination:

- The employer must provide proof of the work experience in the form of employer issued work certificates showing the period of work with the employer and the type of activities carried out.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Liechtenstein chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Kerstin Junge

<sup>2</sup> The dual system of vocational training consists of work-based training with an employer which is complemented by a few days of school-based training per week.

- The Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education (<http://www.llv.li/amtsstellen/llv-abb-home.htm>) assesses the application and decides whether the applicant needs to enrol at a vocational school before the apprenticeship final examination can be taken and how much of the schooling needs to be completed. This decision is based on whether or not the applicant has already completed a (different) training in the dual system. If this is the case, the period of schooling for the new occupation can be reduced as the “general knowledge” elements have already been completed. The school-based training for the relevant occupation needs to be completed in any case.

The Liechtenstein regulations thus follow a clear process and aim at the ex-post accreditation of informal and non-formal learning. It is a formative method.

There is one similar initiative according to the EUROPASS on national level, launched by the “Gewerbe- und Wirtschaftskammer” (Business and economic chamber) Liechtenstein. They call their initiative “Berufspass”. All the courses/classes and knowledge training during life (education, work or leisure time) is documented in this document.

## 22.3 Conclusions

Liechtenstein is a small country that with regard to its education system has a strong focus on neighbouring Switzerland. For the validation of non-formal and informal learning this means that not only Swiss qualifications but also Swiss methods of validation are taken over into Liechtenstein law. Currently, this is restricted to the approach outlined in Article 31 of the Liechtenstein Vocational Training Act. In future, however, this could also mean that Liechtenstein employers take on board the “qualification book” (Qualifikationsbuch) that individuals in Switzerland can use to identify and validate the skills they gained through informal means.

Furthermore, the Maastricht Communiqué and the Copenhagen Process have played a mayor role to develop and conceptualise a framework of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Within this scope the Leonardo-da-Vinci-Programme and the third generation of the lifelong learning<sup>1</sup> program will strengthen the process of validation not only in Liechtenstein.

Finally, a new vocational training act is currently under development, which is likely to come into effect at the earliest in summer 2008. The act refers to the validation of non-formal education as a central theme – it considers the key issue of valuation and acceptance of non-formal qualifications.<sup>2</sup> It thus remains to be seen whether the introduction of this act will lead to developments in the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

<sup>1</sup> COM(2004) 474 final, 2004/0153 (COD) Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Amt für Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung Liechtensteinische Landesverwaltung

## 23.0 Lithuania<sup>1</sup>

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*By Rasa Juciute (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 23.1 Introduction

In order to develop a society of knowledge and lifelong learning and thus a knowledge economy, Lithuania is moving towards a coherent national system of assessment of knowledge and competencies, which aims to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education and thus create an “open” structure which is accessible to all. In principle, the legal basis for this system is in place already. Good progress has been made in embedding and encapsulating many aspects of lifelong learning into many strategic documents, guidelines and action plans, including the evaluation and validation of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education. At the same time, good progress has been made in the development of national VET standards and the system of VET standards, which play a crucial role in the validation process.

Today, scattered initiatives relating to validation of informal and non-formal learning can be found across the country, such as the initiative by Vytautas Magnus University to bridge formal higher education and non-formal and informal learning.

However, methodologies and tools used to evaluate knowledge and skills acquired outside of the formal education system need some further development. Among the main obstacles to greater take-up of the assessment and validation initiatives is the lack of tradition and culture towards lifelong learning. Analysis of existing research and the results of interviews reveal poor awareness among the general public, training providers and even key stakeholders on procedures adopted for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Nevertheless, it appears that a growing number of individuals are interested in issues related to the validation of non-formal education. The successful implementation of recently developed policies and measures should ensure increased visibility and value of non-formal and informal learning experiences and would also strengthen the basis for lifelong learning.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Lithuania chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Giedre Beleckiene (Methodological Centre for VET, National Observatory in Lithuania)

## 23.2 Public Sector

### 23.2.1 Legislation and National policies

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a new concept in Lithuania. An early impetus was provided by the White Paper on VET (**1998**) through the principle *'of formal recognition of the acquired qualification, irrespective of how it has been acquired'*. The law on Non-formal Adult Education (**1998**) established the right of non-formal education participants *'after passing examinations in formal education, science or studies institutions, to receive an assessment of the knowledge acquired in the system of non-formal adult education as well as a state recognised document testifying to the acquisition of a certain level of formal education, stage thereof or a separate regulated part of the programme (module)'*. In **2001-2002**, legal acts defining the procedures for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal vocational education and training and prior-learning in higher non-university studies were adopted. Later, a new edition of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania passed in **2003** set out key elements to formally certify competencies acquired through non-formal (including children's and adult education) or informal learning. This law is an umbrella law establishing the goals and principles of the educational system, the framework of institutions, activities and civil relationships as well as the obligations of the State in the area of formal, non-formal and self (informal) education including validation issues. Finally, the New Procedure of IVET Final Qualification Exams, passed in **2005** describes the procedure for examination of external students who are studying independently and wish to acquire a vocational qualification.

In addition, several strategic documents, namely the Strategy on Vocational Guidance, Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning and action plans of its implementation, Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2003-2012 and Single Programming Documents for 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 (embedded the need to develop Knowledge and Skills Assessment System, including those acquired in a non-formal way), aim to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education. The strategies foresee concrete measures for the further development of a national knowledge and competence assessment system, including official validation of non-formal learning experiences. The Implementation Programme for the Provisions of National Education Strategy 2003–2012 and the Measure Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Overcoming the Consequences of Population Ageing 2005-2013 (approved by the Government in January of 2005) envisioned the creation of a validation procedure for both formal and non-formal educational programmes and modules and obligated The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry and Social Security and Labour to implement respective measures.

In line with the priorities of many strategic documents, new developments to boost vocational education, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning, are expected to take place after the full implementation of the new Law adopted in April 2007 (Amending Law of the Law of Vocational Education, No.X-1065), amending the Law of Vocational Education (1997), and its leading documents. The law is due to come into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2008 and the whole legal framework supplementing its enforcement in practice is due to be developed by 2009. It eliminates the earlier divide between formal and non-formal or informal learning and embeds the view of the vocational education as a seamless lifelong process.

The new edition of the Law on VET introduces a system of qualifications that should facilitate the implementation of validation of prior learning. It also foresees procedures for the recognition of competences as a qualification or a part-qualification.

The system of qualifications is being developed through the ESF national level project "Development of a national qualification system". The aim of this project is to create a uniform and transparent qualifications system which would cover all levels of qualifications, secure transition between the levels, ensure the variety of ways of acquiring a qualification, and provide a possibility to flexibly respond to the requirements of the changing environment. Another national level project "Further Development of the VET Standards System" contributes to the development of qualifications through the national VET standards and labour market needs analysis. Results of these projects will create favourable conditions for the further development of VPL systems.

### 23.2.2 Basis for validation

National VET standards play a crucial role in the curriculum development and validation process. They bring together occupational, educational and assessment elements. The VET standard is comprised of the following parts: general occupational description, occupational purpose, areas of activity, competencies, training objectives, assessment of competencies and final assessment of qualification. In the beginning the progress in the implementation of a comprehensive national qualifications framework based on competency based standards was slow, mainly due to lack of financial resources. Building on the contribution delivered by the "Framework of Qualifications Standards" Project under the Phare 2001 Economic and Social Cohesion Programme, the Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training will develop 100 VET standards under the successive project – "Development of the System of VET Standards" (2004-2008; No. BPD2004-ESF-2.4.0-01-04/0156) by the end of 2007.

A competence-based approach has been introduced in the initial VET system, in order to accelerate the standardisation process.<sup>1</sup> Higher non-university studies were built on the basis of vocational studies and as a consequence they are also competence based.

Though modularisation of curricula in vocational education and in labour market training is on-going, the modules are not yet well harmonised and do not allow flexible attendance at initial vocational education and labour market training. There is not yet mobility between labour market training and vocational education either. Except several single initiatives, the same situation is observed through all levels of education.

Seeking to ensure a unified assessment of vocational attainments, the function of qualification evaluation has been delegated to social partners (Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Craft, Chamber of Agriculture). Separating assessment from education creates strong conditions to formalise the knowledge acquired in a non-formal context.

The recent Law of Vocational Education establishes a qualifications' system of which the main purpose is to ensure qualifications correspond with the constantly changing needs of the economy, to ensure their transparency, benchmarking and lifelong learning and the professional and territorial mobility of people. The system covers the defining and handling of qualifications, assessment and validation of competences and award of qualifications. The new amendments emphasise close cooperation between social partners, state and the educational institutions too. According to the Law, a Qualifications' Agency (Kvalifikacijų tarnyba) under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania will be established in order to monitor and ensure the whole functioning of the system. Among its other responsibilities, it will be responsible for setting the structure of professional standards and the order of their preparation, replacement and amendment will accredit, confirm and register them on the Register of Professional Standards and Qualifications as well as accredit institutions validating individual competences.

Under Article eleven of the Law of Vocational Education, the Government sets requirements for institutions wanting to carry assessment and validation of competences. The process of validation of occupational competences is organised by the institution accredited to do so and in line with the orders approved by the Minister for Social Security and Labour and agreed by the Minister for Education and Science. A certain qualification for a person is awarded when he or she proves they have all necessary competences defined in a respective professional standard. Qualification is granted by the Qualifications' Agency regarding the results of their assessment. The whole process is monitored by the Ministry for Social Security and Labour and by the Ministry for Education and Science.

<sup>1</sup> The reform of vocational studies was finished in 1999 and initial VET programs in 2002.

### 23.2.3 Activities in the field of validation

Currently, students' competences acquired in the course of non-formal learning can be recognised as part of a formal education programme or a qualification according to a procedure established by schools or higher education. In practice, this means that individuals may gain access to formal education at different levels, even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements. For example, children who have completed children's music school and apply to the Lithuanian Music Academy can take a practical test while others are obliged to take a complex musicology exam. Statistics on the results of these initiatives have not been collected.

The equivalency examination is the main method leading to the acceptance of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults. According to the Temporal Procedure,<sup>1</sup> a person over the age of 18 years, with at least one year of work experience can apply to have their competences acquired outside of formal education recognised. In September of each year he or she should register in a licensed vocational school which provides the programme chosen by the individual. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements. This is done through the analysis of certificates on non-formal education and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the external students and schools agree on the timetable of appointed course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. If the results are positive, external students are allowed to take final qualification exams together with those from formal education. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture have taken over full organisation of final exams. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with qualification certificates or the qualified worker diploma. Assessment and recognition services are paid by the external student themselves, by the employer in the case that they initiate the procedure and by the Labour Exchange in the case that they referred the job-seeker to take the examination.

The regulations for recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning set up in the Order of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour<sup>2</sup> are similar to those described above. The only difference concerns the choice of institutions having the right to organise recognition procedures.

The current Leonardo da Vinci programme project "Managing European Diversity in Lifelong Learning" revealed that the equivalency exam as a method of validation is gaining popularity among teachers working in vocational schools. However, during interviews

<sup>1</sup> The Temporal Procedure for Recognition of Knowledge Gained through the Non-formal Adult Education or Informal Education and for Receiving of Formal Documentation for Evidence of Graduation of Higher Level Education, Vocational Training, some Level or Module of Vocational Training and Acquisition of Qualification, 2001, Ministry of Education and Science

<sup>2</sup> Procedure for Organisation and Implementation of Labour Market Vocational Training and Regulations on Digest of Non-formal Labour Market Programmes, 2002, Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

conducted for our research, a lack of knowledge of issues related to validation of non-formal education was identified among training providers, individuals, employers and even stakeholders.. In 2001, the majority of employers<sup>1</sup> did not see any need to formally certify employees' competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways. In their opinion, only the individual could benefit from this validation. However some differences in sectoral approaches could be observed. For example, interest in formalising competencies is higher in the Mechanics and Electronics sector than in the Information Technologies sector. Presented assumptions are being endorsed by the preliminary results of the exploratory research conducted in the framework of Leonardo da Vinci programme project "Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning through the Recognition Procedure of Non-formal and Informal Learning". According to interviews with both training providers and Chambers of Commerce, cases where employers refer employees to take qualification exams are rare.

Based on interview results, it appears the motivation of individuals to gain recognition for non-formal experiences is rather low. However respondents reported an increased interest to certify certain qualifications, especially in the fields of construction and agriculture. This is mainly due to special regulations adopted by some sectoral stakeholders. As an example, according to the Law on Farmer's Farm, a person wishing to register a farm must provide a copy of document evidencing his professional readiness to engage in agricultural activity (a relevant diploma or a certificate). The same requirement exists for farmers applying for loans to banks, support from EU funds or those who are purchasing the land intended for agriculture.

Graduates from *professional colleges*<sup>2</sup> who are continuing studies at colleges<sup>3</sup> have a legal possibility<sup>4</sup> to transfer credits either for subject or for overall study programme. In the latter case students go on with studies according to the individual programme drawn on the basis of the results obtained through comparison of two curricula. Statistics show that the number of graduates from professional colleges and continuing studies in colleges is constantly increasing.

Other validation initiatives in Lithuania cover validation of non-formal and informal learning practices according to international norms. Tests of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or European Computer Driving License (ECDL) are the most popular.

<sup>1</sup> 24 market leaders in sectors of Information Technologies, Hotels and Restaurants and Mechanics and Electronics were interviewed in the framework of ongoing PHARE project "Framework of Qualifications Standards".

<sup>2</sup> Professional colleges provide 3 years duration post-secondary education vocational studies

<sup>3</sup> Colleges provide higher non-university education

<sup>4</sup> Principles for organization of non-university studies for those who studied according vocational studies programme, 2002, Ministry of Education and Science

Despite the fact that Lithuania already has a relatively sufficient legal framework, the practical (de facto) process of building the recognition system and methods for non-formal and informal education has hardly begun. The system of standards is still incomplete and only vocational education and training standards (a description of which can be found on page 4) are in place. Occupational standards are currently being developed within an ESF programme for the Development of a National Qualification System. Adults without basic education but with vocational competencies, acquired at work or through an individual learning, are assessed in accordance with formal rules for young people; therefore their experience is not formally assessed or recognised<sup>1</sup>. Because the country does not yet have a formal recognition system for non-formal and informal education, the prestige of learning gained outside the formal system is reduced, relations between employees and employers are complicated, and the competitiveness of people in the labour market is weakened, especially of those of older age. Among the main obstacles is the lack of traditions and culture towards lifelong learning.

Although there have to date been few initiatives in the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning, several examples can be identified from across the country. VšĮ Skudutiškis academy is developing and piloting a methodology for assessment of competences, using funding from the ESF Equal programme. This regional-level methodology should help older workers, women experiencing problems of integration to labour market and other persons with risk of exclusion from the labour market to self-assess competences, to gain recognition for their competences and to start a home-based business.

Another example of good practice in this field is the recent initiative by Vytautas Magnus University described below. The University has recently set up a Centre of Competences of which the main objective is to get engaged in methodologies which are able to identify, assess and recognise learning acquired in informal and non-formal contexts.

<sup>1</sup> *Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Lithuania.* European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

## Example – The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University

Vytautas Magnus University has recently established the Centre of Competences, with the main objective is to validate informal and non-formal learning of adults wanting to study at the University under individualised study programmes. The Centre is strongly supported by the University and is a result of the current project – “Centre of Competences: Preparation for the Process of the Assessment and Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning. For Establishing Centre of Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning at Vytautas Magnus University” (ESF-2.4.-03-05/0160).

The initiative derived from the Centre for Vocational Education and Research of the Department of Education of the University and is based on the scientific research and the experience acquired through the participation in a variety of different EU projects (for example, past project: Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning Through the Recognition Procedure of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Lt/03/B/F/Pp-171 013 and current project: Recognition and Accreditation of Experiential Learning – a Way for Better Accessibility of Adult Education (REACTION) 223855 - CP -1-2005-1- LT - Grundtvig).

The main objectives of the Centre of Competences are as follow below<sup>1</sup> :

Disseminate information to the public about possibilities to validate individual competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and individualised studies,

Provide individual consultations,

Develop methodological material to the assessors, consultants and participants,

Develop validation procedure under which achievements of the candidates will be assessed and validated,

Provide initial and further training to the assessors and facilitate sharing of good practice,

Involve university lecturers and social partners in the facilitation of validation processes,

Organise special seminars for candidates on documenting acquired achievements and present them to the assessment commission,

Participate in the national and international project on strategic activities of the Centre as well as disseminate research results,

Cooperate with respective structural bodies within other national and international universities.

Among the main purposes to establish the Centre of Competences were the wish to contribute to the development of the University in order to make it attractive to new types of students and create conditions for lifelong learning; by developing a new system of assessment of acquired learning and validation of competences, work closer with social partners and develop better cooperation with other institutions of higher education.

At this initial stage, the Centre aims to provide assistance for individuals wanting to enter part-time Bachelor or Masters’ studies in Management and Economics. A pilot group of individuals wanting to assess and validate their competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is going to take part in the piloting procedure in September 2007. The main competences to be validated are their previous learning and work experience. Among the main methods of validation (still under the development) are

<sup>1</sup> Regulation of Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University.

### Example – The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University

collection of evidence from work experience and formal examinations.

The initiative was designed in cooperation with other universities and social partners. In order to gather more information about the beneficiaries' needs and correspond to them, a pilot group of 25 people was created – the results of piloting validation process will inform further methodological developments. The assessment procedure will be carried out by the respectively trained university lecturers according to the subject and competences to be validated. Validation initiative leads to the certificate.

As an outcome, the university will provide more flexible forms of studies and therefore increase the number of students. For the students benefits can be three-fold. It can open learning possibilities for new groups of students, create more opportunities to combine work and studies, individualise learning and lower university fees. The later benefit for students is among the main barriers for greater take-up of the initiative by other universities.

According to its future plans the Centre aims to provide methodological support for other educational institutions in the field concerned.

In addition, Mykolas Riomeris University, together with Klaipeda, Siauliai and Vytautas Magnus universities are developing a project entitled "Recognition of Nonformal and Informal Learning in University Studies". Further information (in Lithuanian) can be found at [http://www.mruni.lt/lt/bpd/bpd0086/apie\\_projekta/](http://www.mruni.lt/lt/bpd/bpd0086/apie_projekta/).

Activities such as these should help to stimulate an increase in demand for validation of competences. On the other hand, scope remains for future activities, such as improving the awareness of the population of validation and the elaboration of related methodologies and instruments.

### 23.3 Private Sector

**Social partners** participate in the working groups ensuring the compliance of initial VET with the needs of economy and labour market (groups are formed as tripartite partnerships based on equitable participation of employers, trade unions and educational institutions) and the final qualification assessment is fully transferred to social partners too.

**Individual companies** often apply validation instruments (in the form of interviews, observation, personal portfolios etc.) for the selection of new employees, monitoring the performance of staff and for the identification of training needs. It is quite common for the services of private consulting and human resource management firms to be employed for these activities.

Validation is employed used for the following purposes:

- Mandatory certification in the case of special national or EU regulations adopted for particular sectors of the economy (transport, agriculture);
- Optional certification, when certificates are awarded after particular assessment of competences;
- Recruitment of new personnel;
- Identification of training needs with regard to the implementation of new technologies.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the information currently available, it appears that at this stage there are few formal initiatives within the private sector to assess and validate employees' competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Instead, standard training is offered or provided.. However, there are several trends emerging:

- social partners representing employers are more aware of the issue than trade unions;
- large companies or sectors of the economy, according to the Chambers of Industry Commerce and Crafts and the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists consider the issue to be relevant for the sectors they are representing, and especially, for metalwork, working with machine-tools, the furniture industry, the food industry, electronics, chemical and construction industries, because even having the same formal education, employees differ by their competences and tacit knowledge usually acquired through working experience and therefore differ in work efficiency and quality;
- among the main **obstacles** to greater take-up of the assessment and validation initiatives in the private sector are still insufficient number of developed national VET standards and lack of standard methodology frameworks;

<sup>1</sup> Beleckiene, G. and Vaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=358](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358)

- among the main methods used for informal assessment of the employees' competences they already have are observation, collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations and backwards observation.

Case studies collected in the metal, telecommunications, restaurants and retail sectors have revealed that a number of private companies use validation of prior learning instruments in order to assess competences as well as to monitor qualification development progress. The majority of such schemes are developed to assess competences and the suitability of newly recruited personnel. Generally, development of personnel competence is assessed on an annual basis in performance assessment meetings. Interview is the most typical instrument used but other tools include tests, questionnaires, the STAR method (to assess technical competence and individual needs of metal sector companies), the portfolio method (a case in one of the biggest shops chains, when shop assistants willing to receive qualification of retailer formed a portfolio of competences). It should be noted that in some economic sectors, the assessment of results in a certificate award is recognised across the sector (e.g. FESTO certificates for metal sector).<sup>1</sup>

One of the companies that has developed its own system to validate competencies of its employees is Achema, the biggest nitrogen fertilisers company in the country. The box below provides a more detailed case study into the validation practices of this company.

<sup>1</sup> Beleckiene, G. and Viaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=358](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358)

## Example - Achema

The stock company “Achema” is the biggest nitrogen fertilisers company in the country and the largest factory that is involved in this type of activity within the Baltic countries. It has over 1,500 employees.

The company is actively engaged in developing its own system for human resource development where assessment of competencies, skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning plays a very important role. According to the company’s representative, the rationale for the development of such an initiative is the fact that human resources is one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness.

At the moment, the company is developing a system of qualification requirements for every type of work activity performed within the company, which means that the specific qualification requirements will be assigned to each role within the company. In turn this will be later linked to the **occupational standards** currently being developed at the national level. It is expected that the system will clarify, facilitate and render transparent the present process of qualification assessment and encourage employees for lifelong learning.

The main competences the company is validating are those acquired through work experience. Special attention and encouragement is provided for the employees wanting to learn or validate their knowledge in foreign languages. By doing so, they are awarded pay increases. Among the main validation methods used are observation and collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations performed by the direct line manager or formal examinations. The latter is usually used as a part of formal training in the company’s training centre. Indeed, many positions within the company require a certificate, which can be obtained for example by attending one of the training courses of the company – and validation of informal and non-formal learning is a part of this system. The assessment is usually performed by the experts of the company’s training centre and successful assessment of relevant skills and competences can lead to a certain certificate.

The initiative was developed by the company’s training centre with constantly reviewed and improved via indirect input of the beneficiaries – provision of feedback by those participated in the training as well as their managers is encouraged at the end of every training course as well as regular assessment in the longer term.

As the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by the company individually, the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies even of a similar kind. Therefore despite many benefits associated with the delivery and recognising informal/non-formal learning, for example, fairer rewards and better matching between individuals and skills needs as well as better structuring of job profiles, there are still quite a lot of obstacles for greater take-up, for example: the development of assessment and validation methodologies are only affordable by large companies; employees themselves lack motivation as certificates are only recognised within one company; lack of a systematic approach which results in rather scattered learning initiatives than a comprehensive and complete process.

## 23.4 The Third Sector

In the Lithuanian non-profit sector, validation of prior learning is applied in recruitment, assessing and planning of upskilling processes at institutional level as well as in licensing and certification procedures. In the voluntary sector, validation procedures are mainly used for the selection of new volunteers and observation of their competences, as well as the development of their motivation and self-confidence.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis of documents (certificates, diplomas etc.) assessment of portfolios and interviews are the main validation instruments used within the sector. The use of validation systems in NGOs can be illustrated using the following examples:

- Organisations assess the skills and knowledge of newly accepted volunteers and create qualification development plans. Qualification development is assessed annually at group meetings and interviews in order to identify further training needs.
- Lithuanian volunteers who have participated in voluntary activity projects abroad may gain recognition and certification for their experience. This opportunity was facilitated by the Association of the European Voluntary Service. Volunteers receive European Voluntary Service Certificates with an assessment of their technical, social/ intercultural, language competences / skills acquired during their project. The assessment is carried out by the host organisation and the Association of the European Voluntary Service.

Interviews suggest that methodologies for the validation of informal and non-formal learning are still at the development stage in the voluntary sector. However, a number of different initiatives are emerging. Another example is a project which has been started, concerning training for Social Workers. Various organisations, so-called methodological centres, were selected to implement different training programmes. The types of institutions vary from NGOs to public institutions. It is foreseen that after successful completion of the training course the participants will be awarded with a certificate that will be recognised by Ministry of Social Security and Labour workers.

One example of a training programme from a youth organisation is the Madsinga project. The Lithuanian youth organisation Kitokie Projektai was a key member of the international Madzinga project that also involved youth organisations from Belgium, Iceland and Slovakia. This project developed and ran a number of training courses for a total of 24 youth workers from 13 different countries on developing intercultural understanding via experiential learning. The training course consisted of three phases:

- Phase I - experiencing the method, deepening concepts, practical training

<sup>1</sup> Beleckiene, G. and Vaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: [http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download\\_view.php?id=358](http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358)

- Phase II - practice, coaching, networking
- Phase III - professional skills, training external clients, international project development.

The course combined a number of group-based outdoor experiences followed by reflection, sharing of experiences between groups, coaching as well as preparation and running of activities by course participants. In doing so, the course aimed to familiarise participants with the theory and practice of experiential learning in order to enable them to use the method in their work with young people. After completing the course, Lithuanian participants became pioneers in applying experiential learning in the youth sector.

Another good practice example from the third sector is the 'Child Line', a not-for-profit organisation providing assistance for children over the phone. See the example below.

#### Example – 'Child line'

The work of a non-profit organisation providing psychological assistance via phone, letters and emails to children and teenagers "Child Line" ("Vaikų linija") is based on voluntary work by people from a variety of different backgrounds. Because volunteers are not required to any specific degree in order to apply for this type of work, assessment of individual competences acquired in different settings (for example, family, community life, individual experience etc.) and through non-formal learning become very important.

After a potential candidate successfully goes through the initial selection procedure for the job, he or she receives a special training corresponding to the specific needs of the organisation followed by a certificate. The certificate is only recognised among the branches of the organisation, but not among other organisations providing similar services, for example, "Youth Line" etc. There are methods in place allowing further regular assessment of the competences of a volunteer which s/he mostly gains through the working experience within the organisation.

Two main objectives have great importance here: the first, this allows further professional development and the quality of provided services and the second - it enables to identify individual experiences which later can be used in work and knowledge sharing with less experienced volunteers.

The main methods for the assessment are special qualificatory seminars, where a volunteer is introduced to a special situation from his/hers working practice and she/he discusses it with a more experienced member of staff. The second method is conversation with an experienced supervisor (usually qualified and well-experienced psychologists). And the third method is a non-systemic observation of individual's work over the phone.

A new method was introduced recently in order to assess individual competences in consultation over the internet – responses by email are reviewed on a regular basis and feedback provided to the consultant. The main responsibility for the assessment and learning lies on internal experts and well-experienced voluntary staff.

The main benefit for the organisation is better matching between individuals and skills and contribution towards learning organisation. Lack of occupational standards especially for the occupations more often met in the third sector is among the main barriers for greater take-up of the initiative.

## 23.5 Stakeholders' Responsibilities

### 23.5.1 Government

According to the Law on Education “The Government implements the laws regulating the field, the decrees of the President and resolutions of the Seimas (Parliament), long-term State education programs as well as the education provisions in the Government Program, and confirms the implementation programs of the Government Program”.

### 23.5.2 Ministry of Education and Science

*The Ministry of Education and Science (MES)* shapes and implements State education policy, submits proposals and drafts resolutions to the Government, organises and coordinates the accreditation of secondary education, vocational training, post-secondary and higher education studies curricula. The Ministry organises *matura* examinations and confirms the Procedure for final qualification examinations including validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Powers of the Ministry also include determination of the equivalency of education levels attained abroad with those attained in Lithuania, confirmation of State Standards of attained education and vocational training.

### 23.5.3 Ministry of Social Security and Labour

*The Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL)* is responsible for the management of labour market vocational training at a national level. The Ministry also appoints vocational training institutions that admit those willing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal labour market training and implement the exams. Responsibility for organisation and implementation of labour market vocational training falls on *the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority (LLMTA) under MSSL*.

### 23.5.4 Other Ministries

*Other* ministries and departments, governors of counties and municipalities also may implement functions in the field of VET in the scope of their activity. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the training of farmers at a national level and has issued related legal acts, appointed training institutions, implementing farmers training and assessment of knowledge.

### 23.5.5 Vocational schools and Labour Market Vocational Training Institutions

*Vocational schools and labour market vocational training institutions* (in the case of validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal labour market training) have a responsibility to provide for an applicant seeking to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education necessary support which leads to final qualification exams. Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training under the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for development of national VET standards.

Qualifications' Agency (Kvalifikacijų tarnyba) under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania to be established by the 1 January 2008 will be responsible for monitoring and functional facilitation of the whole qualifications' system.

#### 23.5.6 Higher Education Institutions

*Higher non-university education institutions* (colleges) are responsible for the creation of individual non-university study programmes for students coming after graduating from a professional college. These programmes equate differences of curricula of studies at professional college and college. Colleges also take decisions concerning the recognition of credits for subjects studied in professional colleges.

#### 23.5.7 Social Partners

*Social partners* provide suggestions on VET standards and training programs. The responsibility for the assessment of acquired qualifications of vocational schools students is fully moved to social partners. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture took over full organisation of final exams including the design of tasks, identification of relevant members of the commission and granting of qualification. Some regional Chambers approve requests of those willing to validate their knowledge in vocational schools.

## 23.6 Conclusions

Our analysis of the information available shows an increasing motivation of individuals to gain recognition for competencies acquired outside the formal education system. The main factors for this increased motivation are the special sectoral regulations, integration into the European Union, expansion of work opportunities in other countries and the need for lifelong learning.

Although legal and institutional frameworks are developed, further work is needed to create a coherent national system for the assessment of knowledge and competencies. The main issues to be addressed are related to a low variety of methodologies used for competence assessment; absence of competencies agreed at all levels of education; lack of mobility through all levels of education and training; and insufficient links between formal, non-formal and informal education. Additionally, poor awareness of population, training providers and stakeholders on validation as well as lack of appropriate qualitative and quantitative information and culture towards lifelong learning impede the implementation of related validation activities.

It is expected that the national and available funding and guidelines of the EU would ensure the successful practical implementation of the strategies and legal frameworks. This will allow the formation of a flexible structure of comprehensive education bringing together the systems of all levels of education and creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning.

## 24.0 Luxembourg<sup>1</sup>

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*By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 24.1 Introduction

When the 2004 Inventory<sup>2</sup> was produced, the development and implementation of methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning were still in their early stages. Since then, a major bill has been elaborated to reform the system of professional training, which includes provision for significant changes to be made in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, currently little change has been made in practice and until the bill is finalised and approved (which is expected in 2008) this will continue to be the state of play.

This chapter will outline the current provisions for validation of non-formal and informal-learning in Luxembourg and where possible, will give details of the changes which are likely to be implemented following the approval of the bill for reform of professional training. First, it is important to contextualise this relatively small Member State in terms of its rather unique characteristics compared to fellow European countries.

The population of Luxembourg is relatively small, totalling 451,600, of which the proportion of resident foreign nationals is comparatively high at around 38.6 per cent (174,200). The labour force in Luxembourg is 200,500, of which around 98,500 are foreign cross-border workers<sup>3</sup>. With regard to professional training it is also worth noting that Luxembourg's geographical position means that there are competing forces from border regions in neighbouring countries for recruitment of staff. Currently, formal professional education and training qualifications are delivered solely by the state. As such, developments in the sphere of validation centre on these formal qualifications provided by the state. Until recently, the country has not had a university (this was created by the 'loi du 12 août 2003'). The above factors combine to make the debate on education and training in Luxembourg particularly complicated.

However, the impetus behind the current developments in the sphere of validation is similar to other Member States and is based on both national and European factors. There is an identified need within Luxembourg to valorise and validate the country's human capital. The unemployed from older age brackets with low qualification levels are not seen to fit with Luxembourg's labour market needs – validation presents an opportunity

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Luxembourg chapter of the 2005 Inventory by James Winter

<sup>2</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting, 2004, A European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

<sup>3</sup> STATEC, 'Le Luxembourg en chiffres, 2004'

to recognise the skills and experience they have gained in their professional life and is a way of encouraging people to take part in lifelong learning. It also represents an opportunity to change the national mindset that formal qualifications have more value than professional experience.

Moreover, the emphasis across Europe to adapt education systems to meet the needs of the changing world and the changing labour market has been recognised in Luxembourg. This European dimension has led to an increased drive in Luxembourg to introduce validation systems for another interesting reason. Previously, candidates would travel from Luxembourg to France to gain accreditation for their skills and competences through the validation system which is in place there then return to Luxembourg, where the qualifications they had gained could be recognised through a process of *homologation*. Introducing Luxembourg's own validation system would mean that candidates could undergo the process in their own country, rather than travelling to neighbouring France. Thus there are a variety of reasons which have combined to bring about the current developments in terms of validation, which we will now explain in more detail.

## 24.2 Public Sector

In order to gain an overview of the current situation with regards non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg, certain legislative measures merit consideration. Firstly, the National Action Plan for employment adopted in 1998 saw the creation of a form of skills assessment methodology which examined the competencies gained by a person via non-formal and informal means<sup>1</sup>. This process, known as the '*bilan de compétences*' or individual skills audit, is used as a tool to help people evaluate their own skills and competencies, and hence match these to appropriate jobs or training programmes. The National Action Plan for employment of 2002 saw the creation of a similar tool for assessing skills, the '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP)<sup>2</sup>.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is also gradually being introduced as a way of accessing formal learning. The legislation creating the University of Luxembourg in 2003 includes an article allowing a prospective student to request a '*validation des acquis de l'expérience*', which is effectively a validation of non-formal and informal learning of the candidate, as a substitute to certification or other proof of having undertaken the formal education required for entry to the university<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the '*Réglement grand-ducal*' (17 June 2000, revised 18 May 2007) regarding the organisation of adult learning allows in certain cases, the admission to courses for candidates who do not meet the regular

<sup>1</sup> Loi du 12 février 1999 concernant la mise en action du plan d'action national en faveur de l'emploi

<sup>2</sup> Plan d'action national en faveur de l'emploi 2002

<sup>3</sup> loi du 12 aout 2003 - Université de Luxembourg

requirements, providing that they have relevant previous professional experience, which can be validated<sup>1</sup>.

As stated in the introduction, a major bill has now been submitted to the Luxembourg Parliament, proposing reforms to the formal state professional training system. When approved (approval is likely to take place in 2008), the legislation will build on existing provision to create a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning which is similar to the French model. The system will be centred on the concept of lifelong learning and it is anticipated that it will enable many adults, including those with an existing low level of qualifications, to gain recognition for the skills they have acquired during their working life.

#### 24.2.1 Skills audits

##### 24.2.1.1 *The 'bilan de compétences'*

The '*bilan de compétences*' or personal skills audit was created via legislation drawn up in 1998, that of the National Action Plan for Employment. Several articles in the legislation refer to the '*bilan de compétences*' and the cases in which it may be used. It is only available via the ADEM (*Administration de l'emploi*), to job-seekers. The '*bilan de compétences*' is used as a tool to explore the personal and professional skills of the individual concerned, and the skills required by the labour market, and is formative in nature.

#### Objectives of the '*bilan de compétences*'

- To establish and specify, for the individual concerned, ability and experience in the following areas:
- Knowledge – what the person knows: school and professional qualifications
- Know-how – knowledge that a person has regarding the workplace – technical skills
- Behavioural skills – self image, social interaction, communication skills, initiative, manners, motivation

With the aim of:

- Developing the individuals' skills in self-evaluation
- Developing a better organisation of personal career priorities
- Improving awareness of personal skills
- Improving management of personal potential
- Re-motivating the individual in case of loss of employment
- Raising personal awareness for potential for self-improvement

The methodology for producing a '*bilan de compétences*' is via a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and observation of the individual being assessed. The assessments are conducted by third parties on behalf of the '*Service d'accompagnement personnalisé des demandeurs d'emploi (SAPDE)*' section of the ADEM.

<sup>1</sup> Règlement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes

#### 24.2.1.2 *The 'bilan de competences basses qualifications'*

The National Action Plan for Employment of 2003 introduced another level of this type of self-assessment, the *'bilan de competences basses qualifications'*, an assessment method for people with very few qualifications. It is divided into two parts 'professional skills' and 'social skills', since jobs requiring very low knowledge often place a lot of importance on criteria such as hygiene, health, and behaviour in the workplace.<sup>1</sup> The *'bilan de competences basses qualifications'* was a pilot project only and is no longer in use in 2007. It was felt to be too complex a tool which brought little impact for the unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

#### 24.2.1.3 *The 'bilan d'insertion professionnelle'*

The *'bilan d'insertion professionnelle'* (BIP), is similar to the *'bilan de compétences'*, with the specific aim of helping job-seekers to become more autonomous in their search for employment, in addition to providing a tool for evaluating their technical and social skills as well as competencies. It was created in 2002 via the implementation of the National Action Plan for employment.

##### Objectives of the 'bilan d'insertion professionnelle'

- To improve the job-seeker's responsibility and autonomy with regard to becoming employed
- To put into practice in the most optimal way the social and technical skills which the individual possesses

##### Outcomes:

- Increased ability of the job-seeker (via better awareness of his/her abilities, career aims)
- Definition of a realistic occupational 'project' which is transposable to the labour market
- Defence of one's 'project'
- Development of an action plan
- Management of the action plan

The basis for the preparation of the BIP is via group work, in which the job-seekers are encouraged to propose and discuss their career plan, and whether it is compatible with the job market situation. At the same time, the candidate is questioned about what he/she believes are his/her personal competences, and whether they are compatible with their career plan. The BIP is prepared in the form of a 'log book', in which the candidate notes what he or she has drawn from each session of group work, and uses these notes to modify his or her occupational project and plan of action.

#### 24.2.1.4 *Impact*

The 'bilan' system for evaluating competencies is used to some success in tackling unemployment in Luxembourg – according to statistics from the ADEM, 50% of those that undertook a *'bilan de compétences'* or a *'bilan d'insertion professionnelle'* in 2003 are still in employment. While they are not the most concrete method for validating informal and non-formal learning, they do contain an important element which involves the evaluation of

<sup>1</sup> Ministère du travail et de l'emploi, 'Plan d'Action National pour l'emploi, Rapport National 2003'

<sup>2</sup> Source: Representative of the Administration de l'Emploi (ADEM)

one's skills and competences, which are requisite to a job-seeker developing a suitable strategy to re-access the labour market or recognise what fields of work he or she has the ability to work in. The '*bilans*' therefore represent what could be described as an evolutionary step towards more 'formalised' validation methodologies.

Unlike, for example, in the French system, the '*bilan de compétences*' and the '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' are only available for the unemployed. There is no provision in the legislation for those who are currently working to apply to undergo a '*bilan*'. This may not necessarily be because those who are currently employed would not benefit from or wish to undertake a '*bilan*', rather it suggests that there is the possibility to expand the scope of the '*bilan*' system in the future should policy-makers see fit to do so.

#### 24.2.2 '*Validation des acquis*' – the summative approach

'*Validation des acquis*' translates as validation of prior learning, and is mentioned in the legislation creating the University of Luxembourg (*la loi du 12 août 2003*). The legislation allows for the validation of prior occupational learning to be substituted for formal learning qualifications in certain cases when applying to study at the university. Furthermore, the '*Reglement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000*' (revised 18 May 2007) regarding the organisation of adult apprenticeships also contains provisions for admission to courses through a form of validation of prior occupational learning. While this does not currently represent a large legislative framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, it does show that at the national level, this method of assessing an individual's learning experience has already been formalised in certain instances.

### Validation of prior occupational learning and the University of Luxembourg

Art. 9 of the law of 12 August 2003 creating the University of Luxembourg specifies the circumstances under which a candidate can use the validation of prior learning to demonstrate how they meet the knowledge and aptitude levels required in order to be awarded a diploma or other certificate. It is clearly stated on the University website that an individual who has a minimum of three years professional experience (paid or unpaid, or voluntary) can apply for a validation of their prior experience. The awarding of such a validation is decided by a panel (*jury*), the composition of which is stipulated by the university rector according to the nature of the validation requested. The panel is primarily made up of teaching/research staff, although when assessing prior work-based learning, experts from the relevant private sector are also present.

Evidence upon which the panel bases its decision is a combination of a dossier submitted by the candidate, an interview with the candidate or, in certain circumstances, directly via observation of the candidate in their occupational setting, either real or reconstructed, if this procedure is allowed by the authority which delivers the certification. The panel also determines the scope of the validation, and in instances of partial validation, states where knowledge and skills in a certain area need to be evaluated by a complementary assessment.

However, the University is still in the early stages of putting this system into practice and validation of prior learning as a criterion for acceptance to a course at the university is only carried out for a certain number of courses.<sup>1</sup> For example, engineering candidates are eligible for validation of skills acquired in vocational training as well as on the job in order to ensure access to a bachelor programme.<sup>2</sup>

#### 24.2.3 Admission to adult learning courses via validation of prior learning

Legislation developed in 2000 regarding adult learning also contains provisions for the use of validation methodologies for admitting candidates onto adult apprenticeship courses. The completion of a successful adult apprenticeship in Luxembourg leads to one of the following qualifications:

- Certificat d'initiation technique et professionnelle (CITP)
- Certificat de capacité manuelle (CCM)
- Certificat d'aptitude technique et professionnelle (CATP)

These apprenticeships are managed jointly by the Ministry of Education and the professional Chambers. Training takes place either through the Centre National de Formation Professionnelle Continue (CNFC), or in one of the technical Lycées.

Article 9 of the *'Règlement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes'* (Article 8 in the new règlement) allows for 'dispensations to the normal admissions requirements for candidates who do not meet the conditions stated above, but who can demonstrate previous professional experience which can be validated'. In cases where such a validation is requested, the Admissions Commission

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>2</sup> Towards the European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process. National Reports 2004-2005. Luxembourg. Available at: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national\\_impl/00\\_Nat-rep-05/National\\_Reports-Luxembourg\\_050222.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-Luxembourg_050222.pdf)

decides whether to admit the candidate to the first, second, third or fourth year of the training scheme.

#### 24.2.4 Reform of professional training in Luxembourg

In October 2006, a bill<sup>1</sup> was submitted to the Luxembourg parliament outlining proposed reforms to the professional training system in the country. This bill is now open for consultation and is likely to be finalised and approved in 2008. The reforms include provision for the development of a comprehensive system for the validation of all types of learning: (formal, non-formal and informal) for formal professional qualifications, based on a similar methodology and procedures to those currently in place in France. The processes outlined in the bill will only apply to formal qualifications and will not be compulsory for validation initiatives which are implemented by other bodies (e.g. third sector, private sector).

The validation aspect of the reform was developed through a consultation by the government with social partners and through learning from practice already in place in other Member states. A working group on validation has been set up, composed of two representatives of the Ministry of Education, two representatives of vocational training schools and two representatives of each Chamber. Other relevant stakeholders are also able to contribute to the work of the group. This working group oversees the development of the validation methodology and procedures, which has thus incorporated input from all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions (represented by the sectoral Chambers). For example, social partners were particularly keen that given that Luxembourg is such a small country, only one system of validation should be developed, in order to ensure transparency and compatibility across the country. The bill therefore proposes one single system for validation, although the University system continues to take a different approach and there are some exceptions for organisations which deliver qualifications in partnership with French institutions. Third sector initiatives (see below for more detail) have also been developed separately from the state system but ongoing consultation has meant that the third sector initiatives in place are in line with the state system, thus enabling an individual to transfer their validation from one sector to another.

The qualifications which will be included in the proposed state system for validation are:

- Secondary-level technical certificates and diplomas
- higher-level technical certificates (*brevets*)
- Masters-level certificates (*brevet de maîtrise*).

The bill outlines plans for the methodology of the new system, although is still in the process of being finalised in detail. Validation for the above courses will be possible for all

<sup>1</sup> Projet de loi portant réforme de la formation professionnelle et portant modification, no. 5622, 24 octobre 2006

relevant activities, paid or unpaid, provided the individual has at least three years experience. Validation can account for all or part of the qualification and will be assessed by Validation Commissions (which will be set up once the legislation has been approved) made up of employer and worker representatives as well as representatives from the education system.

The bill outlines the envisaged procedure for validation, as outlined below:

- 1) Candidates submit a request for validation of their experience to the Ministry of Education.
- 2) The request should be accompanied by a dossier which has been put together by the candidate, outlining the qualification they are applying for and including:
  - a. A personal profile
  - b. A description of the candidates career history
  - c. Relevant documentation to confirm their training and career history

Candidates will be entitled to personal advice and support when putting together their dossier if requested. This will be provided by the state bodies which currently deliver guidance services, although it is envisaged that advisers will require specific training in validation in order to fulfil this specific role. In addition, the Ministry foresees that a separate guidance service will be set up to focus specifically on validation – this will depend on the approval of the bill. It is also anticipated that the private enterprises will also be able to apply to carry out VAE support and guidance, provided that they meet quality criteria set by the Ministry of Education.

- 3) The validation request is submitted to a validation commission. The evaluation of the dossier may be supplemented by an interview or a practical assessment, if requested by the validation commission or the candidate. The commission then concludes whether the candidate's dossier can be used to validate either part, or all of the qualification and if necessary, indicates what additional skills should be developed to gain the qualification in full.

It is intended that validation commissions will be set up for each professional sector and that these commissions will have a mandate of five years.

The bill also indicates that the implementation of the validation process will be monitored in order to disseminate and evaluate the procedure.

#### 24.2.5 Recognition of validation methodologies from external countries

Luxembourg is unique in its size and geographical location, and it is to be expected that policy formation is influenced by policies of neighbouring countries. With regard to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, there are instances in the higher education sector in which institutions use the validation methodologies of other countries. For example, in the Centre de Recherche Public (CRP) Henri Tudor, a publicly funded science and research centre, the French system of 'Validation des Acquis' is used as a method of determining the skills which a candidate possesses in order to allow him or her to take up certain courses.

#### 24.2.6 Sub-national Initiatives

There are no initiatives at the sub-national public authority level in Luxembourg. The mandate of the Ministry of Education and Professional Training covers all areas of education policy, including lifelong learning.

### 24.3 Private Sector

The principle private sector actors in the training and lifelong learning sector in Luxembourg are as follows:

- Chambre de Commerce (chamber of commerce)
- Chambre des Métiers (representation group for artisans)
- Chambre de travail/Arbeiterkammer – AK (representation group for workers)
- Chambre des employés privés, Luxembourg – CEPL (representation group for all private sector employees in Luxembourg)
- Institut de Formation Bancaire, Luxembourg –IFBL (Institute for training in the banking sector)

As outlined above, there are validation procedures in place for the formal apprenticeship schemes delivered by the professional chambers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

In addition, the Chambre des employés privés has set in place provision for validation of skills and competences for candidates to its adult education evening courses in continuing professional training, as outlined below.

### Example - Validation at the Luxembourg Chambre des employés privés (CEPL)

The CEPL offers evening courses to adults in a variety of vocational subjects, including ICT and administration, accounting and management, law and sales. The courses are delivered by the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC) and on completion of six modules students are delivered an official diploma by the Ministry of Education (although it does not constitute a formal state qualification).

Since January 2007, candidates have been entitled to apply for validation des acquis (validation of skills and competences) in order to obtain these certificates. Candidates must have a minimum of three years' relevant experience in relation to the desired certificate. The methodology for the validation process is outlined below:

Candidates submit a dossier to the LLLC, made up of relevant documentation to evidence the validation process. The LLLC must authorise the validation process, based on this dossier.

Approved dossiers are submitted to a jury, made up of professionals and stakeholders from the LLLC evening classes. The jury's decision on the validation is based on an analysis of the candidate's experience in relation to the skills and knowledge required to obtain the certificate. The candidate's education and continuing professional training may also be taken into account.

The jury may request an interview with the candidate or an additional test (written, oral or practical).

The jury may grant the diploma in full or in part. Candidates who receive validation for a number of modules within a certificate should take the remaining examinations within a period of five years in order to be awarded the certificate in full.

The validation process costs 150 € in total per certificate. A small number of candidates have made use of the validation process since its introduction at the beginning of this year.

More information can be found at [www.cepl.lu](http://www.cepl.lu), under Formation Continue.

Certain private sector actors deliver Masters courses in collaboration with partner bodies in France and are therefore able to apply the French validation system to these courses. For example, the Chambre des employés privés delivers a Masters course in business administration (either business management or human resources management) in collaboration with the University of Nancy2-Tours – candidates can apply for validation of their prior experience to be taken into account in their application for this course, in place of a bachelor degree (which is the normal entry requirement). The introduction of the reform of professional training will not have any impact on this current system for courses delivered in collaboration with French partners, since the French methodology will continue to be accepted.

The Chambre des employés privés is in favour of the introduction of legislation relating to VAE. However, a representative of the Chamber suggested that when introduced, the legislation should apply not only to the qualifications specified in the projet de loi (those relating to vocational training) but to all official diplomas delivered in Luxembourg.

The Institut de Formation Bancaire Luxembourg (IFBL), offers the services of its 'Diagnostic Centre' for the purposes of training those working in the banking sector, part of the role of which is to assist workers in this area to assess their skills and abilities relevant to working in the sector. One of the tools used by the Diagnostic Centre to achieve this, is the drawing up of 'bilan de compétences' similar to those described in section 2.1.2 above.

The Ministry of Education was unable to provide examples of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with validation initiatives in place.<sup>1</sup>

## 24.4 The Third Sector

Third sector bodies have been represented in the design of the reform of professional training through the representative social partners. Some third sector organisations have also developed their own initiative for the validation of skills and experiences gained through voluntary activities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth. 2006-2007 is now the pilot phase for this initiative, which is known as the *attestation de compétences*.

### Validation of non-formal learning: The Attestation de compétences<sup>2</sup>

In 2004, the Fédération Nationale des Eclaireurs et Eclaireuses de Luxembourg (Luxembourg Federation of Scouts) and the Service National de la Jeunesse (National Youth Service) initiated the development of a system of validation for the skills and competences developed by young people through their participation in voluntary work.

This initiative was led by a working group of the Commission Consultative pour la formation d'animateurs et responsables de loisirs (consultative commission for the training of activity leaders) and began with a consultation phase with employers. The initial proposal was amended in line with their feedback and a pilot attestation (certificate) has now been launched, which aims to record the skills and responsibilities which young people have acquired or held during their participation in voluntary work. In 2005, a guidance leaflet was published outlining the pilot attestation procedure, which is based on a similar document produced by the Swiss scout movement.

The attestation can only be awarded to young people who meet the criteria set out in the guidance booklet:

- They must be a minimum of 18 years old
- They must have been involved for at least one year of continuous service in their voluntary activity, or for at least three years in the case of a project
- They must carry out a leadership, training or project management role
- They must have followed a training course from the youth sector.

In addition, during the pilot phase, the attestation can only be awarded to young people who are active in a member organisation of the Commission consultative pour la formation d'animateurs et de responsables d'activités de loisirs. Once the pilot phase is completed and evaluated, and any necessary amendments to the process have been made, it is anticipated that the attestation will be opened up to a wider sphere of participant organisations.

The pilot phase is being run by a Commission d'Attestation which will review all applications submitted and undertake general management of the pilot project. In addition, a steering group has been put together of representatives of the project, enterprises and ADEM. This steering group will have responsibility for

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.snj.public.lu/publications/publications-diverses/index.html>

monitoring the quality of the project.

The attestation is made up of three principal elements: personal details, information about the organisation the young person is involved in and a description of their voluntary activities. There are three different certificates which can be obtained, according to the role and responsibilities the young person has held (leadership, training or project management). The process which must be followed to apply for an attestation is as follows:

- An interview is carried out with the young person requesting an attestation in order to discuss the evidence they can provide and the type of attestation they should request.
- An adult member of the organisation drafts an attestation for the young person, using the appropriate template. This is then discussed with the young person.
- The attestation is submitted to the National Youth Service with an accompanying letter from the organisation. The Commission d'Attestation then considers the dossier and forwards it, with their recommendations, to the Ministry of Youth.
- Approved dossiers are co-signed by the Ministry of Youth.

The need for a validation process to recognise skills and competences developed through voluntary work was seen as a vital component of the concept of lifelong learning. The attestation de compétences is said to be a response to both European and national recommendations.

Close collaboration with the Ministry of Education (a Ministry representative is involved in the pilot group for the system described above) has enabled the initiatives developed by the third sector to be aligned with the state system for validation of formal professional qualifications.

## 24.5 Conclusions

The development of tools and methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg has clearly made significant progress since the last Inventory was produced. Although progress in the public sector has been delayed by the necessary process of consultation and approval of the proposed bill for reform of profession training, there is a clear recognition of the importance of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the need to set in place comprehensive policy on validation and systems for its implementation. It is positive to see that the work carried out by the public sector has been informed by consultation with and involvement of relevant stakeholders, as well as learning from policy and practice in other Member States.

There are also positive signs that in both the private sector and the third sector, validation is on the agenda and action has been taken to implement methodologies and procedures to recognise individuals' professional and non-professional experience. Again, the pilot project carried out by the third sector shows good practice in terms of consultation, involvement of stakeholders and learning from other countries.

Although there remains work to be done (particularly with respect to higher education) it is clear that the foundations have been laid for a strong system of validation to be set in place in Luxembourg in the future. The success of this system will rely on the continuing commitment of all those involved, backed up by appropriate policy and resource allocation, together with awareness-raising among the general public.

## 25.0 Malta<sup>1</sup>

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*By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research)*

### 25.1 Introduction

In October 2005, under legal notice 347, a new organisation was launched - The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC). This organisation is tasked with implementing a new national qualification framework for Malta, which will be compatible with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The European agenda has been a key driver for Malta in establishing this new system.

The new qualification framework will form one single structure encompassing formal, non-formal and informal learning. This framework has not yet been launched but the necessary structures and legislation are in place to allow the new system to be implemented. Importantly, an Implementation Plan for the new framework has been put into place and work on incorporating non-formal and informal learning is expected to start towards the end of 2007.

### 25.2 Public Sector

The emerging National Qualifications Framework for Malta forms a single over-riding public initiative for validating non-formal and informal learning, which has an application for all post 16 learning achieved in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

#### 25.2.1 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The key features of the NQF parallel the European Qualifications Framework. For example in using 'credit' as a currency to understand/value all 'types' of learning whether that be vocational, academic, community based, workplace based, identifying credit at certain 'levels' of difficulty (Malta use an 8 point scale) etc. This will enable qualifications achieved in Malta to be understood and transferred overseas.

There are two key organisations involved with the new qualification framework (and therefore eventually with informal and non-formal learning).

##### 25.2.1.1 *The Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment*

Although the National Qualification Framework falls under the remit of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC), the MQC is answerable to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. The Ministry has ultimate responsibility for the entire education system

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Malta chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Anthony Azzopardy (University of Malta)

in Malta. This includes primary and secondary education as well as the University of Malta, the Institute for Tourism Studies, Malta Council for Science and Technology, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology, youth, employment and training etc<sup>1</sup>.

#### 25.2.1.2 *Malta Qualifications Council (MQC)*

MQC was established under legal note 347, in October 2005 for “the development, assessment, certification and accreditation of qualifications other than those in compulsory education and degrees”<sup>2</sup>.

MQC’s functions are:

- To establish and maintain a qualifications framework for the development, accreditation and award of professional and vocational qualifications, other than degrees, based on standards of knowledge, skills, competence and attitudes to be acquired by learners;
- To promote and facilitate lifelong learning access transfer and progression;
- To foster the recognition abroad of professional and vocational certificates awarded in Malta;
- To promote and maintain the National Qualifications Framework and establish the policies and criteria on which the framework will be based;
- To approve and ensure the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills, competence and attitudes for each development sector;
- To endorse and ensure the publication of the procedures to be implemented by the training agencies offering programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression;
- To ensure that such standards and procedures are implemented;
- To endorse vocational education and training programmes delivered by training agencies;
- To endorse certificates awarded by training agencies;
- To keep and issue official records of certificates awarded.

The MQC is therefore ultimately responsible for incorporating non-formal and informal learning into the new qualification framework.

#### 25.2.1.3 *Developments since 2005*

To date, there has not been any work carried out on validating non-formal or informal learning but it is thought that this will start towards the end of 2007.

With respect to the new National Qualifications Framework however:

<sup>1</sup> [www.education.gov.mt](http://www.education.gov.mt)

<sup>2</sup> [www.mqc.gov.mt](http://www.mqc.gov.mt)

- Three policy documents have been published by the MQC – “Qualifications as tools for Employment”, “A glossary of Select Terminology Associated with Qualifications Frameworks” and a “National Qualifications Framework – A First Guide”.
- An Implementation plan (2006) has been written.

The piloting stage, which took place between November 06 and April 07, has been completed and documents, in connection with the NQF, have been published<sup>1</sup>

## 25.2.2 Current Validation Practices

Since there is currently no national approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning in place, it is still the case that differing examples of practice can be found in key organisations. The following offers examples of this.

### 25.2.2.1 *The University of Malta*

The University of Malta has taken the new credit framework on board and has applied credit values to degree and masters programmes (although not PhDs)<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the Extracurricular Credits System gives students the opportunity to engage in an activity / project which helps them to manoeuvre outside of purely academic limits. On completion of the activity / project, the individual student is assessed both by his/her particular activity supervisor and by the Extracurricular Credits Board. The mark obtained is weighted as 0.5% of the final global mark that is considered for degree classification purposes.

### 25.2.2.2 *The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)*

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, was set up in 2001 with the aim of providing ‘universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy’ (Prospectus, 2002-3). The College provides a variety of courses of vocational educational training in the Institutes of Agribusiness, Art and Design, Building and Construction Engineering, Business and Commerce, Community Services, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Information and Communication Technology, Mechanical Engineering, and the Maritime Institute. The College is a major provider of off-the-job educational training element of apprenticeship schemes. It works closely with the Employment and Training Corporation in ensuring that these schemes meet the needs of local employees<sup>3</sup>.

With respect to non-formal and informal learning, although there is no official policy in place, it is known that students are sent to the college by industry on the basis of their formal qualifications as well as their non-formal and informal experience.

<sup>1</sup> A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. A Second Guide, June 2007; Valuing All Learning (working documents) Volumes 1, 2, 3; Descriptors of Key Competences in the National Qualifications Framework Levels 1 to 3 ([www.mqc.gov.mt](http://www.mqc.gov.mt))

<sup>2</sup> Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2006/2007 National Trends in the Bologna Process.

<sup>3</sup> [www.mcast.edu.mt](http://www.mcast.edu.mt)

### 25.2.2.3 *The Institute of Tourism Studies*

The Institute of Tourism Studies, set up in 1987, provides vocational education in the field of tourism. The accelerated growth in tourism increased the pressure on the local labour market for highly qualified technical and management personnel. Apart from certificate and diploma level courses, the Institute has apprenticeship programmes that fall under the 'Extended Skill Training Scheme' (ESTS). These programmes offer students the possibility to equip themselves with skills for entry into the hospitality and catering industry.

*A more direct link with the concept of non-formal learning is found in the 'Accreditation for Prior Experiential Learning' – (APEL) whereby prospective candidates with documented and related work experience in the tourism industry will be awarded credits<sup>1</sup>.*

### 25.2.2.4 *The Employment and Training Corporation*

The Employment and Training Corporation was established in 1990 under the Employment and Training Services Act. It was set up as a corporate body with a distinct legal personality, to provide and maintain a national public employment service. In essence, this means assisting people in finding suitable employment and assisting employers to find suitable employees. It was also given the mandate to provide training courses to promote employability and to gather the information required for establishing labour market requirements in Malta.

The Organisation is based on the twin European values of solidarity and subsidiarity. Its mission is "to provide and ensure equitable access to training programmes and employment opportunities and to contribute towards the social and economic development of the community"<sup>2</sup>.

Training services, Placement schemes, Apprenticeship schemes and specialist and individualised attention to disadvantaged groups are the main services that the Corporation offers (Azzopardi, A.E. (2003), 'Strategic Review of ETC Services for Young People', Report, Employment and Training Corporation)<sup>3</sup>.

With respect to non-formal and informal learning, the ETC assesses and profiles non-formal and informal learning outcomes by means of trade tests and other newly developed tools. The registered unemployed and others in employment are tested for possible further training and employment possibilities.

<sup>1</sup> [www.its.gov.mt](http://www.its.gov.mt)

<sup>2</sup> [www.etc.gov.mt](http://www.etc.gov.mt)

<sup>3</sup> [www.etc.gov.mt](http://www.etc.gov.mt)

#### 25.2.2.5 *The Armed Forces Malta (AFM)*

The AFM<sup>1</sup> has a system for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning, which they adopted from the British Army. The army performs trade and other tests for training, re-training and lifelong learning. They collaborate with Educational Institutions in Malta to issue certificates and are looking at ways to further develop this system.

### 25.3 **Private Sector**

Consultation work has ascertained that the private sector is involved with validation of non-formal and informal learning with companies taking an interest in developments. The examples provided in the previous ECOTEC report also hold true and hence:

There is evidence of individual organisations moving away from the conventional mode of production bonus systems to reward employees for learning more skills and as a consequence, improving their performance in their department. A particular case in point is the 'learning strand' taken by Playmobil Malta Ltd. where a multi-skilling programme was introduced in September 1995. A three-tier approach to the skills process is taken in terms of must-know, good-to-know and nice-to-know skills. The company also launched a training programme in first aid and a computer-assisted learning technique among a representative group of workers from its various departments (Borg, undated in Haugøy, G., ed., *Open Learning Environments in Adult Education: A Guide to European Models* – [www.statvoks.no/focal/](http://www.statvoks.no/focal/)).

### 25.4 **The Third Sector**

The Youth Policy of Malta has been described by an international group of experts, acting as a Review Team, as 'a sound piece of work'<sup>2</sup>. More specifically, the Team particularly welcomed the 'reference to the accreditation of the acquired experience and skills through non-formal and informal learning'<sup>3</sup>. The expert team also stated that 'it is our view that investment in youth work would be money particularly well spent in Malta'<sup>4</sup> since 'youth

<sup>1</sup> [www.afm.gov.mt](http://www.afm.gov.mt)

<sup>2</sup> Evans, 2003:62

<sup>3</sup> Ibid:63

<sup>4</sup> Ibid:30

work is, of course, the location within which non-formal education can take place very successfully<sup>1</sup>

Articles 6.4 and 6.5 of the National Youth Policy<sup>2</sup> confirm that the State will follow a policy that complements formal education with non-formal and informal education. The policy also states that the various education and employment bodies should ensure the implementation of measures for the accreditation of prior learning and skills acquired through non-formal learning/education.

The Youth Information Handbook provides a list of 112 Youth Organisations with a social, political and religious orientation (2004:118) and 45 Sport Organisations (2004:171). Among these organisations there are a large variety of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning experiences both in Malta and abroad. In particular cases, recognition is limited to terms of sponsorship for activities, such as exchange programmes offered by established institutions. There is no record of accreditation procedures being followed although participants in the various activities have claimed that Certificates of Attendance and Reference Notes have been given some consideration by employees' interviewing Boards<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid*:40

<sup>2</sup> Youth Information Handbook, 2004:18

<sup>3</sup> Interview, 06.09.04, Teuma, M., president, Malta Association of Youth Workers (may@nextgen.net.mt) and president ZAK3 – www.zakmalta.org

## **25.5 Conclusions**

Due to the creation of a new qualification framework in Malta, there is a national focus on non-formal and informal learning, with the aim of incorporating all forms of learning into the framework and adopting a common approach to validation.

Different institutes and organisations do hold experience in validating informal and non-formal learning of individuals and students but there is no common methodology in place, no common working tools such as portfolios, application forms etc. However, Malta will start working in this area towards the end of 2007 and will be looking at other countries to help practically implement a new national approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## 26.0 Netherlands<sup>1</sup>

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By Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 26.1 Introduction

In the Netherlands, the term “EVC” (*Erkenning Verworven Competenties*- Recognition of Acquired Skills) is the term typically used for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and is closely linked to the discussion on competence-based learning<sup>2</sup>. The validation can take the form of a formal exemption, a certificate, testimonial or diploma, or for example new career opportunities, admission to a certain education type/course, admission to a certain professional group, higher salary indication in a Collective Labour Agreement (CAO), etc.

Attention to validation of non-formal and informal learning increased in the Netherlands during the nineties and led to a non-regulated approach by the Dutch government in order to stimulate experimental pilots. Today, EVC has become more embedded into policy through the voluntary agreement of regions and sectoral branches with the Dutch government to carry out 20,000 recognition and validation procedures by 1 October 2007. Today, considerable attention is given to the question of how to assure the quality of the diverse set of EVC procedures available. However, the use of EVC is not yet commonplace in the Netherlands and development is not yet introduced on a very large scale<sup>3</sup>.

### 26.2 EVC in practice

#### 26.2.1 Identified benefits of EVC

A wide range of benefits to EVC have been identified for the Netherlands as a country, as well as for individual beneficiaries. The stimulation of EVC brings the Netherlands closer towards achieving the goals set out in the Lisbon Agenda, by increasing the education level of the Dutch population and ensuring all can follow the approach of lifelong learning. It is important that in the Netherlands the average education level increases to ensure the competitiveness of the country and of Europe on the international market and to avoid a shortage of employees in certain sectors. In addition, employees and job seekers gain a stronger position on the labour market when their competences are translated through recognised diplomas. This leads to increased mobility on the labour market. Furthermore,

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Netherlands chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Cohen Zoon (ECORYS Netherlands)

<sup>2</sup> Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J. , *The learning continuity*, 2004. According to this report, there are more European countries in which the concept of informal and non-formal learning has been given a different name.

<sup>3</sup> 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission, *Contribution of the Netherlands*, April 2007

EVC motivates and offers an individual the confidence to proceed with their education to gain a recognized diploma. It also brings cost reductions as it stimulates the setting-up of more efficient educational procedures by avoiding – ideally - individuals having to study for subjects they already know<sup>1</sup>.

The list in the box below provides an overview of possible benefits of EVC.

#### Possible benefits of EVC<sup>2</sup>

1. Recruitment and selection of staff can also take place among target groups without formal qualifications;
2. It can prevent personnel from leaving the company and can prevent disability (by ensuring employees do not work in hazardous situations without the necessary skills)
3. Career-development and upskilling are stimulated.
4. It leads to increased mobility on the labour market - both externally and within one employer.
5. EVC can serve as a useful controlled instrument for individual accomplishment. It motivates individuals to learn and to work.
6. It helps companies to define and describe their “human capital”, making it easier to describe it on the balance sheet.
7. It leads to a decrease in the time employees are absent from their work.
8. It increases the confidence of the participants. It motivates them to develop themselves further.

### 26.2.2 Methodology

EVC can serve several goals<sup>3</sup>:

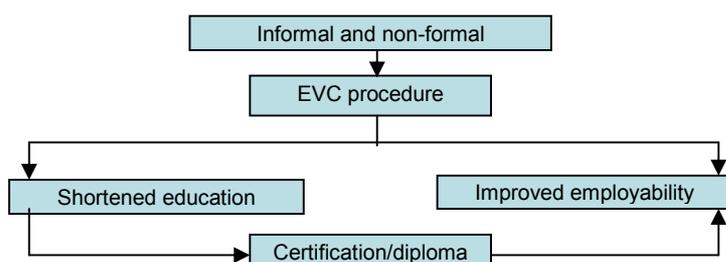
1. **Qualification or education-focused:** EVC can be used to directly gain a certificate or diploma recognised by the Ministry of Education or lead to entry into an education institute (through admission and/or exemptions).
2. **Labour market focused:** EVC can be used to improve an individual’s employability. The goal can be to gain recognition for competences needed for outplacement or reintegration, or to offer an inventory of competences by the employee to increase his or her career opportunities, or to offer an inventory of competences by the employer to increase internal mobility of its employees.

<sup>1</sup> *Spelregels voor het meetellen van werkervaring bij erkende diploma's vastgelegd*, press release, 14-11-2006, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Retrieved 16/08/08: [www.minocw.nl/persberichten/12030](http://www.minocw.nl/persberichten/12030)

<sup>2</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

<sup>3</sup> Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, *EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit*, ITS

The figure below gives an overview of the goals of EVC:



Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, *EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit*, ITS

The EVC-procedure generally consists of five phases<sup>1</sup>, for which responsibility primarily lies with the individual:

- 1. Commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences – both by the individual and by the employer:** This phase focuses on raising awareness and setting the targets for EVC within the context of an organisation and for the individual involved (personal goal and personal development plans).
- 2. Recognition of competences:** This phase involves the recognition of individual competences. The participant usually needs to compile a *portfolio*. This portfolio is meant to offer “authentic evidence” of available competences. Evidence can take the form of: a description of work experience, diplomas, statements from employers, references, papers, photos and/or any other material. It also often includes a self-assessment and a report wherein the candidate reflects on his or her competency levels<sup>2</sup>. This gathering of “evidence” can be done individually, but can also involve some supervision to ensure the participant gathers the evidence needed to compare his or her competences with a set standard. This standard can be company-specific, sector or branch-specific or national-specific. The guidelines for storing and presenting information in a portfolio differ significantly. For example, research in the higher education sector shows that in some cases extensive instructions or manuals are available while in other cases no information is available to support candidates.
- 3. Assessment of competences:** In the next phase, the content of the portfolio is assessed and when necessary followed up by an extra assessment. This can involve an interview, test, demonstration, presentation, but also – with respect to employees - observation during work. Assessors compare the competencies of the individual with the set standard. The result of this phase is either a successful, or an unsuccessful

<sup>1</sup> *The VPL model in short*, Leonardo da Vinci programme, second phase 2000-2006

<sup>2</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

validation of competences - written down into an independent EVC report - depending on whether the individual's competences meet the required standard. The validation can take place on organisational, sectoral or national level in the form of specific sector, branch, company-specific or other certificates, part-certificates, diplomas or a career move. For example, in the higher education sector, the assessors put a proposal to the examination board<sup>1</sup>. It usually also includes an advice regarding possible follow-up steps to bring about further development<sup>2</sup>. This can take shape through advice on career-opportunities and/or study opportunities.

- 4. Further development of competences and advice on this:** The validation offers insight into an individual's available strong competences and missing competences, which offers a great opportunity for the individual to set up a personal development plan (POP). This plan can include possible learning activities, both in a formal and non-formal learning environment; a change in the working situation or a change of employment position, etc.
- 5. Embedding competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy:** The last phase focuses on the structural implementation of EVC in the training and personnel policy of an organisation. This involves the evaluation of the results of the EVC-procedure(s) into the human resource management (HRM) of the organisation. By doing this, the organisation can turn its existing training and personnel policy into a competence-based lifelong learning policy.

An EVC-pathway incorporating all these stages is time-consuming and thus also expensive. Research on EVC in HE shows that in most cases the candidate needs 20 to 40 hours to compose their portfolio and to undergo the various assessment activities, while the assessors need approximately six to eight hours to assess one candidate<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

<sup>2</sup> Werkgroep EVC/ Ministerie van Economische Zaken, *'The glass is half full!, a broad vision for the application of EVC'*, Den Haag, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

## 26.3 Public Sector

### 26.3.1 Role of the Dutch government

The first discussions in the Netherlands on the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning (EVC) started with the establishment of a Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills in 1993, which published in 1994 the report “Kwaliteiten Erkennen” (Recognising Informal Skills). The Dutch government responded positively to this report and decided to provide a set of instruments to assist EVC, including necessary development funding, with the main aim to make education more accessible for adults.

An EVC workgroup was set up in 1999 to investigate the future possibilities of EVC<sup>1</sup>. Their 2000 report “The bottle is half full!” outlines their vision on EVC. The title emphasises the vision of the workgroup that EVC should not be used to highlight gaps in knowledge and skills, rather should build further on existing knowledge and skills<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, the Dutch government decided not to stipulate elaborate policies and regulations regarding EVC. The idea was that the market itself would find the best way to develop, implement and use EVC. Under the policy of “Stimulating and not regulating” (also referred to as “let a thousand flowers bloom” by the EVC Knowledge Centre) different education institutes, different sectors of industry and other stakeholders were given the opportunity to experiment with EVC without being immediately bound to any rules and expectations<sup>3</sup>.

Currently, the main unit of the Dutch government dealing with EVC is the Project Unit Learning & Working (2005-2007). This Project Unit is a joint initiative of the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs set up in March 2005 and will exist until January 2008. Its main aim is to stimulate the approach of lifelong learning among employers, employees, citizens, education institutes, public institutes, municipalities and other stakeholders<sup>4</sup>. One of the identified methods is EVC. As a result, a budget of €4.2 million has been made available in 2005 and €12.2 million in 2006 to promote the development of EVC.

<sup>1</sup> Duvekot, R, Schuur, K, Paulusse, J (editors), 2005, *The unfinished story of VPL, Valuation & Validation of prior learning in Europe's learning structures*

<sup>2</sup> Werkgroep EVC/ Ministerie van Economische Zaken, *'The glass is half full!, a broad vision for the application of EVC'*, Den Haag, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Kaemingk, E, November 2006; *Openingsspeech Nationale EVC dag (14 November)*, Kenniscentrum EVC.

Retrieved 15 August: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/cfc0755dbc64e15936aa56338bb1d0c7.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/cfc0755dbc64e15936aa56338bb1d0c7.php)

<sup>4</sup> *Leren & Werken*, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment. Retrieved 17 August 2007: <http://www.leren-werken.nl/exec/template/werken>

The following actions have been defined to promote the development of EVC in the Action Plan Enhancing Learning and Working 2005-2007 (Plan van aanpak Leren & Werken versterken 2005-2007)<sup>1</sup>:

- To establish contact with regional partners in four different regions in order to set up a structure for EVC, career advice and services. On the basis of these experiences, other regions will also be approached.
- To offer subsidies to education institutes to develop EVC. For example, in 2006/2007 the Project Unit Learning & Working established a temporary subsidy (in total €5.7 million available) to offer tertiary vocational education institutes the chance to start an EVC-focused project<sup>2</sup>.
- To approach new sectors to develop EVC opportunities and procedures.
- To develop a digital portfolio which is linked to Europass/NEC in agreement with the education field, student organisations, partners and the IB-group.
- To identify and remove barriers.
- The EVC Knowledge Centre will set up agreements with six sectors about the number of EVC procedures and CAO agreements.
- The EVC Knowledge Centre's website is important for disseminating information on EVC. Negotiation will take place with the Knowledge Centre to decide for the future where information on EVC will be stored.

One of the main aims of this Project Unit is to stimulate the development of an additional 50,000 EVC pathways by 2010 and 20,000 EVC pathways by 1 October 2007 (7,500 in 2006 and 12,500 in 2007)<sup>3</sup>. To realise this goal, the Project Unit works together with sectoral and regional partners who have committed to carrying out a certain number of EVC actions through a voluntary agreement with the Project Unit. At the moment, the Project Unit has agreed with 45 institutions their approach and a certain number of EVC applications to be processed. In total, the ambition of these organisations is to facilitate 23,117 new EVC procedures by 1 October 2007<sup>4</sup>. For information on the number of new

<sup>1</sup> *Plan van aanpak 2005-2007, Leren & Werken versterken*, 2005, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment

<sup>2</sup> Website leren en werken, EVC. Retrieved 28 August 2007: <http://www.leren-werken.nl/exec/template/projecten/evc>

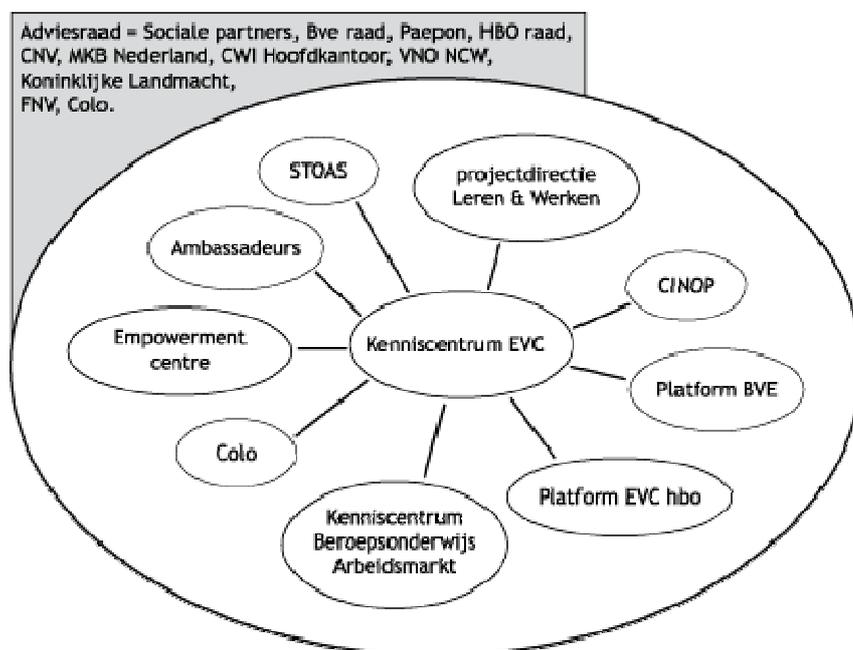
<sup>3</sup> *Plan van aanpak 2005-2007, Leren & Werken versterken*, 2005, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment

<sup>4</sup> Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007)*, CINOP

EVC procedures which have been completed, please proceed to the section on EVC in practice, take-up rate.

### 26.3.2 The EVC Knowledge Centre

In 2000, one of the recommendations of the EVC workgroup was to set up a national knowledge centre. As a result, in 2001, with the financial resources of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and support from social partners and educational umbrella organisations, a consortium of three organisations (Cinop, CitoGroep and STOAS) was given the task to set-up the national knowledge centre (EVC Kenniscentrum)<sup>1</sup>. Currently, the Knowledge Centre is managed by Cinop, STOAS and KBA and works under the Project Unit Leren & Werken (Learning & Working) of both the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs. The figure below shows with which organisations the EVC Knowledge Centre cooperates.



Source: EVC Knowledge Centre, organisation. Retrieved 15 August 2007:  
[http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/97681e2cb32cbd4f13bbd0f565509e22.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/97681e2cb32cbd4f13bbd0f565509e22.php)

The EVC Knowledge Centre aims to collect and share knowledge and good practices on validation of prior learning in the Netherlands. It aims to stimulate the use of EVC practices by developing a sustainable infrastructure for the application of EVC in education and the labour market, in regions and in sectors.<sup>2</sup> To achieve these goals, the EVC Knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Cinop, Citogroep and STOAS are private organisations, serving educational organisations. All three have experience with EVC.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from the website of the EVC Knowledge Centre,  
[http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php)

Centre is building and expanding its network of EVC-professionals who develop, improve and publicise new EVC methods.

### 26.3.3 Quality assurance of EVC: covenant on EVC quality code

The experimentation with EVC has led to a great number and very diverse set of EVC examples which demonstrate what works and what does not work. However, the great diversity has also led to confusion among users concerning the differences in quality of all these EVC procedures. As a result, in 2006, the Dutch government, social partners and other stakeholders decided to start a broad consultation process among all stakeholders to assist the development of a quality framework for the EVC procedure. This has led in the same year to the establishment of a “quality code” in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders: the Labour Foundation (Stichting van de Arbeid- national consultative body of social partners), Colo (Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market), PAEPON (Platform of Accredited Private Educational Institutions), the Centre of Work and Income (CWI- Employment Agency), HBO-Council (Association of Universities of Applied Science), MBO-Council (Association of Vocational Education and Training Centres), AOC-Council (Council for Agricultural Education Centres), the Open University and the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science on behalf of the State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment<sup>1</sup>.

In the box below the main arrangements agreed in the covenant are summarised.

#### Summary of arrangements agreed in the covenant, 2006<sup>2</sup>

1. The use of the EVC quality code is **voluntary**, but the signing parties are dedicating themselves to promote the use of EVC.
2. Everyone who starts with an EVC procedure agreed on the reasons for doing so. EVC is not a standard process but an individualised series of arrangements customised on the goal and use of EVC. **Customised work** is the standard.
3. Every EVC procedure ends with an **EVC report**. This makes EVC independent from the educational provider.
4. **Accredited EVC providers** are listed in a directory.
5. Only **professionals** can be supervisors and assessors.
6. The quality of the EVC procedures undergoes continuous **improvement**.

The EVC code – agreed in the covenant - is based on research undertaken by the EVC Knowledge Centre; on European principles; on CH-Q (Swiss model for career counselling) and an existing private EVC quality code<sup>3</sup>. It has been developed to make EVC more transparent; to make it clear what EVC entails and how EVC should be offered. The EVC

<sup>1</sup> Notice that the universities are not included as a signed party in the agreement

<sup>2</sup> Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Covenant “Een kwaliteitscode voor EVC” in *Staatscourant 13 December 2006, nr.243/pag.26*, OCW & SZW

<sup>3</sup> Maes, M., May 2007, Powerpoint presentation: *EVC in the Netherlands & one stop shops*, EVC Knowledge Centre

code has not only been developed for the purpose of quality control but also to stimulate the development of collaborative partnerships between EVC-providers and the organisations where people work or organisations that help people with employment<sup>1</sup>.

The EVC code safeguards the quality of EVC through an evaluation procedure of EVC-providers<sup>2</sup>. Any EVC-provider is left free to develop their own EVC procedures, but their procedures are evaluated to examine whether they are in accordance with the EVC code. EVC-providers can check – before the official evaluation - through the use of a checklist whether their EVC procedures are in accordance with the EVC code<sup>3</sup>. Then, the official evaluation is undertaken by the organisations KCE<sup>4</sup> and VBIs<sup>5</sup>. Social partners in sectors and/or industries, SUWI chain partners<sup>6</sup> and professional organisations can choose their own evaluating organisation<sup>7</sup>. When the evaluation is positive, an EVC-provider becomes officially registered as a recognized EVC-provider and their EVC-offer is published on websites on which potential clients search. In addition, recognised EVC-providers can make use of the relevant fiscal measures. Since January 2007 organisations who pay for an EVC-procedure undertaken by a recognized EVC-provider can receive a tax benefit of €300. Individuals who pay for their EVC-procedure can deduct the expenses from their taxes.<sup>8</sup>

The EVC Knowledge Centre is responsible for the above-explained EVC code until the end of 2007. Until that date, the Centre's tasks are to set up and publicize the register of recognized EVC-providers; to develop sample EVC reports, portfolios and other EVC instruments; to produce a model methodology to evaluate the quality of supervisors and assessors; to research the effect and impact of the EVC code; to investigate whether the designation of evaluating organisations and the corresponding accreditation of EVC-providers under the responsibility of social partners, SUWI partners or professional organisations is actually happening; to investigate how the evaluating organisations

<sup>1</sup> Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC

<sup>2</sup> Van Leeuwen, H, 2007, Powerpoint Presentation: *Kwaliteitsborging EVC procedures, EVC in het MBO*.

<sup>3</sup> Maes, M., May 2007, Powerpoint presentation: *EVC in the Netherlands & one stop shops*, EVC Knowledge Centre

<sup>4</sup> KCE (Kwaliteitscentrum Examinering-Quality Assurance Centre for Examinations) evaluates the quality of the exams of all vocational education programmes of institutions with a licence against the national standards.

<sup>5</sup> VBIs (Visiting and Evaluation Institutions) evaluate the program at the request of the institution in higher education. The NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) independently warrants the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders and reviews this external evaluation, undertaken by the VBIs.

<sup>6</sup> Suwi chain partners are involved in the implementation of social protection and labour reintegration measures.

<sup>7</sup> Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC

<sup>8</sup> Directie Communicatie, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, December 2006, *Belangrijkste maatregelen per 1 januari op het terrain van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, retrieved 15 August 2007:

[http://home.szw.nl/actueel/dsp\\_persbericht.cfm?jaar=2006&link\\_id=109460](http://home.szw.nl/actueel/dsp_persbericht.cfm?jaar=2006&link_id=109460); Knowledge Centre EVC, *fiscal benefits*, retrieved 15 August 2007: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/16fbf9145faf2c5b2e960d50cef2acd1.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/16fbf9145faf2c5b2e960d50cef2acd1.php); *EVC-procedures fiscaal aftrekbaar*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 16/08/07: [www.kenniscentrumevc.nl](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl)

proposed by the social partners are applying the EVC-code and standards; to have an impartial and independent evaluation performed of the quality model and the use of the EVC code; and to write recommendations on how to take EVC forward<sup>1</sup>.

#### 26.3.4 EVC in higher education

##### 26.3.4.1 *Legal regulation of EVC in higher education*

The law “Wet of het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek” (WHW - law on higher education and scientific research) regulates the admission and exemption policy in higher education and stipulates the possibilities for EVC in higher education. Higher education institutes are left free to translate this regulation per study in the “Onderwijs en examenreglementen” (OERs - rules on education and exams)<sup>2</sup>.

The WHW stipulates that a student can only enter academic higher education if (s)he possesses an academic upper secondary education degree (VWO) and can only enter vocational higher education if (s)he possesses an academic upper secondary education degree (HAVO or VWO) or a post-secondary vocational degree (MBO). However, students who do not fulfil these requirements and are older than 21 years old can be admitted to higher education via the **colloquium doctum** (admittance research). Each higher education institute is left free to set their own requirements for the colloquium doctum per faculty (in the OERs)<sup>3</sup>.

##### 26.3.4.2 *Law of professions in education*

An exception to the non-regulated and decentralized policy of EVC in the Netherlands is the law of professions in education (Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs- BIO). This law was approved by the Dutch Parliament in January 2004 and stipulates the competences teachers and other educational workers need to possess. The main reason for setting up this law was the continued shortage of teachers in the educational sector, which needed to be addressed. By stipulating the competences teachers need to possess, they enable non-certified individuals to start employment in the educational sector (so-called side-streamers). Qualifications gained outside of the formal pathways are recognised through an assessment procedure. This procedure is arranged by specific centres which assess candidates for various teacher education institutes in a district<sup>4</sup>. If a person’s competences meet the competence requirements, he or she can receive recognition and start as a teacher. For those who fail to meet certain competences, an individualised study

<sup>1</sup>Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Covenant “Een kwaliteitscode voor EVC” in *Staatscourant 13 December 2006, nr.243/pag.26*, OCW & SZW

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

<sup>4</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

programme may be offered either before they start with their employment as a teacher or during their employment as a teacher<sup>1</sup>.

#### 26.3.4.3 *Use of EVC in higher education*

EVC is currently still mostly taking place in upper secondary/post secondary VET and to a much lesser extent in higher education, even though the gains there can be great. EVC in higher education – as stated in the policy document HOOP in 2000 - can lead to a reduction in the shortage of graduates as it encourages new target groups to participate in HE. These new target groups can be people coming back to the labour market after a period of absence; high educated foreigners; or workers who are willing to up-skill or change career by following a "shortened" education pathway<sup>2</sup>.

Research shows that even though many higher education institutes are considering introducing EVC, actual implementation remains low. When higher education institutes apply EVC it is mostly through the offering of admission or exemptions, but not with the development and application of EVC-procedures as such. When EVC practices can be found, they also mostly take place in higher vocational institutes (hogescholen) and not in university education. Kink, Boon and Schlusmans (2003) assume that universities remain limited in their use of EVC because they are afraid of losing their quality status. Another reason mentioned by Schlusmans, Joosten-ten Brinke and van der Klink (2005) might be the fact that universities fear that EVC is not focused enough on knowledge acquisition, which forms one of the most important elements of university education. Vocational higher education institutes are far less focused on knowledge acquisition and focus more on the acquisition of skills and professional competencies which fits more closely with EVC. In university education competence-based thinking is not yet accepted on a broad scale. Instead the focus is on knowledge transfer and little value is attached to specific competences<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

<sup>3</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

The table below offers an overview of the advantages and drawbacks of applying EVC in HE.

Advantages of EVC in HE	Drawbacks of EVC in HE
It attracts new target groups who have already gained competences elsewhere: it avoids “double education” and motivates the individual.	Fear of loss of quality and prestige of higher education
It can lead to a contribution to solving the shortage of HE graduates.	Fear of too little attention on basic knowledge
It offers an education institute more insight in the profile of a student and can thus offer more individual flexible learning pathways	Fear of moving towards competence-based thinking
It improves the position of higher education institutes in comparison to private educators as they become much better equipped to fulfil the needs of the labour market	Regular students could observe the students who enter education via EVC as unfair competition  A substantial higher amount of student entries could lead to capacity problems

*Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS*

A small-scale investigation shows that the majority of the EVC-candidates in higher education were satisfied with their EVC-procedure. Also EVC-candidates with negative outcomes were often satisfied because the procedure resulted in a more realistic insight into their competency levels<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

## 26.4 Private Sector

### 26.4.1 The role of social partners

The Dutch social partners, together with the Dutch government, play a steering role in the development of EVC on national level and play an essential role with respect to the development of EVC on sectoral level<sup>1</sup>. This method of collaboration and sharing of responsibility is often referred to as the "Dutch poldermodel" or consensus-model.

One way of developing EVC on a sectoral level is by including it in Collective Labour Agreements (CAO) in different sectors. This way, employees are stimulated to improve their employability to strengthen their position on the labour market and employers gain an indication and better understanding of the competences of their employees. An investigation of sectoral schooling-agreements (2005) and the situation of training funds (2004) concludes however that only a few collective agreements contain agreements about EVC<sup>2</sup>. The EVC Knowledge Centre offers an overview of sectors where agreed CAO's include EVC: (1) retail in potatoes, vegetables and fruit; construction; (2) child care, (3) metal industry (4) legal assistance and, (5) welfare and social services<sup>3</sup>. These EVC agreements are often financed by the Training Funds (O&O funds) which have been set up to support the educational initiatives of employees. These Funds are financed by contributions from both the employees and employers. In sectors where no EVC agreements have been included in the CAOs, the employee is still very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved<sup>4</sup>.

In the text box below we offer an example of the retail sector in potatoes, vegetables and fruit.

<sup>1</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>2</sup> *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report*, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and European Centre of enterprises with public participation and of enterprises of general economic interest

<sup>3</sup> *EVC en cao's*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: [www.kenniscentrum.nl](http://www.kenniscentrum.nl)

<sup>4</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

## Overview of EVC in the CAO retail sector in potatoes, vegetables and fruit<sup>1</sup>

Every employee in the sector has the right to apply for an EVC procedure and can approach the O&O fund CKO in Den Hague regarding the organisation and finance of the procedure. The following requirements have been set:

- The employee has the intention to start a course or education within the sector;
- The employer is informed;
- The employee and employer have filled in the available competences scan and developed the personal development plan (POP) of the employee;
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee fulfils all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, the employee can ask for a certificate from a CKO-authorized educator. No salary demands can be raised.
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee does not fulfil all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, the employee can join courses authorised by CKO (financed through subsidies);
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee fulfils all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO and this function is vacant, the employee receives primacy in the selection procedure; and
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee does not fulfil any of the competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, no demotion or salary reduction follows.

### 26.4.2 Examples of social partner involvement in EVC

In the welfare sector, a good example of social partner involvement in EVC is the organisation of, financing and evaluation of EVC-procedures by the organisation "FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvoorwaarden" (Service in labour market issues). This organisation was set up by the social partners MOgroep, ABVAKABO FNV and CNV Publieke Zaak to support the sector welfare and social service, youth care and child care services to function optimally in a changing labour market and society.

<sup>1</sup> EVC en cao's, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: [www.kenniscentrum.nl](http://www.kenniscentrum.nl)

In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC-procedures in the child care sector to gain better insight:

- into the quality of EVC-procedures;
- into differences among EVC-providers; and
- to offer employers and employees experience with EVC-procedures.

What makes their involvement in EVC best practice, is the fact that they have undertaken an in-depth evaluation of the organised EVC-procedures to shed light on the motivations and satisfaction of the EVC-candidates, the quality of the procedures, etc. in order to make recommendations for the future use of EVC in the sector. A useful outcome of their evaluation for example, is the fact that considerable differences among EVC-providers have been identified, especially in the field of valuing experience. At the moment, the practice of evaluating EVC-procedures and making recommendations for the future is not yet usual practice<sup>1</sup>.

FCB continues to evaluate EVC-procedures, now in the sector Welfare and social service and Youth care, aiming to improve the quality of EVC-procedures. FCB also tries to stimulate the use of EVC-procedures by offering co-financing through the European Social Fund."<sup>2</sup>

Another best practice example can be found in the technical sector within the branches installation techniques, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and ICT. Kenteq is a centre of expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market and amongst others is responsible for the qualification structure of VET in the technical field. The centre is a recognized EVC-provider by the EVC Knowledge Centre. Kenteq started in 2001 with EVC to formalise qualifications of employees, because many of the employees in this sector work in a function above their formal qualification level. The strength of their EVC procedure is that the focus is on practical competences instead of formal vocational training and qualification standards. Together with the education institutes Noorderpoort college, Horizon College, ROC Gilde Opleiding and ROI Zuid-Oost they have identified practical competences for several functions.

<sup>1</sup> *Evaluation EVC-procedures Leidsters Kinderopvang en Peuterspeelzalen 2004-2006*, FCB. Retrieved 18 August: [http://www.fcbwjk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatierapport\\_evc\\_ko\\_psz.doc](http://www.fcbwjk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatierapport_evc_ko_psz.doc)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by KVB by email 28/08/2007

Until 2004, Kenteq supported 201 EVC-candidates, but since then the numbers have increased greatly: 627 candidates in 2004, 455 candidates in 2005 and 650 candidates in 2006. Each EVC-candidate receives an APL-certificate through the Examinations Committee of Kenteq. This certificate has an official status of the branches and will be increasingly recognized by educational institutes. Another option is to gain a formal qualification. Employers can get a refund of their EVC-expenses (approximately €1,345 per candidate) through the three branch Training Funds (O&O fondsen) which are involved.<sup>1</sup>

### 26.4.3 Individual companies

The number of individual companies - particularly larger enterprises - that have set up EVC procedures for employees is increasing slowly. Many of these projects started with small pilots, eventually leading to full-scale integration of EVC in human resource procedures. Unfortunately no systematic and comprehensive overview of national level exists yet.

Some of the examples of organisations that have introduced EVC are: Friesland foods, Shell, Corus, H.J. Heinz B.V., Auping, Rockwool and BSN Glasspack<sup>2</sup>. There is a belief in these companies that employees learn by doing and that certification helps both company and employee to indicate what competences are present (acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal way).

In the boxes below we offer an overview of some examples of EVC undertaken in individual companies.

<sup>1</sup> *EVC procedure installatietechniek*, Kenniscentrum EVC. Retrieved 18 August: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/c2262b28d9982dcbe7b0fad68aa4cbdc.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/c2262b28d9982dcbe7b0fad68aa4cbdc.php); *Erkenning verworven competenties*, Kenteq. Retrieved 18 August: <http://www.kenteq.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?pageid=48>; Information provided by Kenteq by email 21/08/2007

<sup>2</sup> Een jaar 'Passie & Rendement', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004

### **Best practice example - Introducing EVC at H.J. Heinz B.V.<sup>1</sup>**

From September 2002 until June 2003 Heinz undertook an EVC pilot to externally legitimise internal knowledge and experience through EVC. For this, they investigated to what extent their internal training fitted with the legal qualifications to become a food technology expert level 2 (voedingsmiddelentechnoloog niveau 2). The location for the pilot was the small Foodservice division in Elst. The pilot working group developed several assessment techniques: portfolio, quick scan, criteria-oriented interview, 3 tests in the work place and 1 assignment.

In total, 28 employees have undergone an EVC-procedure, of which 3 candidates received a vocational MBO diploma level 1; 11 candidates received a vocational MBO diploma level 2 and 14 candidates only needed to follow a shortened education programme in order to receive the diploma (especially in computer usage and Dutch language skills). From these figures it becomes clear that Heinz internal training is closely linked to the MBO study food technology expert level 2.

Heinz management hopes to use EVC further in the future to prove the quality of their internal training and to offer leaders and employees a structural opening to discuss work and functioning. If all competences fit with the legal standard, certification is a next step. New pilots were set up in 2004-2006 in Baarn, De Ruijter, Nijmegen, Honig en Giessen and Hak.

On average, the employees spent 34 hours on the EVC procedure. The unit leader (internal assessor) spent approximately 160 hours per person, the product leader 100 hours and the education manager 250 hours.

### **Best practice example – Reintegration through EVC at Nedcar<sup>2</sup>**

Nedcar, an organisation located in the south of the Netherlands, produces cars for several car companies. In the last few years, the organisation has undergone several reorganisations due to a reduction in demand. The maximum production capacity counts an annual production of 300,000 cars, but today the annual production is only 70,000 cars. From the 6,500 employment places, currently only 3,000 remain and since last year this number has had to be decreased further to 1300. In order to achieve this reduction in a sensitive manner, the company has set up together with the Province Limburg, the municipality Sittard-Geleen, CWI (employment agency), UWV (unemployment benefit agency) and several knowledge centres (social partners) and reintegration- and placement agencies, the 'MCA' which stands for Mobility Centre Automotive.

This Mobility Centre is involved in a unique cooperation with multiple parties to translate the competences of Nedcar employees into competences recognized in the labour market. Employees can volunteer for this procedure. In the first three months that the Centre was set up, 950 employees had already registered.

The cooperation technique ensures several steps: (1) The CWI (Employment Agency) tests the competences of the employees, subsequently (2) Kenteq (social partner knowledge centre) translates these competences in labour market competences and acknowledges these in an e-portfolio of the employee, then (3) the UWV and municipal social service help the employee into a new job or into education & training.

<sup>1</sup> *Best practices*, Knowledge Centre EVC. Retrieved 18 August 2007:

[http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/df0540f8c03df89b481894ed84bc088a.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/df0540f8c03df89b481894ed84bc088a.php)

<sup>2</sup> Magazine, December 2006, Knowledge Centre EVC. Retrieved 18 August 2007: [http://www.leren-werken.nl/html/documenten/parkstadlimburg\\_evc\\_magazine\\_dec2006.pdf](http://www.leren-werken.nl/html/documenten/parkstadlimburg_evc_magazine_dec2006.pdf)

## 26.5 The Third sector

EVC is increasingly used in the volunteer sector, among others in sports clubs, scouting and the Red Cross. EVC is particularly used in this sector to show how volunteer work can contribute to the learning of an individual. This supports both the recruitment of new volunteers and offers “current” volunteers the possibility to validate the competences they have acquired<sup>1</sup>.

EVC-procedures are either set up within the individual volunteer organisation or through umbrella organisations. Movisie (a merger of among others NIZW and Civiq) is an umbrella organisation which started in 2001 with several EVC projects which have now led to a finalised EVC-procedure for Dutch volunteer organisations. The EVC certificate which the volunteer receives after finishing the procedure includes a maximum of 12 competences. These competences have been determined through consultation with volunteer organisations and are also based on EVC-procedures from other fields (education and the labour market)<sup>2</sup>.

Where EVC has been introduced by individual volunteer organisations, the quality is still relatively low. These projects mostly deal with identifying what competences exist in the volunteer sector and how they can be used, instead of formally recognising competences. Although it lacks professionalism, these are the first steps towards more mature EVC-procedures in voluntary work<sup>3</sup>.

An example of an individual volunteer organisation which has started to implement EVC more professionally is the Dutch Scout Association in the Dutch province Gelderland. This organisation started with EVC in 1993 and in 1997 they developed a portfolio for volunteers in the Scout organisation. This raised a lot of questions: what competences should scouts have to do their job well, what can the scouts currently do and what are they missing? This led to the development of a core competence profile for the scout volunteer. Currently three profiles have been set up and have been developed further in cooperation with the SITO-test desk to gain external recognition. The Scout Association in Gelderland has also become a recognised internship provider for studies in sport and movement, SPW and SCW<sup>4</sup>. The Project Unit Learning & Working is now in negotiation with the

<sup>1</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003*, pp.10-15

<sup>2</sup> *Herkennen van competencies*, MOVISIE & CIVIQ. Retrieved 18 August: <http://www.civiq.nl/emc.asp?pagelid=2104>

<sup>3</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003*, pp.10-15

<sup>4</sup> *Extra sociale meerwaarde voor vrijwilligerswerk*, 2006, EVC Kenniscentrum. Retrieved 18 August 2007: [http://www.scouting gelderland.nl/images/stories/PDF/ssg\\_press.pdf](http://www.scouting gelderland.nl/images/stories/PDF/ssg_press.pdf);

Scouting Gelderland and the Youth Council to offer them a subsidy to continue their EVC work<sup>1</sup>.

Another example is the volunteer organisation Vrijwilligerscentrale Utrecht which has – in cooperation with the reintegration company BOA - developed a project “Practiceschool for females” which focuses on offering low-skilled females work experience in a volunteer organisation. They subsequently – through the use of EVC – identify the main competences that participants have learned during the internship to offer them more opportunities in the labour market<sup>2</sup>.

## 26.6 Take-up rate of EVC and the future

There are no large summary documents available yet with clear figures on the take-up rate of EVC within the Netherlands over the years. It is estimated that by 2002, approximately 6,000 persons within 500 organisations have followed an EVC procedure<sup>3</sup>. The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of EVC among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures<sup>4</sup>.

It is estimated that almost 40% of the EVC-procedures are aimed at providing individuals with a nationally recognised diploma; in approximately 30% of cases, concrete follow-up activities have been organised to further develop the individual’s competences. The last 30% aims at the possibilities of promotion, the selection of staff or a division of tasks<sup>5</sup>.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the EVC procedures are particularly aimed at competence level at upper secondary/post-secondary VET level (MBO). This is not only due to the fact that most labour market positions are placed at this level but also because of the availability of a ready-usable standard - the VET qualification structure which is based on competences. Such a standard based on competences is not available on tertiary VET level because each tertiary VET institute is left free to develop its own standard. For this reason, tertiary VET institutes mostly only apply EVC procedures to offer possible exemptions to new students.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and employment, information provided by email: 22/08/2007

<sup>2</sup> *Praktijkschool*, Vrijwilligerscentrale Utrecht. Retrieved 18 August 2007: <http://www.vrijwilligerscentrale-utrecht.nl/index.cfm?action=content&contentid=W8OD5WN9>

<sup>3</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>4</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>5</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

Below we offer an overview of the number of EVC procedures started through agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working, outside the Project Unit's agreements and some sector-specific information.

## **26.7 EVC procedures started through agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working**

As we have seen before, the Project Unit Learning & Working of the Dutch government has set itself the goal to stimulate the development of an additional 20,000 EVC procedures by 1 October 2007. To realise this goal, the Project Unit works together with sectoral and regional partners who have committed themselves to carrying out a certain number of EVC procedures through an agreement with the Project Unit.

At the moment, the Project Unit has agreed with 45 institutions a certain approach and a certain number of EVC applications to be processed. In total, the ambition of the organisations is to support 23,117 new EVC candidates, of which on 1 February 2007 only 4,149<sup>1</sup> (including extra actions outside the set ambitions) have been achieved. This means that almost 20% of the target had actually been achieved by 1 February 2007. When we compare the actual progress with the goal to establish 20,000 new EVC procedures, the percentage of EVC procedures carried out is only 21%<sup>2</sup>, which is worryingly low so close to the deadline. According to estimates, if the trend continues in the same way, only 51% of the promised EVC applications will actually be completed. Below an overview is given of the completed EVC procedures before 1 February 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Interesting to note is that the majority of realised EVC procedures (70%) have been achieved by the EVC Knowledge Centre, the importance of other players in EVC remains thus small.

<sup>2</sup> Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007)*, CINOP

**Table 26.1 EVC-procedures started before 1 February 2007 under the Project Unit Learning & Working, by EVC provider**

<b>EVC provider</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Number of EVC procedures carried out</b>
Knowledge Centre EVC	3000	1.719
Rotterdam		370*
Eindhoven	1.070	210
Rivierenland	1.500	274
Groningen	870	265
Den Haag	1500	120
Construction	900	47
Achterhoek	1.250	80
Consumption goods	1.250	450
Green knowledge cooperation	950	80
Car body branch	350	131
Rijn Gouwe	500	13
NHN	650	0
HBA	330	33
Zeeland	500	63
Utrecht	500	1
Noordoost Brabant	500	1
Parkstad Limburg	500	116
Zwolle	500	95
Helmond	500	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.270</b>	<b>4.149</b>

Source: Westershuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007), CINOP*

When examining the number of completed procedures more closely, it becomes apparent that of the actual procedures of which details are known (approximately half of the total number of procedures), the majority is developed in the context of vocational education (upper secondary level, MBO level 2) although in recent years the number of beneficiaries not officially registered education involved in EVC has increased (from 8% in 2006 to 18% in 2007 of EVC beneficiaries). The EVC procedure "assistant food processing technology" has been the most popular, followed by "chief of storage" and "knowledgeable assistant food processing technology 3". A difference can be noted between the preferences of male and female participants: for male participants, the most popular EVC procedure has been "assistant food processing technology" while for female participants the most popular EVC procedure has been "branch manager retail". According to statistical data gathered on the realised procedures, a typical Dutch EVC participant (62%) is male (81%) native Dutch (90%) and employed (84%). When examining the age of EVC beneficiaries the majority of EVC participants are between the ages 30 and 49 (37% falls in the age-group 40-49 and 28% falls in the age-group 30-39)<sup>1</sup>.

#### 26.7.1 Other EVC actions, carried out outside agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working

The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that in 2006 approximately 2,000 procedures have been started up and/or completed outside the agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working. Of these, 66% have been set up to offer shortened education pathways to the individuals involved; 29% have been set up as part of HRM strategy and 5% due to both<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007), CINOP

<sup>2</sup> Some important EVC-providers could not provide figures yet and are thus not included in this total.

**Table 26.2 Number of EVC-actions carried out outside the Project Unit Learning & Working in 2006, by EVC provider**

EVC provider	Number of EVC procedures
Kenteq	603
AOC Oost	506
People in transfer	309
Friesland foods	224
LSBL	62
Heineken	52
NLW Logistiek Venray	43
Innovam	40
Leaf Holland	37
Schoevers	25
SH & M	24
Vrumona	24
NC OI	20
Abbott Zwolle	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>1986</b>

Source: Monitor gebruik EVC in 2006, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 16/08/2007: [www.kenniscentrumevc.nl](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl)

## 26.7.2 Sector-specific information

Within the health and social care sector, EVC is particularly used to find new competent employees<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that in this sector approximately 1,000 persons have undergone an EVC procedure and that this number will increase rapidly in the future<sup>2</sup>. Within the metal sector, it is mentioned that EVC is predominantly used to up-skill current staff and to offer them further career opportunities<sup>3</sup>. It is estimated that approximately 10% of the organisations in the metal and electronics sector (mostly large metal companies) already use EVC and 25% of the organisations in this branch believe that EVC will become an important part of their future HRM policy<sup>4</sup>. In the building industry EVC is mostly used to help employees move on to related sectors<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003, pp.10-15*

<sup>2</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>3</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003, pp.10-15*

<sup>4</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>5</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003, pp.10-15*

### 26.7.3 Barriers for greater take-up of EVC

The following factors and circumstances are mentioned that can be seen as barriers to greater take-up of EVC<sup>1</sup>:

- The lack of custom-made procedures in the learning process, whereas EVC is implying just that
- Lack of confidence of participants in the quality of the assessments.
- Fear of employers, that the recognition of competences will lead to more diplomas and through this to higher salary demands
- Fear of employers, that EVC will lead to recognition of competences of their employees leading to more competition to hire their employees.
- Rigid legislation that complicates flexible custom-made procedures.
- Lack of competence-based thinking in higher academic education, particularly in universities. A discussion is needed to understand “academic competences”: how can you recognize them and how do you assess if individuals possess them?

<sup>1</sup> Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

## 26.8 Conclusions

The Dutch government has taken since the 1990s a stimulating, not regulating approach towards EVC, in order to offer all stakeholders the chance to experiment, without immediately being bound to any rules and expectations. The EVC Knowledge Centre was set up in 2000 to study, accumulate and distribute information on these experiments and to ensure the different stakeholders would exchange information and expertise. Currently, the EVC Knowledge Centre is assigned to the Project Unit Learning & Working of the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs. This Unit has set itself the aim to stimulate the development of an additional 20,000 EVC procedures by 2007. To achieve this aim, they have signed covenants with different institutions to carry out a certain number of EVC-procedures. At the moment, the actual number of completed EVC procedures is behind the target, so it is questionable whether the aim will be achieved.

One of the latest developments in EVC in the Netherlands has been the development of a quality code in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders. The code has been set up for the following goals: to make EVC more transparent; to make it clear what EVC entails; and to show how EVC should be offered. The code safeguards the quality of EVC through an evaluation procedure of EVC-providers. When EVC-providers receive a positive evaluation they become a “recognised” EVC-provider. The EVC Knowledge Centre bears responsibility for the code and its implementation.

The EVC procedure consists of five phases: (1) commitment and awareness of the value of one’s competences, (2) recognition of competences, (3) assessment of competences, (4) further development of competences and advice and (5) embedding competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy. In the second phase of recognising competences, the participant typically needs to compile a portfolio showing “authentic evidence” of his or her competences. This portfolio is subsequently assessed in the fourth phase, often in combination with an interview, test, demonstration, presentation or observation during work. The crucial element is here that assessors assess the competences of the individual against a set standard. The assessment is then written up in an EVC report, possibly leading to a validation of competences through certificates, part-certificates, diplomas or a career move and advice on what follow-up steps should be taken regarding education and career opportunities.

EVC is particularly strong in upper secondary and post-secondary vocational education, possibly because these types of education are typically focused on the acquisition of skills and professional competences which fits well with EVC. In higher education, EVC is much less commonly used, although increasingly HE institutes are trying to include more EVC in their policies, particularly regarding admission procedures and the offering of exemptions.

The Dutch social partners play a large role in the implementation of EVC in the Netherlands sector-wide. Different sectors in the Netherlands have included EVC in their Collective Labour Agreements (CAOs) and many Training Funds (O&O Fondsen) finance these EVC agreements. When an employee works in one of these sectors, they can request EVC, otherwise they are very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to cooperate.

Although no comprehensive overview exists, it seems that the number of individual companies – especially larger enterprises - involved in EVC is increasing slowly. The belief among employers is growing that employees learn by doing and that certification helps both the company and employee to indicate what competences are present.

In the third sector, EVC is either set up by individual volunteer organisations or umbrella organisations. Many projects are still very much in the start-up phase but some are developing rapidly in full-scale EVC-procedures. EVC is particularly used to show how volunteer work can contribute to someone's learning. It supports the recruitment of new volunteers and offers "current" volunteers a chance to validate their acquired competences.

## 27.0 Norway<sup>1</sup>

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*By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 27.1 Introduction

This update to the 2005 Inventory on non-formal and informal learning has been based on a review of relevant literature, including the recent OECD country background report on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning<sup>2</sup>. References are given as footnotes to other specific documents which have been reviewed.

There is a long history of recognising non-formal and informal learning in Norway. The 1952 Vocational Training Act allowed citizens to take a crafts examination, provided they could demonstrate sufficient work experience. Later, the Adult Education Act of 1976 outlined the need to create opportunities for adults to have their knowledge and skills documented at all levels and areas within the education system, regardless of where these competencies were acquired. In terms of establishing actual technical and institutional arrangements to support this act, little progress was made at first and as a result, the 1999 Competence Reform was introduced in order to establish legal and procedural frameworks to ensure implementation.

Throughout, there has been strong support from stakeholders in the field of adult education, including trade unions and associations providing liberal adult education.

This strong focus on validation of informal and non-formal learning in Norway can be seen as a response to national changes in demography, as well as to national and international policy visions of lifelong learning. Norway currently faces an ageing population, together with an inflow of migrant workers. In addition, Statistics Norway has estimated possible future supply-demand imbalances in the labour market. For example, the estimates show that there will be a shortage of nursing aids and engineers between 2006 and 2010.

Moreover, in working life, there is an increasing focus on documenting individual competencies within firms. And within the Third Sector, organisations now focus on reaching their own standards of recognition.

Validation of informal and non-formal learning helps to address these issues, by improving flexibility within the labour market and facilitating access and mobility, both into and within education and employment.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Norway chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

<sup>2</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, (RNFIL), Country background report 2006, Norway

After five years of experience with a validation system, there have been significant achievements in Norway in terms of validation of informal and non-formal learning but there are also some reasons for concern. The OECD country report highlights a challenge for the national recognition system to maintain, evaluate and develop its legitimacy within the educational and work-place sectors. Moreover, it appears that there is a need for enhanced cooperation between the educational sector and the labour market.

## 27.2 Public Sector

### 27.2.1 Policy Background

In **1952**, the **Law on vocational training** allowed individuals to pass a crafts examination, provided they had sufficient practical work experience. Normally, two years of theoretical training and two years of practical apprenticeship are required to take a crafts examination. Interest in this flexible arrangement soared from the mid-1990s and onwards. At its peak in the period 1997-99, close to 14,000 candidates annually made use of this opportunity.<sup>1</sup>

The **1976 Adult Education Act** opened up the right for adults to have their knowledge and skills documented at all levels and areas within the public education system, independently of how these competencies were acquired. However, little progress was made in terms of procedures and institutional arrangements. One of the objectives of the 1999 Competence Reform (see below) was therefore to establish improved legal frameworks as well as the practical procedures that would fulfil the intentions of the 1976 act. At the same time, the 1999 reform widened the concept of validation, by including competences acquired outside of the regular education system, with a view to strengthening the job prospects of low-skilled individuals.

Thus, the main objective of the **Competence Reform** launched in **1999** was to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge and to give adults more opportunity to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications. The reform aimed to put non-formal and informal competences on a more equal footing with formal competences. This ambition was supported by stakeholders in the field of adult education, such as the trade unions and associations favouring liberal adult education.

The Competence Reform was both a workplace reform and an educational reform and was targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. One of its principal objectives was *“to establish a national system for documenting and validating the non-formal and informal learning of adults, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education*

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Norway, [www.ssb.no](http://www.ssb.no)

system". This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid employment, organisational involvement and organised training.

A national **Validation Project** (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) was set up with the objective to form the foundations for a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning during the period **1999-2002**. The priority areas for development were:

- Documentation of non-formal and informal learning in the workplace
- Documentation of non-formal and informal learning in the voluntary sector
- Methods for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning
- Validation and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning in respect of upper secondary education criteria
- Adjustments and possible amendments of existing laws, regulations and agreements on the basis of experiences drawn from the project
- Admission of students to universities and colleges, on the basis of non-formal and informal learning

The Ministry of Education and Research was responsible for the project, which was conducted by Vox (the National Institute for adult Learning), in close cooperation with the social partners, the educational sector and the third sector

Many development projects were initiated both in the education sector as well as in working life and the third sector during the experimentation period. The result was a final report from the Ministry of Education and Research with information on the implementation and further development of a national system for documentation and recognition of competence and skills. Based on the conclusions from the Validation Project, it was proposed that the national system should include a shared set of principles, anchored in custom-made legislation as well as a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence and skills.

The principles are based on the understanding that starting the process of recognition of competence and skills is *voluntary* and has to be perceived by the individual as beneficial. The report stated that the documentation of *realkompetanse* (formal, non-formal and informal learning) must benefit both the individual and society and that documentation tools must be flexible, easy to use and transparent. The Validation Project recommended that the right of an individual to document his or her *realkompetanse* must be secured by law. These principles are now anchored in legislation that comprises the Education Act, the acts on vocational training and vocational assessment, and the University and College Act.

As part of the Competence Reform adults were given rights by law to primary and secondary education from 2000. Adults have a statutory right to primary and lower

secondary education, which must be adapted to their needs and situation. Employees also have the right to study leave.

The **2002** amendment to the **Education Act** determined that adults born prior to 1978<sup>1</sup> have a statutory right to be accepted to upper secondary education, based on an assessment of their informal and non-formal learning. The education must then be adapted to the individual's needs and life situation.

The **Act concerning Vocational Training, §3.5**, allows adults with more than five years of work experience, who wish to obtain a trade and journeyman's certificate, to obtain formal recognition of knowledge and skills acquired over time in the context of a job. The candidate is not required to go through a formal education and training process but must take the same final examination as apprentices, including both theoretical and practical elements.

The **New Act on Vocational Assessment 4A-3** (enacted on March 14, **2003**) gave adults with the right to further education a right to have their *realkompetanse* documented, including when not seeking further education. It also gave immigrants who have recently arrived in Norway and registered jobseekers not entitled to upper secondary education the opportunity to undertake an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning, including vocational testing.

According to the **Working Environment Act § 68**, employees who leave their positions after giving legitimate notice to do so have a legal right to receive a written reference from their employers. The written testimony shall contain the employee's name, date of birth, the content of the job and the length of employment. This Act also laid down in 2001 the right of employees to study leave. All employees who have worked for at least three years and at least two years with the same employer have the right to three years of full or part time study leave, to participate in organised education and training leading to documented competence. The training has to be related to their professional situation. (These rules only apply to the right of study leave and not to the right of salary during the study leave.)

Since 2001, applicants without sufficient formal entrance qualifications can be admitted to Higher Education on the basis of age (25 years or more), and a combination of formal, informal and non-formal learning. It should also be noted that since 1992, adults aged 23 and over can be admitted to higher education on the basis of five years of education and/or work experience and prescribed minimum levels in six core subjects from upper secondary school.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Government will propose a change in this legal right from "born prior to" to "25 years or more" in spring 2008

<sup>2</sup> 2007 National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Norway

The **Act relating to Universities and University Colleges No. 15 of 1 April 2005** thus contains two sections concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning, relating to admission and exemption:

#### Section 3-6: Educational qualifications for entrance to higher education

The general basis for admission as a student is successful completion of the Norwegian upper secondary school and fulfilment of the requirements regarding subject combinations and hours of study laid down by the Ministry. The Ministry may stipulate that other suitable education or combinations of education and work experience shall constitute a general basis for admission.

The institutions may grant applicants aged 25 years of age or older (in the admission year) admission to specific courses if they hold the necessary qualifications for the course concerned, on the basis of their prior learning (formal and non-formal).

#### Section 3-5: Exemption from an examination or test

Exemption from an examination or test shall be granted when it has been shown that a corresponding examination or test has been taken at the same or another institution. Such exemption may also be granted on the basis of another suitable examination or test. Documentation of prior learning (formal and non-formal) may also provide a basis for exemption.

Currently, the national **Strategy for Lifelong Learning** recognises the validation of informal and non-formal learning as one of its overarching priorities. The strategy aims to follow up on lessons learned from experience to date, and thus major policy measures now include:

- Strengthening information and guidance services
- New methods of cooperation between education, working life and the NGO sector
- New measures for uniform practice
- New reporting and data collection routines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2007 Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Norway

The **benefits** of validation have also been recognised in a wide range of policy documents:

- Many immigrants to Norway have high educational qualifications and a goal in the implementation of a national recognition system in Norway was to enable competence identification and validation for adult immigrants. The government **action plan against racism and discrimination for the period 2002-2006** recognised the importance of validation for the inclusion of refugees and immigrants.
- The recent government **white paper on senior policies** (St.meld.nr. 6 2006-2007) endorsed the validation of non-formal and informal learning to enhance the careers of older workers, who sometimes have long-term work experience but lack formal qualifications
- Validation is recognised as an important tool to combat skills shortages in the Directorate for health and social affairs' **national plan to recruit personnel to the health and social services sector for the period 2003-2006** and in the recent government **white paper on the future challenges in the health and social services**.

#### 27.2.2 Practical Framework

The Norwegian approach to validation of informal and non-formal learning has been based on the idea that the documentation and validation methods must have value for users in different areas. As such, the documentation and validation process is carried out in relation to three main learning areas:

- The Education Sector – to visualise competences and skills in relation to the objectives in the national curricula (upper secondary education) or specific curricula (higher education)
- The Labour Market – to visualise and document competences and skills in relation to organisational requirements, sector requirements and international standards
- The voluntary sector – to visualise competences and skills in all forms.

As part of the national Validation Project, every county authority received funding to establish a system of recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Most regional authorities set up one or more 'assessment centres', which are usually located at upper secondary schools. These centres provide information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to secondary education. They are also responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure, including the training of assessors.

In addition, extra funding was provided to 12 counties to develop assessment methods and tools. Today, different methods and tools for mapping and assessment of competences and skills exist.

The National Institute for Adult Learning (Vox) has a number of responsibilities in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal learning, as outlined in the box below.

#### Vox, the National Institute for Adult Learning<sup>1</sup>

Vox carries out a number of activities in the area of validation of informal and non-formal learning. These include: national surveys, networking, training, information campaigns and national projects.

The Institute has the main responsibility for providing information about the Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Information is provided on the web site [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no), at national and international conferences and seminars and through other publicity materials.

Vox also runs a national network which supports the system of validation in the upper secondary education system.

In terms of training, over the years 2004/2005 a national tour was organised, delivering two-day training sessions for assessors in upper secondary education. 788 participants were involved.

During 2006, Vox undertook various projects relating to specific issues and target groups in relation to validation, such as a project to improve the cooperation between employment offices and education centres, projects working with the public sector and higher education, a review of good practice in upper secondary education and various projects relating to documentation in working life.

In addition, Vox has developed a standard format for a competence card to describe learning at work. The Competence Card helps an individual to map and describe their professional competence such as branch knowledge, work responsibilities, working methods and personal skills. The tool can be downloaded at [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no). The tool is accompanied by a guide on how to successfully carry out the procedure, some good practice examples and a database tool for Human Resource Managers. Today, Vox is promoting more widespread use of this tool as a common documentation of informal and non-formal learning in the workplace.

Information about validation of non-formal and informal learning is also available on the web sites of the Ministry of Education and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation. Many other stakeholders also provide web based information, including the county authorities and higher educational institutions.

### 27.2.3 Upper Secondary Education

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning related to upper secondary education is free, provided that the applicant meets one of the following criteria:

- He/she was born before 1978 and does not have a general or vocational certificate from upper secondary level (costs are borne by county councils)

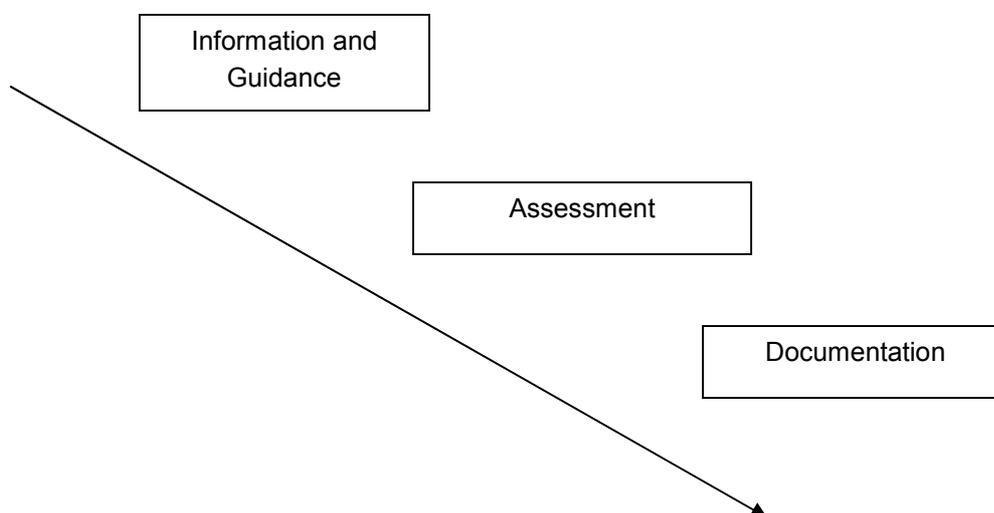
<sup>1</sup> Information taken from: Nilsen Mohn, T. , 2006, The Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning; benefits for individuals, enterprises and society, A presentation given to the Sixth ERDI expert seminar, 12 May 2006, the 2006 OECD Norway Country Background Report on Activity in Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning and the Final report from the Norwegian sub-project of REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education and Vox - Annual Status Report on Norwegian Adult Learning 2006: Basics!.

- He/she is unable to work due to disability (costs are borne by social security offices)
- He/she is unemployed (costs are borne by the employment office).

The purposes of recognising non-formal and informal learning in upper secondary education are:

- To match the learning to formal qualifications set in the national curricula and shorten the study period
- To give possibilities for a more streamlined and tailor-made study programme for each individual
- To provide the individual with an accredited certificate or diploma (Competence Certificate) to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job or increase mobility in the working life

The validation process within the educational system is based on three stages which are illustrated in the diagram below:



Source: Nilsen Mohn, T., 2006, Visualisation and Documentation, Methods and Tools, a presentation given at the sixth ERDI expert seminar, 12 May 2006.

Within this process, the following methods and tools have been developed for the implementation of the assessment stage. Each one is implemented in relation to the requirements set out in the national curricula:

- Dialogue-based method: based on discussions between an assessor/specialist and the individual. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question. This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The method can be combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates.
- Portfolio assessment: based on written documentation, photos etc. The candidate sends a 'charting' form to a 'service centre' together with certificates and reports. After admission to secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to the individual's actual knowledge and skills.
- Vocational 'testing': based on an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives of the adult are charted. This interview is followed by a second one by a professional specialist, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed. Vocational 'testing' provides adults with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. On the other hand, it also requires inter-

departmental cooperation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

Quality assurance is provided through the school system itself.

#### 27.2.4 Higher Education (HE)

In HE, individual universities or university colleges assess applications for admission or exemption based on non-formal or informal learning. Applicants' qualifications are assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. The institutions are free to decide what constitutes the necessary qualifications for admittance and the admittance procedures are decided locally. As a result, there are variations with regard to practice between the institutions.

Recognition related to higher education is free for the individual applicant. The costs must be covered by the university or university college. Informal and non-formal learning is assessed mostly through self-declarations and portfolios - interviews and tests are seldom used. Foreign qualifications and documented work experience are assessed and accredited centrally by NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency of Quality Assurance in Education. Each HE institution is responsible for its own quality assurance. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) oversees quality assurance on a national level.

During the 1999-2002 Validation Project, sixteen state university colleges and one university tested a variety of different entrance requirements, allowing admission for adults who lacked the general academic exams normally required for admission to higher education. The trials received a favourable evaluation, showing that in most subjects adult students admitted on the basis of non-formal and informal competencies progressed as fast as younger students admitted on the basis of a general upper secondary education. Apart from in mathematics and the natural sciences, they also received results which were on a level with the traditional students' results. The teachers also appreciated that work experience was brought into the classroom by the adult learners, and stated that they added positively to the learning environment at the institutions.<sup>1</sup>

NIFU STEP<sup>2</sup> has surveyed the effects of the legal right to seek admission to HE on the basis of non-formal and informal learning. Before the reform was implemented, there was scepticism among higher education institutions towards validation but experience has led

<sup>1</sup> E. Brandt: Høgskolenes erfaringer med realkompetansestudenter fra forsøksordningene i 1999 og 2000, NIFU Skriftserie 11/2002, Oslo:NIFU. In Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian research institute for studies in innovation, research, and education.

to a positive attitude to the reform in most institutions. Small university colleges particularly value students admitted in this way, who are found to be motivated and hard working. The centrally located university colleges, which have too many applicants, find it hard to provide enough resources to deal with these application schemes.

The Norwegian sub-project of the European REFINE project studied the assessment of a number of candidates with non-formal and informal learning who applied for exemption in higher education. The report shows that the six institutions selected for the study lacked procedures for the assessment of exemption candidates and consequently dealt with the candidates in an 'ad hoc manner'. Although a proposal for an exemption form was provided by the committee investigating *realkompetanse* in higher education, the form has not gained wide acceptance and is not felt to be adequate – a documentation tool is required which documents skills and competences that are specifically related to the field of study the candidate is applying for exemption from. However, although the project revealed that exemption is not a priority in Norwegian higher education and that existing procedures are inadequate, it also found that without exception, the institutions involved were positive about the right to exemption.<sup>1</sup>

#### 27.2.5 National Qualifications Framework

The development of a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning is still under discussion in Norway. In May 2006, a working group was appointed by the Ministry of Education, to consider the development of a comprehensive national qualifications framework. This working group had participation from relevant stakeholders: one member from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, one from Vox and five from the Ministry. The working group gave a final report for consultation in October, 2006.

It has been decided to start working on a proposal for a national qualifications framework for vocational education and training, and to start a pilot project for testing the EQF in certain sectors. This work will be undertaken in close collaboration with the social partners. In addition, Norway is participating in two projects on EQF funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme.<sup>2</sup>

A framework of qualifications may provide an important link between standardisation in assessment arrangements and procedures of quality assurance, enhancing the legitimacy of the recognition system.

<sup>1</sup> Haugoy, G., Moe, F., 2005, REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education, Final report from the Norwegian sub-project, Vox and the University of Bergen, January 2005

<sup>2</sup> 2007 National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Norway

## 27.2.6 Progress

Between 2000 and 2005 approximately 60,000 persons went through a recognition procedure in relation to upper secondary level, of which approximately 80% were in vocational subjects.<sup>1</sup>

At higher education level, the number of applicants 25 years and older seeking recognition of their formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission to a study programme was 6,000 in 2001 (the first year this was possible). The number of applicants decreased in the following years, to 2,700 in 2006.<sup>2</sup> (It was expected that the number of applicants would be high when the opportunity was first made available and that this would decrease somewhat over time.) The majority of the applicants were women (70% of students admitted on the basis of non-formal and informal learning).<sup>3</sup> Approximately half of the applicants were for health and social studies and one fifth were for educational studies, mostly bachelor studies at university colleges.<sup>4</sup>

Adult students admitted on the basis of recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning constitute approximately 5 % of all new HE students annually, relatively more in health and social studies (12 %) and in educational studies (10 %). The number of these new students annually has decreased somewhat, from 2,100 to 1,300 in the period 2001-2006. However, these figures show that it is still an important scheme for adults lacking formal study to gain access to higher education.<sup>5</sup>

However, there were only 123 applications for exemption in higher education during the period 2001-2004.<sup>6</sup>

In an evaluation of the Validation Project<sup>7</sup>, supervisors and assessors/specialists found that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has a positive effect on candidates, as it gives the candidates more self-respect for example. Candidates themselves found that the assessment of non-formal and informal learning was a positive experience – around 80% found the experience useful or very useful.

<sup>1</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Nilsen Mohn, T. , 2006, The Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning; benefits for individuals, enterprises and society, A presentation given to the Sixth ERDI expert seminar, 12 May 2006

<sup>4</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Brandt, E. (2005): *Avkorting av studier på grunnlag av realkompetanse*. Oslo: NIFU STEP

<sup>7</sup> Agenda (2003a): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS. In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

The surveys however identified a major need for training – around 96% of supervisors and 85% of the assessors/specialists felt that they needed training in the future, particularly in relation to a quality assurance arrangement which may lead to a national standard in the future.

It also appears that there is a need for greater publicity of the initiative. A comprehensive survey by Vox, “Awareness of legal rights to upper secondary education”<sup>1</sup> conducted between 2003 and 2005 showed that of the 21,000 adults participating in upper secondary education, 85% did not know where to go for recognition of their informal or non-formal learning.

### 27.2.7 Further developments

As we have seen, Norway has been at the forefront of the development of formal recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, there remain a number of challenges which must be addressed, in order to realize the full potential of the national validation system:

- Opportunities for validation are not widely known, particularly amongst people with low formal education. The services that exist are not sufficiently marketed towards relevant target groups.
- The system for documentation is insufficiently developed, and the reporting routines are not adequate, particularly at the upper secondary level.
- Currently, adults born after 1978 do not have the same statutory right to have their learning validated at the upper secondary level as adults born before 1978
- There is too much variation between the counties in the way they practice recognition of informal and non-formal learning
- Vocational testing, a method which particularly suits the needs of immigrants, is not widely used
- Higher education institutions have a large degree of freedom in the way they practice access and exemptions. There will always be variations in practice between the institutions – experiences to date may suggest there is room for closer cooperation.
- There is a need for further cooperation between sectors.
- The cooperation between the employment and welfare offices and the county offices responsible for the recognition of learning at the upper secondary level is underdeveloped – relatively few unemployed people use the opportunities offered to have their learning validated
- The use of documentation tools such as the Competence Card has not been widely spread in working life

<sup>1</sup> Haugerud, V., Røstad, S (2004) *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget, sluttrapport*. Oslo: Vox

Projects and initiatives have thus been set up in response to these challenges. For example, in 2005, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Education and Research initiated three projects to promote better coordination of the employment policy and the education policy. One of the projects is aimed to increase the number of unemployed persons who go through recognition of non-formal and informal learning at upper secondary level. Three county municipalities have been given funding to carry out pilot projects to develop systems for building bridges between these two public services.

In addition, pilot projects are now being implemented to use validation of informal and non-formal learning to the benefit of groups with specific needs, for example immigrants and refugees, the unemployed and older workers.

Finally, the 2006 OECD country report on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Norway identified a significant lack of baseline data on issues related to quality assurance, which presents challenges to evaluations of efficient, beneficial and equitable recognition systems. In order to develop informed responses to the challenges which have been identified above, it is clear that comprehensive monitoring and evaluation procedures must be implemented alongside these new pilot initiatives and projects.

## 27.3 Private Sector

### 27.3.1 Social Partner Involvement

The mandate of the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) was first geared towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning for individuals wanting to enter into education. The social partners moved to extend the mandate to the development of validation tools for working life as well. Nine experimental projects targeting the labour market or working life were thus carried out during the period 1999-2002. The projects were carried out by the social partners in different sectors, study associations and county administrations which cooperated with enterprises. Some projects were directed at specific sectors or industries, other projects were focused on a geographical area.

The social partners have also recognised the importance of validation of informal and non-formal learning through the 'Basic Agreement'. The Basic Agreement is an agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions. The **Basic Agreement for 2006-2009**, Chapter VI on Development of competence has a new part: 16-4, Documentation of formal, non-formal and informal competence (*realkompetanse*) where it is stated that *"The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees' experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work"*.

The social-partner based projects carried out under the Validation Project explicitly decided that wage increases should not be a goal. One of the projects was a direct follow-up and an attempt to strengthen the implementation of the new chapter on the 'development of competences' set out in the Basic Agreement. Other projects also tried to develop tools that could describe and account for non-formal and informal competencies in a way that would be useful to the enterprises in allocating and developing their human resources. At the same time, these validation schemes aimed to be useful for the individual when applying for a new job in the labour market or when applying for admission to an educational institution.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

Social partners have also been involved in the delivery of specific projects relating to validation in certain sectors, such as the AKS project, funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme:

#### Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills (AKS), a Leonardo da Vinci transnational project<sup>1</sup>

The AKS project took place over the period 2003-2004 and was funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme. It was a follow-up to a project carried out by ELBUS during the national Validation Project. The project's scope of work was to develop the validation, assessment and transferability of formal, non formal and informal learning in the electro-technical industry throughout Europe. The lead partners were the two Norwegian organisations OREE (advisory council for vocational training in the electro technical centre) and ELBUS (national centre for electro technical vocational education). The other partner countries were Denmark, Greece, Sweden and the UK.

The project group developed a pan-European methodology to enable electro-technical or other enterprises to document and assess accumulated knowledge and skills of an employee or potential employee. This methodology is explained in a handbook, and is supported by a web/electronic-based tool to aid the process. All five partner country languages are present in both the methodology and the tool and the tool was piloted in several different European electro-technical pilot companies.

The 'assessment' stage of the methodology involves a conversation with the employer, based on what the individual has recorded about him/herself. This conversation should follow clearly defined guidelines and will be strictly confidential between the individual and the employer. To aid this development dialogue the project partners developed an 'Ability to take action' questionnaire. The main objective of this assessment is to develop the basis of a personal development plan involving measures that the employer is able to initiate or support.

100 individuals were involved in the project from Norway, five from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.

The mapping tool is web-based whilst the CV and the 'Ability to take action' forms are available electronically through the AKS web site.<sup>2</sup>

The AKS project was one of three to receive the first ever Leonardo da Vinci award launched by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

<sup>1</sup> [www.aks-international.com](http://www.aks-international.com)

<sup>2</sup> The main page of the web-based tool is: <http://komptest.prodok.no> A password is required to be able to use the tool.

### 27.3.2 Validation in practice in the private sector

One of the main reasons for the Competence Reform was to encourage awareness and recognition of the amount of learning which takes place at work. A survey<sup>1</sup> concluded that:

- employees regard their workplace as the most important venue for learning
- employers believe practice is the best way of learning

Many organisations have their own systems and procedures for documenting competences, either as part of their HR management system or ISO requirements.

During the Validation Project, internet-based tools were developed for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies. Most of these digital tools start with self-assessment of the kind of work tasks the employee has performed and responsibilities he/she has held in the enterprise. This self-assessment is then subject to discussion, evaluation and ultimately validation and signed by the employer as a **Competence Passport**, to be combined with a CV. While some of the tools developed in working life received favourable evaluations from human resource managers as well as from employees who took part in these projects, the diffusion of Competence Passport tools across working environments has so far been limited. One reason for this is that employees may be sceptical about how the documentation might be used by the employers in times of downsizing.

Moreover, employers' confederations also showed some scepticism about the use of validation tools in the work place – they feared that employees who had undergone a validation process would demand a salary increase.<sup>2</sup>

The different Competence Passport tools developed during the Validation Project were free for enterprises to use, unlike existing commercial tools for charting which work tasks an employee can do. For example, Vox has made a Competence Card available on their website [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no). The existing commercial tools for charting competence in work tasks are for use *within* an enterprise. The Competence Card tools have this use too, but aim also to be useful for the employee when applying for a new job or when applying for admission to an educational institution on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning.

An evaluation of the Competence Passports developed in technological enterprises had views from employers and employees on possible important areas of application. Individual wage stipulation was considered important by 40 % of both employers and

<sup>1</sup> [www.fao.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf](http://www.fao.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf). In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Skule, S., in Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

employees. Job-seeking outside the enterprise was considered important by 60 % of employers and 80 % of employees.<sup>1</sup>

The following two examples demonstrate how validation has been used in two sectors. The first describes a pilot project in the agriculture sector and the second gives an overview of the use of validation in the metal sector

#### Validation in the agriculture sector – a pilot project

The State Agricultural Administration supported a pilot project between 2004 and 2006 on voluntary documentation in the agriculture sector. The national associations of farmers and small farmers cooperated with partners in Nordland county (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service). For farmers, to document their non-formal and informal learning may be useful for further development as a farmer, planning future new production (i.e. in niche markets), demands for quality assurance and documentation in relation to the markets. The national associations developed a course in how to document their total competence, to be used in study groups of 6-8 farmers. Schemes for CV and Competence Passport (professional competence including economy and ICT, personal/social competence, managerial competence) were part of the course material. In four meetings, the farmers discussed their varied work tasks and learned how to assess their competence and document it, how to find partners to validate and sign the Competence Passport (i.e. Agriculture Guidance Service staff) and discussed possible needs for more education.

#### Validation in the metal sector<sup>2</sup>

By 2006, 10% of organisations in the metal and electro-technical sector were already working with validation of informal and non-formal learning. Validation procedures are mostly used for up-skilling staff but are also used for recruitment purposes. Validation of prior learning is included in the collective labour agreements in this sector.

Examples of valuation and validation procedures used by firms in the sector can mostly be given for the low-skilled. Validation is also used for university-level competences for different functions, from fitters to engineers. New validation procedures are also being developed, e.g. a validation procedure is being developed for the mechatronic sector.

At most big companies, validation has become a part of the human resource management policy, to up-skill their staff, like Philips, Corus and DAF. SMEs have less structured human resource management policies and therefore less active in terms of validation, although in fact they could benefit from it greatly.

In the main, organisations in the sector aim to get a good view of the competences they have in their organisation. To stimulate development and use of competences, a quarter of the metal and electro-technical sector makes use of a form of competence-based management. This is one of the reasons why the importance of the recognition of competences has been recognised.

An experiment in using a work-based competence passport as a starting point for validation in the education system showed that differences persist between how prior

<sup>1</sup> Skule, S. & Andersen, B. (2000): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien. Evaluering av TBL og Fellesforbundets dokumentasjonsordning for arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-rapport 363 (pp. 42-44). In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> VPL, Norway National Review, March 2006

learning is valued in working life and how it is valued in the school environment. One important difference was that enterprises are primarily interested in recording what the individual can actually accomplish in relation to the strategies and tasks in the enterprise, while the point of departure for education providers are to map the lack of competencies compared with a given curriculum or plan of study. It was therefore necessary to translate the competence passport issued in working life into the scheme used within upper secondary education. In spite of this need for a 'translation process', the conclusion of the experiment was that the authorities would still save time and money if individuals or groups of employees brought a competence passport with them when entering a validation process in the education system.<sup>1</sup>

## 27.4 Third Sector

During the national Validation Project, experimental projects were also carried out in the third sector, which encompasses study associations, distance learning institutions, folk high schools and various nongovernmental organisations.

Adult education associations are run by voluntary organisations, such as the *Folkeuniversitetet Adult Education Association* and the Workers' Educational Association of Norway, which are primarily concerned with adult education. Courses are offered in a wide variety of subjects, ranging from recreational to vocational courses and courses at university and college level. Twenty-two adult education associations receive state support to hold such courses.

700,000 adults participate annually in courses held by adult education associations. 24,000 adults participate in courses at the upper secondary level and 48,000 adults attend courses at university and college level.

Voluntary organisations in Norway carry out various types of voluntary activity where individuals help out by providing labour. The documentation of non-formal learning in the voluntary sector must therefore be adapted to suit the various needs of the many parties in the sector. It has been suggested that this multitude of different learning environments has prevented the development of a coherent approach to the validation of learning through third sector activities.

Eight projects were carried out in the third sector under the national Validation Project and a draft personal competence passport was devised to validate experiences from activities in the third sector.

<sup>1</sup> Skule, S. in Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal learning in the sector are based to all intents and purposes on individuals' own efforts – a self-declaration with minimum input from assessors. Electronic tools have been developed which can be used for this work. The idea is that individual organisations will provide information to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are also responsible for guidance for the people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own CV and identify and describe their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a self-assessment of the skills identified and describes these.

Some third sector organisations have developed a tool for the description of competences and skills from participating in different activities in third sector called the 'Personal Competence Document', as outlined in the box below.

## The Personal Competence Document (PCD)<sup>1</sup>

The Personal Competence Document is a system for mapping and documenting competences, based on self-evaluation. The main objective of the PCD system is to stimulate users to map, describe and document the activities they are or have been involved in and the competences they have developed, with a focus on non-formal learning and voluntary activities. The secondary objective is to raise awareness of the multitude of competencies developed in the voluntary sector so that these can be taken into account in both the education system and in working life.

The PCD focuses on the competence development aspect of all learning activities in the member organisations. It reminds and underlines to member organisations of the fact that all learning activities may form important parts of an individual's competences that may be relevant for work or further education.

The PCD contains:

- Instructions and guidance
- Forms to document the "totality" of competencies and competencies linked to single activities
- Examples
- A dictionary of voluntary activities

The likely value and effect of undertaking the PCD process for individuals is: an improved overview of one's own competence-generating activities, increased motivation and self-esteem and increased ability to put one's competences into words. Creating an overview of an individual's competences may make it easier to see what competencies are 'missing'. The use of the PCD may therefore make it easier to decide "where to go" - what learning activities to start with/continue with, what kind of work to look for etc.

The PCD is available on the internet at: [www.vofo.no](http://www.vofo.no) (in Norwegian only).

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by T. Nilsen Mohn

However, although there is a tool available to the third sector for validation of prior learning, the use of the tool is sporadic. It is used only if organisations choose to do so – and if they have the capacity. The reasons for the low level of use are:

- Need for more information and training (especially at local level)
- Small number of employees
- Fear of the amount of administration involved
- Limited financial resources.

The following key words are often used to describe non-formal and informal learning in the third sector: independence and self-discipline, own efforts and cooperation, reflection and ability to put ideas into words, ICT skills, skills in environmental protection, language skills, social skills, managerial skills, organisation skills, skills in problem solving and stress management. The purpose of the documentation of non-formal and informal learning is to reinforce the self-confidence and inspire people to make it easier to gain access to formal educational courses. It is also believed that documentation of non-formal and informal learning in the voluntary sector will lead to self-awareness that is useful and important for development of their voluntary career, as well as for taking on additional duties in voluntary organisational life. In the long term, it is believed that this may lead to the revitalisation of voluntary work.

Finally it has been shown that in the validation procedure in the formal education system there is very little attention to learning in the voluntary sector. One of the findings in the Vox report “Validation of Prior Learning in Practice” was that local education authorities find it easier to validate competence gained from work than from the voluntary sector.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vox - Annual Status Report on Norwegian Adult Learning 2006: Basics!

## 27.5 Conclusions

Norway has an established national system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning and is one of the countries at the forefront of development in this area. Validation of informal and non-formal learning is possible throughout the education sector, from primary to higher education. The national system has been developed with support from all relevant stakeholders and through collaboration and cooperation, thus providing individuals with opportunities which respond to their needs and circumstances.

Validation initiatives have taken place not only within the public sector, but also within the private and third sectors. Social partners and employers have been involved in the development of national initiatives as well as individual pilot projects. Today, workers can undergo a validation procedure to obtain Competence Passports which documents the skills and competences they have developed through their work experience. In the third sector too, organisations have worked together to develop validation tools, to enable individuals to recognise the skills and competences they have attained through voluntary work or other third sector activities.

However, there remain some challenges for the future. Although there is a national policy on validation of informal and non-formal learning, actual practice varies across the country. The National Association for Adult Education, Vox, recommends that a national consensus should be reached on how documentation and validation should be practiced on a local basis. Vox suggests that the documentation and validation system must be based on national principles regulated by rules, rather than on local interpretations and advocates greater, improved collaboration among relevant stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

Good practice must be shared across Norway and lessons learned must be acted upon. Further, there remains a lack of awareness among individuals of the validation opportunities available to them, thus greater publicity and dissemination efforts must take place. In the private sector, the use of Competence Passports remains limited to a certain number of enterprises – again, good practice must be shared to enable more individuals to benefit from these important tools. In the third sector, organisations face barriers to take-up of validation, such as limited resources and it is important that these barriers are not allowed to prevent individuals from maximising the opportunities available to them.

<sup>1</sup> Vox - Annual Status Report on Norwegian Adult Learning 2006: Basics!

Norway is therefore a country where the benefits of validation have been widely accepted and recognised for a long period. Other countries can learn from the Norwegian experience to date and Norway itself must learn from and act on its own achievements. At the same time, it is important to examine and address the problems and barriers which are now being encountered, for example through learning from good practice in other countries at a similar stage of development.

## 28.0 Poland<sup>1</sup>

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*By Anna Drozd (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 28.1 Introduction

Although a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning does not yet exist in Poland, many elements of such a system are already in place. It must be highlighted that formal education still holds a dominant position in the Polish education system. At the same time, there is a wide recognition of the importance of validation of informal and non-formal learning. The legal environment has also been gradually adjusting to meet changing demands in this respect.

Whereas validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning de jure depends on the systemic and legal arrangements which are being introduced only on a gradual basis, de facto validation subsystems often already exist in certain crafts and other sectors. There is an abundance of examples of innovative initiatives in the third sector, as well as interesting analytical and development projects in academic institutions. Many of these initiatives have been supported by EU programmes.

Overall, there are provisions for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in place. However, one cannot speak yet of a coherent and transparent system in the lifelong learning perspective.<sup>2</sup>

### 28.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public sector

#### 28.2.1 Background – vocational and general education and training in Poland

Polish initial Vocational Education and Training (VET) has undergone a comprehensive reform of a systemic character, which has not yet been fully finalised. It has been aimed at ensuring flexibility of education; linking vocational education to the needs of the labour market, and ensuring the quality of education and comparability of qualifications.

The reform process, as well as the very transition to the free market economy, had a major impact on patterns of participation in education and training in Poland. There has been a shift in the interest of students from vocational to general education and participation in general education has almost doubled since 1990, reaching 36% in 2001/2. However, vocational pathways are still predominant and approximately 60% of the relevant age groups undergo VET at secondary level. Reform has facilitated the vertical permeability of

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Poland chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Olga Strietska-Iliina

<sup>2</sup> Zelloth, H. et al. Vocational education and training and employment services in Poland, ETF, 2002, pp.60-61.

the system. Horizontal permeability, however, is still limited, as transfers between different types of schools are only possible at the initial stage of the educational cycle. Curricular reform has supported the modularisation of study programmes but putting them into full usage in practice is still very much in progress<sup>1</sup> - by 2005, there were 53 modular programmes in place<sup>2</sup>. By 2007, an additional 131 modular programmes were created with support from the European Social Fund (Sectoral Operational Programme – Development of Human Resources 2004-2006).<sup>3</sup>

As far as Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) is concerned, in spite of a number of motivating mechanisms in place, participation in CVT is still relatively low in comparison with the EU average. The participation rate in education and training of the adult population (aged 25-64) in Poland was only 5.6% in 2006 compared to the 9.6% EU27 average<sup>4</sup>.

### 28.2.2 Assessment and certification mechanisms in IVET and CVT<sup>5</sup>

Since 1999, vocational school graduation has been separated from the acquisition of the vocational qualification. The system now allows graduates to continue their education at a higher level, whether or not they have taken a vocational examination. The title of 'qualified worker' or worker with equivalent qualifications in a given occupation has been granted to graduates of basic VET schools and one-year post-lyceum schools who have successfully passed the relevant vocational examinations. The title of technician or equivalent is given to occupations, where graduates of technical secondary schools (technicum), post-lyceum (postsecondary) schools have successfully passed the initial VET examination. Both titles, certified with diplomas, are obtained irrespective of the form in which the education took place (daytime, evening, weekend, extramural, or based on out-of-school examinations).

In the reformed system, the responsibility for certification, evaluation and the issuing of maturity and vocational title diplomas lies with Regional Examination Commissions. These Commissions are coordinated by the Central Examination Board, appointed by the Minister of National Education. The system combines both internal and external assessment.

<sup>1</sup> Zelloth, H. Et al. Vocational education and training and employment services in Poland, ETF, 2002, p.73. Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Poland. 2004. QCA Consortium. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Poland.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Poland.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Strategy for Development of Education 2007-2013, Ministry of Education and Sport, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by E. Rudomino, Ministry of Education and Sport, Poland

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat, 2007

<sup>5</sup> This section is mainly based on the text of the Country Monograph (Zelloth, H. Et al. Vocational education and training and employment services in Poland, ETF, 2002), extended/updated where applicable.

In June 2002 an external standardised competence test on completion of primary school and an external examination at the end of the third year of the new lower secondary/gymnasium, both conducted by regional examination commissions, were introduced for the first time. Although the results of both of these tests do not determine a pupil's progress, the results obtained by pupils are recorded on individual school certificates.

The new maturity examination, introduced in 2005, is composed of a part taken internally at the school (oral examination) and an external part (written examination). The first external vocational examinations (*egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe*) took place in 2004 and were taken by 20,066 candidates from 2-year vocational schools, of which 12,609 passed (63%)<sup>1</sup>. In 2005, the number of those taking the exam almost doubled (43,651 candidates) as the exam was also taken by those leaving 3-year vocational schools<sup>2</sup>. Examinations are based on the requirement standards defined for given occupations by authorised institutions (e.g. schools, enterprises). The occupational titles of apprentices and foremen are acquired through an examination committee operating with a chamber of crafts.

In 2003, on the basis of the regulation of the Minister of Education and Sport, the standards for external examination requirements were developed for 75 occupations<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, it must be stressed that these external exams are solely for school-based education and include initial VET but not the continuing education system<sup>4</sup>. However, there are some exceptions to that rule, whereby a candidate can be a young worker (*pracownik młodociany*) and attend complementary classes while still working<sup>5</sup>.

It is also worth noting that under certain conditions, those who attend school-based VET can be exempted from taking the written part of the final school examination, provided they took part in inter-school competitions in a given subject and either entered the finals or obtained the first prize<sup>6</sup>. An appropriate note is made on the candidate's diploma. Similar provisions exist in general education, where the exemption from the exam at lower secondary level can be granted for those who took part in a competition in a relevant

<sup>1</sup> Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna (2004). Egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe dla absolwentów dwuletnich zasadniczych szkół zawodowych. Informacja ogólna o wynikach [Translation]

<sup>2</sup> Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna (2005). Egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe dla absolwentów dwuletnich i trzyletnich zasadniczych szkół zawodowych. Informacja ogólna o wynikach [Translation] The aggregate data on results for all occupations were not available (only for 11 occupations).

<sup>3</sup> 5. Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu z dnia 3 lutego 2003r. w sprawie standardów wymagań będących podstawą przeprowadzania egzaminu potwierdzającego kwalifikacje zawodowe. (Dz.U. z 2003r. Nr 49, poz. 411) [Translation]

<sup>4</sup> Information obtained from the representative of the Central Examination Commission

<sup>5</sup> An interview with the representative of the Ministry of Education and Sports

<sup>6</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu z dnia 7 września 2004 roku w sprawie warunków i sposobu oceniania, klasyfikowania i promowania uczniów i słuchaczy oraz przeprowadzania sprawdzianów i egzaminów w szkołach publicznych (DzU nr 199, poz. 2046 z późniejszymi zmianami)

subject and either qualified beyond the regional level of the competition or were one of the finalists. The exemption can be granted upon presentation of a certificate stating the pupil's achievement and is equivalent to obtaining the highest grade of the written part of the final school exam. At upper secondary level, the achievement of the prize in the competition also results in exemption from the final exam (maturity exam resulting in ISCED 3 qualification) and achieving the highest possible grade in that exam either in written or oral part<sup>1</sup>. The list of competitions allowing the exemption is announced by the director of the Central Examination Commission at least 2 years before the planned examination.

The current continuing education system encompasses public and non-public establishments functioning within and outside of the school system. External examinations confirming the vocational qualifications acquired represent one of the links between the system of initial vocational education and training and the continuing education system<sup>2</sup>. The separation of the qualification examination from the fact of attaining formal education is a first step towards the creation of the possibility for a standardised validation system of qualifications, achieved in formal vocational education or in non-formal learning<sup>3</sup>.

Adult education in the regular school system, allowing adults to continue their school education after it has been interrupted or when they are already in employment ('second-chance') is largely a copy of the formal initial vocational education system, with traditional pathways leading to the same recognised certificates and qualifications. The system of extramural examinations (*egzamin eksternistyczny*) introduced the possibility of officially recognising skills at primary, lower and upper secondary school level, and awarding a school leaving certificate corresponding to the maturity exam (ISCED Level 3) without the requirement of attending classes in school<sup>4</sup>. This system covers all types of schools<sup>5</sup>. A recent example of a qualification that can be gained through the system of extramural examinations is the Laboratory Diagnostician qualification, where the 2006 amendment to the existing legislation introduced extramural examinations as an alternative to the existing attendance-based training in the field of medical analysis<sup>6</sup>.

Early school-leavers, lacking a school certificate, may have their vocational skills, acquired on-the-job, certified by state committees (appointed by school headmasters) and receive the title of qualified labourer or master in the given occupation. The completion of a

<sup>1</sup> Central Examination Commission website: [www.cke.edu.pl](http://www.cke.edu.pl) and Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne (publishing house) website: [www.wsipnet.pl](http://www.wsipnet.pl)

<sup>2</sup> Drogosz-Zabłocka, E. et al. VET in Poland. National Report. National Observatory, 2003, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Modernizacja kształcenia ustawicznego i kształcenia dorosłych w Polsce, jako integralnych części uczenia się przez całe życie. Raport opracowany dla Ministerstwa Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu. (Modernisation of vocational education and continuing training in Poland as integral part of lifelong learning. Report prepared for the Ministry of National Education and Sports). Stockholm University, Ministry of National Education and Sports, WB, p.50

<sup>4</sup> An interview with the representative of the Ministry of Education (August 2007)

<sup>5</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.5

<sup>6</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.5

vocational or post secondary school is no longer tantamount to receiving a vocational title but only denotes skills acquisition. Skill certification is made possible by passing an examination organised by one of the regional examining boards set up in 1999 by the Ministry of National Education. In practice this means that an adult who wishes to acquire vocational qualifications does not have to finish a vocational or post-secondary school. He or she is able to acquire these qualifications in the out-of-school system or at work. To gain formal recognition of these qualifications the candidate has to pass an examination<sup>1</sup>.

CVT out-of-school (courses, seminars, workshops, guided self-study, on-the-job training, apprenticeships) is provided by enterprises, NGOs, and different training and education centres, but also schools. Qualifications attained in the out-of-school system (including qualifications acquired in the process of work) may be validated by taking examinations, organised by state examination commissions. There are also examination boards appointed by employers (e.g. chamber of crafts), which certify equivalent qualifications providing for the title of journeyman or master craftsman in a profession<sup>2</sup>.

An important element of the CVT system are the Centres for Continuing Education (*Centra Kształcenia Ustawicznego – CKU*), which are multifunctional public education facilities offering education, further education and training to adults, in both in-school and out-of-school forms (including awarding qualification titles and the organisation of extramural examinations). The CKUs also provide training courses, commissioned by labour offices, and advisory services for teachers and trainers involved in adult education. They play an important role in preparing and implementing modern curricula and methods in adult education<sup>3</sup>. Vocational courses taken by accredited institutions can be accepted as a part of vocational training for adults, provided they are run in accordance with a teaching programme accepted by the Minister of National Education.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report on VET system in Poland, 2001, National Observatory, ETF., p.72

<sup>2</sup> Zelloth, H. et al. Vocational education and training and employment services in Poland, ETF, 2002, p.53-54

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by E. Rudomino, Ministry of Education and Sport

### 28.2.3 Other established validation practices

There are some other long-established practices of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. For instance, in the training and examinations for craftsmen and candidates for particular degrees in craftsmanship, in accordance with the 1989 Crafts Act. The Act (1989 Dz. U. No. 17, item 92 with subsequent amendments) stipulates the conditions for carrying out examinations for craftsmen for the degree of apprentice and foreman in crafts, which is recognised by employers and State administration on a national level<sup>1</sup>. These examinations can be taken by both young people who have completed vocational education and training in crafts and adults wishing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through work or theoretical training<sup>2</sup>.

More recently, procedures for validating skills and competencies for 20 medical professions have been under negotiation and a draft act has been adopted in March 2007<sup>3</sup>. This validation initiative falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, in certain occupations (e.g. security worker, engineers and technical staff in the electrical power sector, work safety and hygiene technicians and officers) sector entities and professional associations issue and deliver state-recognised certificates following training and examinations organised within the respective occupation or craft<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, the regulation in the field of categories, founding principles, changes and cancellation and principles of functioning of teacher training institutions (2000, Dz. U. No. 85), allows under certain conditions (e.g. number of hours, practical training) the application for recognition of the retraining vocational course of teachers as the completion of the qualification course<sup>6</sup>.

Some voivodship labour offices provide evaluation of vocational skills and experience gained in non-formal contexts, making use of the French model the *bilan de competence*<sup>7</sup>.

Some pedagogical tertiary schools make various attempts to introduce subjects related to the diagnostics of vocational knowledge and skills, acquired in both formal and non-formal contexts, into the curriculum of studies in pedagogy of labour<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Responses of the Institute for Terotechnology in Random 2002, ETF

<sup>2</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.6

<sup>3</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.5

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by E. Rudomino, Ministry of Education and Sport

<sup>5</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning. An analysis of the first responses by the candidate countries, ETF, 2002, p.3

<sup>6</sup> [ipe.pl/archiwum/+/html/pyt/uznanie.php](http://ipe.pl/archiwum/+/html/pyt/uznanie.php)

<sup>7</sup> Drogosz-Zabłocka, E. et al. VET in Poland. National Report. National Observatory, 2003, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

#### 28.2.4 Policy development

The authorities attach great importance to continuing education. This is demonstrated in a document entitled 'Development Strategy for Continuing Education Until 2010', adopted by the Government on 8 July 2003<sup>1</sup>. The overriding aim of the Strategy is to outline the direction of development of CVT in the context of the concept of lifelong learning and the development of a knowledge-based society. The implementation of the Strategy is intended to ensure individual development for everyone through easier access to continuing education and training and improving its quality, and to promote an active approach, increasing the employability of individuals. The Strategy outlines tasks for state administration and local governments, scientific and educational institutions and social partners, foundations, associations and other non-governmental organisations. It may also provide a basis for developing ministerial (branch) programmes for the development of continuing education in order to systematically improve the professional qualifications of human resources in view of social and economic needs<sup>2</sup>.

With regards the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning, the Strategy targets the implementation of numerous elements which are vital for the system. It recognises 'the necessity of building a more human-friendly system of access to all levels, forms and methods of gaining knowledge and developing skills. It should have the following features: 'openness, diversity, permeability, comparability, transparency and recognition of qualifications'. In particular it aims to develop a system of examination, confirmation and recognition of qualifications acquired in school and non-school forms and in a non-formal way, with the inclusion of self-study and experience gained in the process of work; the establishment of professional qualification standards as one of the elements of ensuring quality in continuous education; the creation of a system of voluntary accreditation of institutions conducting continuing education in non-school forms; the modification and enrichment of the continuous education programmes offered, with particular emphasis on modular programmes; the creation of the bank of modular programmes for school and out-of-school training; the preparation of vocational counsellors for the educational system and the labour market, etc.

Some other policy documents, including earlier ones, also refer to the objective needs in establishing a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

*The National Employment Action Plan for 2002* included actions taken to implement the unified qualification validation system for both the formal (school) and non-formal (out-of-school) systems, to compare the vocational achievements of pupils, to develop the national list of vocational qualifications based on occupational requirements, carrying out

<sup>1</sup> Strategy for the Development of Continuous Education until the year 2010, Ministry of National Education and Sports, adopted by Council of Ministers on 8th July 2003, pp.4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Drogosz-Zabłocka, E. et al. VET in Poland. National Report. National Observatory, 2003, p.12.

accreditation of vocational training programmes for the labour market and accreditation of the non-formal training providers of such programmes<sup>1</sup>.

*The Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources* (National Development Plan for the years 2004-2006) aimed to strengthen the system of continuous education of adults by accreditation of institutions conducting CVT in the out-of-school system and by the development of distance learning.

*The National Strategy for Employment Growth and Human Resources Development for the years 2000-2006* contains new proposals for activities, of which a very important one is the creation of appropriate conditions for the operation and formation of a flexible and efficient model of continuing education.

*The Strategy for Development of Education 2007-2013* underlines the necessity of creating a system for recognising and validating competencies acquired outside of the formal school system, diversifying continuing education provision both for those with low qualifications and disadvantaged groups and those with higher qualifications, in order to allow them to upgrade their skills<sup>2</sup>.

The Act of 27 June 2003 Amending the Educational System Act and Some Other Acts (Journal of Laws 137/2003, item 1304) introduced the accreditation of establishments offering continuing education activities and teacher upgrading centres. The amended Educational System Act defines more strictly the organisational framework for continuing education and specifies the types of schools and establishments which may offer this type of education. Furthermore, the Act ensures permeability between the formal school system and the out-of-school system<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding the validation of proven work experience, Poland introduced legal provisions and procedures by a joint ministerial decree (MoNE and MoLSP) in 1993, providing for the award of formal qualification titles through state examination commissions. This applies to persons wishing to confirm the level of qualifications they have acquired not in the course of school studies, but resulting from their professional experience<sup>4</sup>. In 2006, new legislation introduced specific arrangements whereby professional/vocational skills acquired through employment can be validated through qualification examinations. The new regulation also introduced the possibility of validating partial qualifications obtained as a result of completing training in a non-school setting, and of recognising partial

<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Responses of the Ministry of Education and Sports. 2002, ETF

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education and Sport (2005). Strategy for Development of Education 2007-2013 available at: [http://www.nauka.gov.pl/mein/\\_gAllery/16/18/16188/strategia\\_2007\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nauka.gov.pl/mein/_gAllery/16/18/16188/strategia_2007_2013.pdf) (Accessed 8 August 2007)

<sup>3</sup> Drogosz-Zabłocka, E. et al. VET in Poland. National Report. National Observatory, 2003, p.7

<sup>4</sup> Zelloth, H. et al. Vocational education and training and employment services in Poland, ETF, 2002, p.54

qualifications obtained in this way by adults who take up study in schools for adults providing vocational education and training<sup>1</sup>.

## 28.2.5 The development of a Qualifications Framework

From the point of view of some basic characteristics of qualification standards (flexibility and universality of the system, objective evaluation of learning outcomes and their comparability) numerous analyses produced so far in this field<sup>2</sup> indicate that a system of vocational qualifications in Poland does not yet exist. But there are elements of a system, such as centrally prepared curricula for certain professions, the system of administration of public education at the central and regional level, the system of final examination, the system of qualification examinations (extramural and separated from the actual process of education and training), work towards the harmonisation of the two classification system (that of vocation fields and of occupations), system of documentation of the achievements of students (though without competence-based evaluation) etc.<sup>3</sup>.

The creation of National Qualification System and National Qualification Framework became one of the priorities in the new Operational Programme – Human Capital 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund.

There are ongoing efforts to develop a system of standards that would facilitate comparison of qualifications, certificates and diplomas acquired in the formal as well as the non-formal system of education. In 1998, a basic methodology for the design of standards of vocational qualifications was developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as part of a European Training Foundation (ETF) initiated project<sup>4</sup>. Standards for eight professions have been designed using this methodology. Between 2002 and 2004, as a result of the Phare project, work relating to another 40 occupations has been completed and an internet database with the defined standards and modular vocational education programmes has been created<sup>5</sup>. At present, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is involved in a project primarily aiming at broadening the standards catalogue and promoting its wider use. The project lasts from 2006 to 2008 and will involve preparation of standards for 200 occupations and carrying out a large information and promotion campaign among

<sup>1</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.6

<sup>2</sup> e.g. by the Institute of Educational Research; also see: Kwiatkowski, S., Sepkowska, Z. (eds.). Budowa Standardów Kwalifikacji Zawodowych w Polsce. (Construction of qualification standards in Poland).. ETF, MEN, MPiPS, KUP, BKKK. Warszawa – Radom 2000; also Butkiewicz, Model Polskich Standardów Kwalifikacji Zawodowych. (A Model of Polish Vocational Qualifications). In „Edukacja i Praca” i ITeE. Warszawa, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Modernizacja kształcenia ustawicznego i kształcenia dorosłych w Polsce, jako integralnych części uczenia się przez całe życie. Raport opracowany dla Ministerstwa Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu. (Modernisation of vocational education and continuing training in Poland as integral part of lifelong learning. Report prepared for the Ministry of National Education and Sports). Stockholm Universitypp. Ministry of National Education and Sports, WB. Pp. 49-50

<sup>4</sup> Kwiatkowski, S.M.; Symela, K. Standardy kwalifikacji zawodowych. Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Drogosz-Zabłocka, E. et al. VET in Poland. National Report. National Observatory, 2003, p.11; the Internet database can be found at: <http://www.standardyiskolenia.praca.gov.pl/> (Polish version only) (Accessed 8 August 2007)

employers. The project also envisages research into the usage of the occupational standards by their potential users<sup>1</sup>.

In 2001 unification of the two following official systems of occupations/professions have been finalised: (i) Classification of occupations and specialisations used by the Ministry of Labour and the Central Statistical Office for statistical purposes (contains some 1,800 occupations<sup>2</sup>); (ii) Classification of vocational fields used by the Ministry of Education as a basis for designing vocational education for the relevant professions (contains 202 broadly conceived fields<sup>3</sup>).

The state may only recognise the qualifications and certificates (skilled manual worker, technician, etc.) that fall within the classification of vocational education fields. The development of a coherent system of standards is one of the priorities of the Strategy for the Development of Continuing Education until 2010. The implementation of this objective is made more difficult by the fact that, in Poland, there still is not an institution responsible for the development and quality of qualification standards, or for the development of a national system of qualifications. The design of standards related to vocational examinations is the responsibility of the Central Examination Board<sup>4</sup>.

In 2006, the Minister of Science and Higher Education established a Working Group on the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, whose work will primarily focus on obtaining comprehensive information on the competencies acquired by graduates through individual educational paths, on access to opportunities to further learning, ensuring that the educational programmes are defined on the basis of learning outcomes and increasing the diversity of educational programmes to better respond to the labour market needs<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The information on the project, which is carried out by external organisations which were awarded a public contract, can be found on the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' website: <http://www.mps.gov.pl/index.php?qid=502&#407> (Accessed 8 August 2007) (Polish version only)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by E. Rudomino, Ministry of Education and Sport

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Poland. QCA Consortium, 2004, pp. 25-26. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Poland.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Poland.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.5

## 28.2.6 The Academic sector

The method of the record of achievement is discussed in the literature<sup>1</sup> as a flexible and therefore promising initiative, which allows for 'portable' competences. Several Polish organisations had an opportunity to join the work of a European consortium of institutions on elaboration of a competence management tool entitled 'The European Record of Achievement' (EuroRecord) targeted at the engineering industry<sup>2</sup>. On the Polish side, the work was joined by: Kielce University of Technology, Warsaw University of Technology and Polish Association for Continuing Engineering Education.

EuroRecord is a software-supported tool for planning and recording individual training and development needs with the support of mentoring and guidance, in dialogue with the employer, designed to record prior learning achievements and to link it to the individual strategy for personal and professional development and advancement. The tool supports a credit system recognising continuing training courses, experiential learning and accreditation of in-company training. It is targeted at individual employees, employers, universities and professional organisations.

The EuroRecord helps individuals to manage their professional development and career by providing a methodology for the documentation of competences, identification of the requirements for further learning and with the subsequent design of the development plan. The method records learning achievements and professional development, regardless of where and how they occurred.

The Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Radom is very active in the initiation of and participation in projects which develop aspects of the validation of competences attained through informal and non-formal learning, such as:

- A project in the framework of the PHARE SIERRA/APPLE Programme: System Procedures and Solutions for Vocational Qualifications Recognition in the European Union Countries and in Poland,
- The pilot project PL/99/1/086604/PI/I.1.1.A/FPI of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme: Methods and Procedures of Vocational Qualifications Accreditation at the European Labour Market,
- The pilot project of the "The Jean Monnet – Poland Action" Programme: „Comparativeness of Vocational Qualifications on the Polish and European Labour Market" PL98/0071;

<sup>1</sup> see e.g. Mrówka, B. Kształcenie ustawiczne a doskonalenie umiejętności profesjonalnych [Continuing training and improvement of vocational skills]. Studia Europejskie Mar-99, p. 126.

[http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/wydawnictwo/Kwart\\_1999\\_3/Mrowka.pdf](http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/wydawnictwo/Kwart_1999_3/Mrowka.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The project was coordinated by European Society for Engineering Education, [www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/](http://www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/).

- The pilot project PL/00/B/F/PP/140179 of the Leonardo da Vinci programme: European Bank for the Development of Modular Curricula and Educational Technologies – EMCET de Bank<sup>1</sup>

The latter project, EMCET de Bank, European - Bank for the Development of Modular Curricula and Educational Technologies (2001-2003) - was developed in a European consortium of seven partner institutions. Apart from the Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Radom, several other Polish institutions were involved: Association of Technical Schools, Upper Silesia Education Centre and FESTO DIDACTIC. The project developed a modular approach, which took into account the training needs of participants based on the formative assessment of their competences. The system is based on clearly identified criteria and standards, which feed into the accreditation system of training providers for young people and adults. A further element of the system is a certification model along with the certificate supplement<sup>2</sup> - the validation of qualifications attained in formal or non-formal modular training. This system is supported by the elaborated computer database; and 'Centres of Competences' which among others serve trainers and individuals in their exploration and development of flexible offers and paths in vocational education<sup>3</sup>.

Poznań University of Technology carries out two projects aiming to certify skills acquired in non-formal settings in the area of telecommunications. The persons who possess the right skills and pass an online exam can obtain a certificate, without the necessity of attending school-based training. The projects are carried out under the Leonardo da Vinci programme<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Responses of the Institute for Terotechnology in Radom 2002, ETF

<sup>2</sup> The supplement explains the scope and character of the course of the modular training.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.itee.radom.pl/programy/emcet.htm>

<sup>4</sup> ET2010 Report Poland, p.6

### 28.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

The aim of the empirical survey of the Department of Labour Resource Management of the Warsaw School of Economics (2003); among Polish firms which have their headquarters in other European countries was to find out whether these firms use any standards (and which ones) in the provision of CVT. The results showed that qualification standards are not used by Polish firms in the provision of CVT. Enterprises use standards (profiles, descriptions) of competences. Also the standards of assessment of competences achieved by prior learning (informal and non-formal) are not widely known to Polish firms. The survey demonstrated a lack of awareness and understanding of solutions, commonly applied by European companies in this field, among the Polish firms<sup>1</sup>.

In some industries, however, special standards are set and work-based learning courses are easily recognised by other enterprises across the sector. Such an example is banking,<sup>2</sup> with the system of qualification standards. The sector also enjoys the presence of the project European Foundation Certificate in Banking (EFCB), represented in Poland by the Gdansk Academy of Banking, WIB and MSBiF. Accredited members of the European Bank Training Network elaborated the certification system, representing 17 countries including Poland. There are minimum competence requirements set for the recognition of the qualification. The certificate is linked to the Polish system of qualification standards in the banking sector. It is targeted at those who have the qualification 'independent employee in banking' and at those who do not possess vocational qualifications in the system of standards. Those already qualified in banking may take a simplified examination. The certificate allows for comparability on the European labour market and supports the mobility of the workforce. The first exam in Poland took place in December 2004. Polish institutions also offer training for preparation for the exam<sup>3</sup>.

Polish literature in the field of CVT specifically pinpoints the construction sector<sup>4</sup> where a model of continuing vocational training of construction workers includes self-training and training aimed at upgrading of skills in the out-of-school system of CVT<sup>5</sup>. The same sector employs the *Model of professional qualification structure and new methods of promotion, certification and mutual recognition of managerial skills according to EU requirements*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kwiatkiewicz, A. Standardowe rozwiązania w dziedzinie ustawicznego kształcenia kadr a praktyka firm europejskich w Polsce. (Standard solutions in the field of continuing training and practice of European firms in Poland). In 'e-mentor', No. 2 (4), April 2004, pp. 24-30

<sup>2</sup> Responses of NARICs on Questionnaire ICE & PLAR.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gab.com.pl/efcb/>

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Francuz, Wł. M. Budowniczowie. Zadania zawodowe, Kształcenie, Doskonalenie. (Construction workers: professional requirements, training, upgrading of skills). Politechnika Krakowska im. Tadeusza Kościuszki. Kraków 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Modernizacja kształcenia ustawicznego i kształcenia dorosłych w Polsce, jako integralnych części uczenia się przez całe życie. Raport opracowany dla Ministerstwa Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu. (Modernisation of vocational education and continuing training in Poland as integral part of lifelong learning. Report prepared for the Ministry of National Education and Sports). Stockholm University. Ministry of National Education and Sports, WB

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.il.pw.edu.pl/~itiopb/leonardoll/info-eng.htm>

The model was developed in the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci project by a consortium of institutions represented in Poland by the Institute of Construction Engineering and Management at the Faculty of Civil Engineering of Warsaw University of Technology, Construction Management Education Foundation, and Polish - British Construction Partnership. The main goal of the project is to develop a system of mutual recognition of managerial skills in construction, comparison and certification of managerial qualifications in the European construction industry. The project is built on the achievement of the previous projects in the construction sector, which aimed to recognise the need for managerial qualifications of construction personnel, recognition of applied systems of education, certification of the personnel and accreditation of studies in European Union. The following activities occurred in the framework of the follow-up project:

- Discussion and acceptance in an extended group of partners of the project final version of areas and structure of managerial knowledge in construction, necessary for different levels of qualifications and all types of managerial function in construction, in order to certify engineers and accredit courses,
- Creation of a guidebook for a comparability of all components of certification and accreditation systems in the form of curricula-qualification modules. These modules will describe content-related qualification requirements. Selected sets of these modules will become a compendia of knowledge for different levels of qualifications and different specializations,
- Comparable analysis of curricula, education methods and certification requirements in selected countries of the European Union,
- Creation of uniform certification criteria of managerial qualifications and accreditation of studies, preparing to fulfil managerial functions in various areas of the construction industry and different levels of required qualifications,
- Preparation of models and organisation of complementary studies (especially "distance learning" system), which are necessary to standardise qualification levels and process of specialisation of construction managers in different countries, according to agreed criteria of certification and MBA postgraduate studies in Construction Management and Real Estate Management,
- Preparation of uniform and detailed conditions and procedures of managerial skills certification and accreditation of studies assuring these qualifications, which are necessary to establish an organization called "European Construction Management Club", that will conduct and coordinate process of certification and accreditation on a European scale.

Another example of a sector initiative is the certification system of the Polish Welding Centre of Excellence in Gliwice. The system is accredited by the Polish Centre for Accreditation (PCA) in the scope of welding products, management systems as well as welding and NDT personnel certification. It is authorised by the European Federation for

Welding, Joining and Cutting (EWF) in the range of qualification and certification of welding personnel as well as certification of quality systems according to series of EN 729 standards. The Centre is authorised by the International Institute of Welding (IIW) in a scope of welding personnel qualification. Among others, the Certification Centre offers qualification and certification of welding and NDT personnel, which includes:

- iv. Qualification and certification of welding personnel on the basis of the PCA accreditation and authorisation of IIW and EWF in the following categories:
  - a. International Welding Engineer/European Welding Engineer,
  - b. European Welding Inspector,
  - c. International Welding Technologist/European Welding Technologist,
  - d. International Welding Specialist/ European Welding Specialist,
  - e. International Welding Practitioner/ European Welding Practitioner,
  - f. European Welder.
  
- v. Certification of NDT personnel competence on the basis of the PCA accreditation in the following methods of testing:
  - a. visual inspection,
  - b. liquid-penetrant inspection,
  - c. magnetic particle inspection,
  - d. radiographic examination,
  - e. ultrasonic testing.

Certificates are issued in welding production, castings and forgings, production and processing of metals, pre-operation and operation testing of plants, objects and structures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.is.gliwice.pl/en/certification.html>

The Polish Psychologists Society (PPS) provides recommendations, licences, and permissions for performance of training or consultations for the PPS members with complete higher education studies. The certification approach takes into account previous non-formal training and practical experience, including specific case studies. Below there are some examples of certificates, licences and recommendations offered by PPS:

- therapists and supervisors in therapy (over 500 certified specialists are included on the list to date);
- PPS trainer (3 degrees; over 500 recommended trainers and supervisors are included on the list to date);
- Recommendations to psychologists who apply for provision of expertise in courts (59 recommended experts to date);
- Certificate of the consultant in the clinical child psychology (35 certified specialists included on the list to date).<sup>1</sup>

The aforementioned examples at sector level are not exhaustive and many more initiatives can be found there. It is necessary, however, to raise transparency about the rules for granting certificates by various institutions and organizations – their procedures, competence requirements etc, as education authorities often decline to accept certificates recognised by the environment, as in some cases certificates of the Polish Psychologist Society.<sup>2</sup>

#### **28.4 Review of existing initiatives: the Third Sector**

There are about 47,000 non-government organisations in Poland, 15,000 of which offer social help. All of these organisations employ only a limited number of paid personnel with most of the work carried by volunteers (approx. 2 million).

The third sector in Poland is rather active in taking the initiative towards the validation of informal and non-formal learning. One of the reasons for this is that many non-governmental organisations, associations and societies (e.g. Polish Red Cross, Union of Polish Scouts, Caritas, voluntary workers organisations, houses of culture, associations 'Open doors', 'Semper Avanti', 'Tratwa') offer their membership and beneficiaries the possibility of learning by doing and other forms of informal and non-formal learning. In particular, activities in the framework of charity, voluntary works and in other forms of practical experience grant possibilities to attain a set of entirely new competences and knowledge, and the workers are particularly interested in their validation. This and the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ptp.psychologia.pl/>

<sup>2</sup> Korab, K. Report at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lll/life/report/candidate/poland\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lll/life/report/candidate/poland_en.pdf). Department of Strategy and Development, Ministry of National Education, p.4

problems linked to informal and non-formal learning in general was a subject of the conference organised by the National Agency of the Programme Youth in December 2004<sup>1</sup>.

The Volunteer Centre is a professional operation which matches individuals wanting to volunteer with organisations and groups who are interested in benefiting from the services offered by volunteers<sup>2</sup>. An integral part of the Volunteer Centre's programme is organising and conducting training sessions for groups of volunteers and co-ordinators. The Centre has developed a special training method for this purpose offered throughout Poland.

The Volunteer Centre in Warsaw has initiated Regional Volunteer Centre network-building in Poland. Currently, the network comprises 17 Centres operating in different parts of the country. All Regional Volunteer Centres apply the same standards of work and are linked by mutual commitments<sup>3</sup>, as expressed in the 'Karta wolontariusza' ('Volunteer's card').<sup>4</sup>

The project 'Assessing voluntary experiences: identifying, evaluating and validating skills and qualifications acquired through volunteering as an informal learning for a professional purpose' was supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2003-2006) and involved the Volunteer Centre on the Polish side of the European consortium. Associations may be the ideal place to get accustomed and trained to novel and innovative solutions and practices, to experiment or acquire new skills. For volunteers, a voluntary experience may lead or facilitate a professional career. Identifying and evaluating the skills and qualifications acquired through volunteering in the associations should be the way to recognize and validate this informal learning. It should be very useful for people who have no professional experience to face with a first activity (young people) and for people who have been kept away from the labour market to renew a professional activity (parents who have raised their children, sick people when they have recovered, former prisoners). The project's objectives were to:

- identify and evaluate the skills and qualifications required and acquired in volunteering;
- validate these skills and qualifications in a professional perspective<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wiadomosci.ngo.pl/labeo/app/cms/x/89865>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iriv.net/>; <http://www.wolontariat.org.pl>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iriv.net/>; <http://www.wolontariat.org.pl>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.fip.ngo.pl/programy/st\\_dok/4.pdf](http://www.fip.ngo.pl/programy/st_dok/4.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.iriv.net/>; [www.eEuropeassociations.net](http://www.eEuropeassociations.net)

The Non-Governmental Organisations' Trainers' Association (STOP) implements a jointly developed certification system aimed at increasing professionalism of the occupation of trainers for NGOs. Working for non-governmental organisations, STOP sometimes received signs of discontent; relations of unprofessional and even unethical activities in the training provision and thus decided to provide competence standards for NGO trainers supported by a certification system. STOP hopes to ensure quality of service provision by its members and by those means to increase the trust and motivation of NGOs in training<sup>1</sup>.

There is a description of the competences of a trainer of STOP with a list of minimum entrance competence requirements. The certification system is prepared for STOP members. STOP trainers are expected to be able to identify training needs, prepare training and evaluate its results, apply active learning methods, and have to implement training in accordance with the specific needs and situation of the group. The system has elaborated a 3-stage procedure of certification. The concept is based on sharing competences and evaluation by supervisors on the basis of actual training delivery. It distinguishes 2 degrees of certificates, where the higher amount of actually taught hours (practical experience) is demanded for the higher degree. The set of required documents along with the assessment by the supervisor goes to the Certification Commission of STOP; which takes the final decision. The certificate is valid for 5 years. During the first three months after obtaining the certificate the trainer has to provide a feedback on the experience and from clients.

<sup>1</sup> <http://free.ngo.pl/stop/>

## 28.5 Conclusions

A great deal of efforts have been made in the framework of the reform process in initial VET and - more recently – in policy development and implementation of CVT. The introduction of modular training, extramural qualification examinations and work in the field of harmonisation of vocational and occupational standards all create good preconditions for a well functioning system where formal education can gradually become integrated with non-formal out-of-school training. From the point of view of an individual a real possibility exists in obtaining a recognised qualification without the necessity to undergo formal education in this field. Informally attained competences and experience can thus be validated and recognised. The system, however, is still in the process of change and adaptation. Many aspects of the reform are yet to be implemented. It is therefore very difficult to give an objective evaluation of the real situation.

Similarly, the development of a National Qualifications Framework is still in its early stages although there are ongoing efforts to develop a system of standards that would facilitate comparison of qualifications, certificates and diplomas acquired in the formal as well as the non-formal system of education. The development of a coherent system of standards is one of the priorities of the Strategy for the Development of Continuing Education until 2010 as well as the Operational Programme – Human Capital 2007-2013, and in 2006, the Minister of Science and Higher Education established a Working Group on the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The development of a NQF is an important element in the development of education and training systems across Europe and should take place alongside and in alignment with validation initiatives.

The importance of the validation of informal and non-formal learning is widely recognised in Poland, it is present in the political agenda as well as in expert discussions. However, a wealth of examples of initiatives in the academic circles, at sector level as well as among non-governmental organisations and public associations is accompanied by limited information and lack of awareness at a company level. The engagement of companies in the provision and development of validation of informal and non-formal learning can be facilitated through the enhancement of transparency and reinforcement of the systemic character of activities in this field.

## 29.0 Portugal<sup>1</sup>

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*By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 29.1 Introduction

By 2007, Portugal had become a country with a high degree of acceptance for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

There are a number of policies which have been developed and applied by the Portuguese government on validation of competences acquired outside the formal education and training systems. The qualifications deficit among Portugal's adult population and compliance with community guidelines are key drivers behind the rationale for these policy initiatives. As stated in the National Employment Plan 2005/2008, in spite of an increase in the number of young people completing secondary and higher education and a fall in the school dropout rate, Portugal's position is still one of the least favourable in Europe.

Portugal thus has comprehensive national systems for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. Until 2007 there were two main systems – one which related to education and training (RVCC) and another which related to employment (SNCP). However, currently there is a Vocational Education and Training System Reform taking place. This reform is introducing considerable changes in the way qualifications are developed and validated, and the SNCP is being replaced by a new system.

There are also some other validation initiatives, such as the possibility for an initial assessment carried out for potential students of adult education (EFA) courses, and validation of work experience for teachers and trainers.

Partnership-working is central to the initiatives in place. Private sector stakeholders are involved in the public initiatives for validation of informal and non-formal learning. However, little evidence can be found of individual private and third sector actions relating to validation of informal and non-formal learning.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Portugal chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Mencia de Lemus

## 29.2 Public Sector

### 29.2.1 Introduction

We have collated information regarding public sector validation initiatives from the following sources: 2005 European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>1</sup>; Refernet<sup>2</sup>; the 2005 National Report on the Implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme<sup>3</sup>; the *Novas Oportunidades* website<sup>4</sup> and an update on the achievements of the *Novas Oportunidades* initiative from 2007. We also consulted with relevant stakeholders. Information on the take-up of RVCC is taken from the CIDECE 2007 update to its Study on the Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the Vocational Education and Training System Reform, today there is only one main system for validating and certifying competences acquired through non-formal or informal means in Portugal:

- *O Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências* (Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences), which comprises the educational scheme (the *Sistema Nacional de Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências*, SNRVCC - National System for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences) and a vocational scheme (RVCC-Professional).

This system was created and put into operation at government level by the Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Labour and Welfare (MTSS). The key body which oversees implementation is:

The National Agency for Qualification, I.P. (*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, I.P.*, ANQ, I.P.), under both the Ministry of Education (ME) and the Ministry of Labour and Welfare (MTSS). The Agency coordinates the implementation of the young and adult education and training policies and assures the development and management of the National System for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences.

<sup>1</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting, 2005, European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

<sup>2</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Portugal, published by Cedefop

<sup>3</sup> National Report on the Implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme, 2005 Progress Report for Portugal

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.esas.pt/novasoportunidades/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.esas.pt/novasoportunidades/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

<sup>5</sup> Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos (CIDECE), May 2007, The Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences: Update, published by the Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional (DGFV)

## 29.2.2 Policy Background

There are a number of policies which have been developed and introduced by the Portuguese government on validation of competences which have been acquired outside the formal vocational education and training systems. The qualifications deficit among Portugal's adult population and compliance with community guidelines are key drivers for these policy initiatives.

The RVCC, established in the 2001 - Ordinance nr 1082-A/2001 of September 5, made validation a part of the European Employment Strategy through successive National Employment Plans. It has become, and still is, an effective stimulus and support to the demand for certification and new training opportunities. It allows the Portuguese education and training systems to recognise learning acquired by adults through life and work experiences.

The need to address this demand had been reiterated in the Agreement on Employment, Labour Market, Education and Training, signed by the Government and Social Partners in February 2001. The Agreement reflected a consensus that promotion and invigoration of adult education and training should be encouraged. Thus, adults should have the opportunity to independently and continually access educational, technological, cultural, vocational and professional progression by valuing educational and vocational competences developed through life experiences.,

The Agreement set the following objectives in relation to recognition and certification of competences:

- to develop and consolidate the SNRVCC;
- to test and implement methodologies for the recognition and validation of a basic training level (acquired throughout life experiences) and for the certification of competences;
- to promote, within the training/certification system, the implementation of methodologies that underpin the transferability of competences;
- to make the certification systems for competences acquired in formal and informal contexts, both operational and intercommunicable.

The recent 'New Opportunities' Initiative (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*), established within the scope of the National Employment Plan and the Technological Plan in 2005, defines a comprehensive qualification strategy for the Portuguese population, taking as reference the generalisation of secondary education as a minimum education level. This initiative has already had a significant impact, as outlined below. New Opportunities has two main axes: one for young people and another for adults.

For young people, the initiative aims to implement measures to stop the flow of young people leaving the education and training systems without achieving secondary-level education and thus implying that 50% of those who attend the secondary level of education enrol in dual system courses.

For adults, the New Opportunity is given to all those (seeking their first job, employed or unemployed) without full secondary education. The initiative employs actions such as expanding Adult Education and Training Courses and expanding the National Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences System.

In July 2007 the national catalogue of professional qualifications was launched (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações) which includes 213 professional qualifications, covering 40 educational fields ([www.catalogo.anq.gov.pt](http://www.catalogo.anq.gov.pt))

### 29.2.3 The National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences

The National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (SNRVCC) comprises two areas: education and training. It is important to mention that joint work between these two systems has been established in an effort to promote the individual's social and professional development, not only in the education and training systems, but also on the labour market.

The SNRVCC was initially a joint initiative of the ME and MTSS. Between 2004 and the end of 2006 it was under the sole authority of the Ministry of Education, becoming again a joint initiative of both Ministries in 2007 through the National Agency for Qualification, I.P.

The System aims to provide all citizens with the opportunity to have the competences they have acquired throughout their life experiences recognised, validated and certified.

To this end and in accordance with the Joint Ministerial Order nr ° 24/2005, of January 10, the System's specific goals are:

- to recognise the competences acquired by adults in different life contexts;
- to validate and certify prior learning and competences by attributing the equivalent to an educational qualification, thus encouraging better professional performance, promoting career progression and facilitating subsequent education and training routes;
- to promote conditions ensuring that employed adults have access to the information, guidance and support they need to establish an education and training path;
- to enable the conclusion of incomplete training paths leading to competence certification, by means of complementary training..

The priority target group for the initiative is adults with low educational and vocational qualification levels – particularly adults over 18 years old, employed and unemployed, who have not completed nine years of education (generally corresponding to age 15) or, since the beginning of 2007, those who have not completed 12 years of educating. (generally corresponding to age 18).

The system promotes and facilitates new education and training pathways, and the (re)building of personal and professional life plans.

The underlying values and principles of the SNRVCC are:

- personal development;
- the creation of opportunities for intergenerational solidarity;
- the reinforcement of social participation;
- the extension of citizenship;
- the improvement of employability.

The SNRVCC is deemed to be innovative, insofar as its design and practices value the involvement of public and private sector, demanding joint reflection and action by different players - these include researchers, teachers, trainers, training managers and policy makers.

The process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of competences is applied for at New Opportunities Centres (previously known as RVCC Centres).

## New Opportunities Centres (former RVCC centres)

The network of Centres for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) was first established in Portugal in 2000. These Centres were responsible for the implementation of a national system for recognising, validating and certifying competences on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Education. They are financed by the State and the European Commission, as negotiated at the time of the Community Support Framework III. They are now known as New Opportunities Centres because they are not only responsible for providing the RVCC Process, but also for finding a suitable educational and training pathway for every adult who wants to improve his/her qualification level.

New Opportunities Centres are promoted by public or private sector bodies with local, regional or national level standing. The National Agency for Qualification, I.P., is responsible for the creation of these Centres. The Regulation nr 86/2007, of January 12, allocated these powers to this organism which took over the responsibility that belonged previously to the ANEFA (National Adult Education and Training Agency) and later to the DGFV (General Directorate of Vocational Training).

There are now over 260 New Opportunities Centres located according to demographic density and geographical distribution related criteria, in order to mitigate regional asymmetries

Adults without the secondary-level of education apply to a New Opportunities Centre. Then, the centre, through several means (e.g. personal interview, group sessions and Curriculum Vitae analyses), defines their profile and jointly (with the adult) establishes the most suitable qualifying path for them: the RVCC Process or another training itinerary. Following this stage, the candidate, using their profile to develop the process, takes part in sessions in which their key competences are identified according to the Competences Reference Framework. Validation must comply with the Competences Reference Framework, organised according to levels: Basic (1, 2 and 3) and Secondary.

Competences recognition is based on a range of activities, which are supported by competences assessment (competences are identified and evaluated) and by a variety of means (such as personal and group interviews, practical activities, games).

Candidates then prepare a Personal Dossier (Basic level), a Learning Reflexive Portfolio (Secondary level) and Professional Portfolio (RVCC Professional). The Dossier and Portfolio are made up of documents which demonstrate the competences which adults have acquired through life experiences, covering the key competence areas given in the Competence Reference Frameworks. Once the evaluation is carried out, the candidate requests the validation of the key competences by a jury. The jury is constituted by an external expert (Avaliador Externo) and a technical and pedagogical team.

If the adult is found not to have the necessary competences, he/she may be offered a proposal for complementary training (up to 50 hours) that is deemed to be essential in order to fill the identified competence gaps, before being able to proceed to obtain certification of education years 4, 6, 9 or 12. Alternatively, they may be guided towards other solutions if their skill gaps justify longer training. In these cases, adults are steered towards short-term training actions or courses for adults, particularly Adult Education and Training Courses (*Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos*, EFA – (see below)).

If the candidate is found to have the necessary competences, he/she is granted a certificate, which is recognised for all legal intents and purposes, by the education and vocational training systems, and on the labour market. The conclusion of the RVCC process can result in career progression, in educational and/or vocational training progression, and better employment situation.

The national RVCC system allows people who need to develop their vocational competences further to devise personal training plans. It helps to steer them to take up the right training path to get the competences they lack. These paths may include continuing training units carried out by accredited

providers, depending on the competences required, and/or more tailored training paths, such as work-based training or self-directed learning.

Centres are set up on the initiative of public and private sector bodies that have strong links and intervention dynamics in the community, region and nationally. Consolidation of these partnerships and network relationships is vital to the life of the Centres because they facilitate the delivery of their activities and services. Furthermore, inter-centre relationships are important as they help to shape a specialised response network for workforce development.

By 2007, over 57,000 adults were engaged in a validation procedure at a New Opportunities Centre.

The contribution and originality of the RVCC system is focusing the process on the adult and on his/her life experience, using and improving different methodologies (such as competence assessment, life histories, and others), valuing “self (re)cognition” and drawing it out to be the carrier and anchor of projects for and with a future.

The RVCC system’s originality was recognised by OECD specialists visiting Portugal in 2001 for the Thematic Review on Adult Learning, and it was referred to in the Synopsis of Main Conclusions of their Country Report. Under “strengths and exemplarity” they included *“originality of RVCC Centres’ methodology: account taken of vocational skills in the assessment of scholastic knowledge”* and *“exemplarity of the national system of skill recognition and certification centres: disclosure of skills, incentive to learning, greater transparency of the system”*

The same system has been adapted for professional purposes (named **RVCC Professional**), which is overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Education through the National Agency for Qualification, I.P. RVCC Professional is a process which enables recognition, validation and certification of the competencies that adults acquire through work experience and in their life, by achieving a certificate of professional proficiency / qualification.

RVCC-PRO was launched as a pilot initiative in March 2005 and was made available for twelve occupations in twelve Directly- and Jointly-managed Vocational Training Centres (*Centros de Formação Profissional de Gestão Directa e Participada*) in the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP)<sup>1</sup> network. Following the pilot experience in 2006, it was intended to gradually extend RVCC-PRO to other Centres as well as to all the occupations for which the IEFP was able to offer training (this intention was included in the Government Major Planning Options for 2005/2009 - *Grandes Opções do Plano para 2005/2009*).

<sup>1</sup> The National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications

In 2007 RVCC-Professional is being extended to 50 more occupations in those New Opportunities Centres which are designed for sectoral activity areas.

RVCC-Professional is intended to be used in tandem with the educational RVCC Process, i.e., when an individual seeks both educational and vocational certification. It targets workers, employed or unemployed, over 18 years old, who have acquired knowledge and competences through professional experience or other situations and want these to be recognised by a formal certification.

One of the innovative aspects of the RVCC-Professional is the variety of methodologies that can be brought into play in the recognition/evidence-gathering process to identify an adult's competences. One of these methodologies is, for example, direct observation in the workplace.

The RVCC-Professional process develops over a series of sessions during which technicians, the tutor and an expert (from the occupational area concerned) identify and recognise the candidates acquired skills/competences, gathering evidence to support and demonstrate them.

Then, a commission validates the candidates' competences and identifies any gaps. If the candidate lacks some essential skills/competences, additional training is recommended before final certification can be awarded. In this case, the RVCC-Professional team devises a Personal Qualification Plan (*Plano Individual de Qualificação*) for the candidate,, which can include continuing training units delivered by accredited providers, depending on the competences needed, and/or more tailored responses, such as work-based training or self-directed learning.

At the end of the RVCC-Professional process, candidates are awarded total or partial certification of their respective competences, in the form of:

- a Vocational Training Certificate (*Certificado de Formação Profissional*), at either Level 2 or 3, which attests that the candidates holds all the competences that correspond to a given occupation;
- a Record of validated competences and training needs: issued when a candidate has only some of the competences stipulated in the training framework. This document attests the candidate's competences, identifies those lacking, and indicates the Individual Training Plan to be followed before certification is awarded.

Candidates applying for the Vocational Training Certificate are assessed against the Training Frameworks for a specific occupation. To obtain the Certificate they must prove they have all the competences associated with the respective vocational training course.

The creation of the RVCC-Professional mechanism has contributed to the reform of the vocational educational and training system (see below), by demanding tailored training responses that are fine-tuned to the adults' needs.

#### 29.2.4 The National Vocational Certification System (SNCP)

Currently, the SNCP is being reformed – it is going to be replaced by a new system integrated in the National Qualification System

In March 2006, the government and the social partners established an agreement which included the creation of a National Qualifications System (NQS). The National Qualification System will comprehend all qualifications that award a double certification (education and vocational training). This agreement and the regulation for the NQS, which is being produced, state clearly that qualifications within the NQS are based on competences and structured in terms of Learning Outcomes (using the descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework).

Under this reform process the National Qualifications Catalogue (NQC) was created (and is now being developed). This is a tool for managing national qualifications in a more flexible and efficient way. It contains competence frameworks and training standards for each vocational qualification, awarded within the sphere of the National Qualifications System. The aim is to develop single standards for NQS: single competence frameworks for training processes and for recognition of prior learning processes; and single training standards for all training modalities. Some of the aims of the NQC are to raise quality levels and to bring more rationality for the education and training system; to contribute to facilitate the access to training for all (in a LLL context) and the mobility between qualifications and training paths, are some of the aims of the NQC.

#### 29.2.5 Other validation methods

- **Adult Education and Training (EFA) Courses**

Adult Education and Training Courses (*Cursos EFA*) are integrated education and training courses for adults aged 18 and over, who have low levels of educational and vocational qualifications. They offer either education certification or dual (education and vocational training) certification, which corresponds to four, six, nine or twelve years of education and/or to a vocational qualification of either Level 1, 2 or 3.

The way in which EFA Courses are organised means that actual training may begin after a Competence Recognition and Validation (*Reconhecimento e Validação de Competências*, RVC) process (developed in a New Opportunities Centre) and, as a result, even though trainees may all have the same educational certification, they may each enter the same course at a different point, depending on the competences already acquired.

The RVCC process is based on a Competences Assessment methodology. Validation is carried out by a jury (see New Opportunities Centres – Table 2.1 and RVCC-Professional 2.3.2.). The results are recorded in a Personal Competences Booklet (*Carteira Pessoal de Competências*) in which not only the competences validated in the scope of EFA Courses are recorded, but also those acquired subsequently in other contexts.

- **Training for Teachers and Trainers**

Given the considerable number of **Basic and Secondary Education teachers** who have suitable scientific knowledge for teaching and wide experience of working in the education system but do not have qualified teacher status, the Ministry of Education has provided for recognition of their expertise, through Order nr. 6365/2005, of March 24.. Within the system, teachers must:

- a) hold a proper qualification in the terms of the applicable legislation;
- b) have at least five years of complete effective teaching service, of which three have been completed in the four previous years to the year of 2005/2006;
- c) have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education in the school year of 2005/2006.

Teachers who meet these requirements must complete a training module in education sciences, corresponding to the first year of in-service training (regulated by the Decree-law nr. 278/88, of August 19).

If teachers meet the requirements mentioned above at point a) and c), they are excused of further in-service training if they are in one of the following situations:

- a) they have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education, completed in three of the four previous years of 2005/2006, are 45 years old and have 10 years of effective teaching service.
- b) they have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education, completed in three of the four previous years of 2005/2006, and have 15 years of effective teaching service.

The work of **trainers** is regulated by Decree Laws nr. 401/91 and 405/91, both of October 16, according to which it is the task of the State to contribute to the optimisation of the country's training capability, on the basis of training needs, and to promote the training of trainers. Regulatory Decree nr. 66/94, of November 18, partially amended by Regulatory Decree nr. 26/97, of June 18, specifies the requirements for working as a trainer in the area of labour market based training.

Work as a trainer calls for psychosocial, scientific, technical, technological and practical training and a qualification level in the subject area being taught that is the same or higher

than the training profile of the respective trainees. It also requires pedagogical training and the respective Pedagogical Aptitude Certificate for Trainers (Certificado de Aptidão Pedagógica de Formador).

The Certificate for Trainers is awarded after completion of at least 90 hours of pedagogical training for trainers. The Certificate is valid for 5 years, and to renew it a trainer must prove his/her scientific, technical and pedagogical updating as well as his/her training experience.

Trainer training is not generally based on formally set career paths or regular initial training courses, but rather initial and continuing training is available to improve trainers' performance at different stages of the process.

An exceptional measure provided for by Regulatory Decree nr 26/97, of June 18, enables professionals who do not satisfy all the requirements to work as a trainer but who are holders of special academic or vocational qualifications, or who have undergone training that is unavailable on the market, to intervene in training. However, such exceptions are made only when the pedagogic or technical nature of a training action would justify it, and when authorisation based on a well-founded decision is granted by the certifying body.

- **Awarding certificates based on professional experience**

Another method of validating non-formal and informal learning is provided for under Regulatory Decree nr. 68/94, of November 18, which specifies the criteria for the award of a training or aptitude certificate on the basis of professional experience. The process for awarding aptitude certificates on the basis of experience entails analysis of the applicant's curriculum, a technical interview and the submission of evidence.

- **Research Projects on competences recognition, validation and certification**

Research projects on competences recognition, validation and certification are undertaken with the help of funding from European Community initiatives. The Equal Community Initiative project entitled "Competences Development, Recognition, Validation and Certification" (*Desenvolvimento, Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências* - PRODERCOM) serves as an example:

#### **PRODERCOM – a project funded by the Equal Community Initiative**

The objectives of the PRODERCOM project are:

- To increase the response opportunities to requests from the poorly skilled for recognition, validation and certification (RVCC) of non-formally and informally acquired competences, and so improve their formal qualifications.
- To consolidate institutions for delivering RVCC processes by enabling the recruitment of practitioners with the right competences for the functions involved in the processes.

- To develop a methodology and respective tools for RVCC that will lead to the establishment of tailored training routes.
- To assess the impact on enterprises and other organisations of engagement in and integration of RVCC processes.

There are six national organisations involved in PRODERCOM. These are: Associação Industrial do Minho - AIMINHO (Minho Industrial Association); Associação Nacional de Oficinas de Projectos, Desenvolvimento e Educação - ANOP (National Association for Projects, Development and Education); Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional - DGFV (General Directorate of Vocational Training); Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional - IEFP (Institute of Employment and Vocational Training); Instituto para a Qualidade na Formação (head of project) - IQF (Institute for Quality in Training).

The transnational partnership includes partners from Italy, the UK and the Netherlands.

Further information on the project can be found in the following website: [www.iqf.gov.pt/prodercom/](http://www.iqf.gov.pt/prodercom/)

Source: Refernet (2005-2006), *Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Portugal*, published by Cedefop

- **Higher Education (HE)**

There are currently no national mechanisms within HE for the recognition of prior learning.<sup>1</sup>

## 29.2.6 Take-up

### 29.2.6.1 *Take-up and perceived benefits of the RVCC Process*

The update to the 2004 study "Impact of recognition and certification of skills acquired through life" produced in 2007 gave a profile of the users of the SNRVCC.<sup>2</sup> The figures used in the study refer to 2270 adults who responded to the 8570 surveys which were sent out. These adults all received certification via RVCC in 2003.

Of the adult certificate holders who answered CIDECE's questionnaire, there was a slight majority of women (55.1%). A higher percentage was married (72.2% married) and adults with children (80.1% compared to 19.9% with no children).

With regard to the sample's distribution by age, most people were aged between 25 and 44 years old (65.7%), while those who had least used the System were those aged over 55 years (5.4%), followed by 18 to 24 years old (7%).

When they enrolled for the RVCC process, most of the adults surveyed had completed the second cycle of Basic Education, corresponding to six years of schooling (84.2%). Many of these, however, had also already attended the third cycle, corresponding to nine years of schooling (44.9% of the survey respondents).

<sup>1</sup> Bologna Process: Towards the European Higher Education Area, National Report for Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos (CIDECE), May 2007, The Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences: Update, published by the Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional (DGFV)

Only 19.9% of the certificate holder survey respondents were unemployed at the time of their enrolment. 7.1% owned their own business or were self-employed, while 70.2% were employees and 2.8% were economically inactive.

The table below outlines the reasons given by the certificate holders for their participation in the RVCC process:

Reason for participation in RVCC	Absolute Value	Percentage
Personal development	1379	66.1%
Increased employability	550	26.4%
Further studies	693	33.2%
Attractiveness of the system	96	4.6%
Career progression	749	35.9%
Other unspecified reasons	749	4.1%
Total	2087	100%

Source: CIDEA "Impact of recognition and certification of skills acquired through life: Update" (2007).

Respondents also gave other, affective reasons (socialising, sharing experiences and helping children with their homework) as well as self-esteem issues. The RVCC's contribution to increasing self-esteem and self-worth was considered 'important' or 'very important' by 96.6% of respondents. RVCC is thus not just a tool for certification – it is also an opportunity for personal growth and (re) construction of personal and vocational life plans.

#### 29.2.6.2 Take-up of the SNCP Process

In recent years, in the scope of the SNCP, around 30 Specialised Technical Commissions (*Comissões Técnicas Especializadas, CTE*) have been or are in operation. They have approved around 170 occupational profiles and hundreds of thousands of workers have obtained certification, mostly in relation to pedagogical training for trainers (*formação pedagógica de formadores*), taxi drivers and personal services (see 2.4. *The National Vocational Certification System*).

### 29.2.6.3 Take-up of the RVC Process for EFA courses

The table below gives an overview of trainees' views on the RVC (Competences Recognition and Validation) process for EFA courses:

Process enabled trainees to...	Not at all / A little	A lot / Completely
Feel more motivated to learn	8.4%	91.6%
Discover they have skills that were useful for life	15.0%	85.0%
Learn to get to know others better	16.1%	83.9%
Value and recognise their skills	17.7%	82.3%
Realise they can choose their training route	19.4%	80.6%
Become more confident	23.9%	76.1%
To get to know themselves better	28.4%	71.6%

Source: Questionnaire survey among EFA Course trainees (2002), in the scope of the *Relatório Nacional de Avaliação dos Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos 2002-2003*.

## 29.2.7 Problems and Barriers encountered

### 29.2.7.1 *New Opportunities Centres (former RVCC centres)*

The 2004 study "Impact of Recognition and Certification of Skills Acquired through Life"<sup>1</sup> found that the main barriers facing the RVCC Centres were shortage of human resources (41.2% of respondents), cash-flow difficulties (38.2% of respondents) and the nature of the process itself (29.4% of respondents). Other barriers included:

- Administrative difficulties (26.5% of respondents)
- Shortage of or inadequate facilities (17.6%)
- Poor target group engagement (14.7%)
- Difficulty in liaising with PRODEP Educational Development Programme for Portugal (*Programa de Desenvolvimento Educativo para Portugal*) (14.7% of respondents)
- Difficulty in liaising with ANEFA/DGFV (11.8%)

When the answer given was "other reasons" (14.7% of respondents), the commonest barrier referred to was that the physical goals were too ambitious.

With regard to cash-flow problems, the study suggests that these could be related to the timescales for financial reimbursements processed by the Educational Development Programme for Portugal, PRODEP III, given that 64.7% of the respondent Centres considered the length of time for repayment to be "very unsuitable". Furthermore, nearly half believed that the speed at which transfers were processed was detrimental to their Centre's day-to-day running.

This study is the only evaluation of the RVCC system published so far. It does not address the question of barriers for individuals to benefiting from opportunities offered by the system. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the RVCC centres have now become New Opportunities Centres – the changeover may have helped to alleviate certain problems/barriers or may even have created new ones.

<sup>1</sup> Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos, CIDECE (Interdisciplinary Centre for Economic Studies), 2004, O Impacto do reconhecimento e certificação de competências adquiridas ao longo da vida, commissioned by the Direcção Geral de Formação Vocacional - DGFV (General Directorate of Vocational Training)

### 29.2.7.2 SNCP System

(See also 2.4, The National Vocational Certification System).

The working of the SNCP system comes in for some criticism in the Evaluation Study of Lifelong Learning Policies<sup>1</sup>. The list below outlines criticisms made in the report:

- heavy and bureaucratic operation, characterised by slowness and lack of consistent direction that can cover the range of training frameworks necessary;
- highly susceptible to corporate pressures, which results in the SNCP functioning as an element that aids labour market segmentation;
- tendency to over-regulate, putting pressure on the System by producing excessive numbers of professions to which access is restricted by law;
- lack of coordination within the Public Administration itself, which is evident from the difficulties in getting the CTEs or awarding bodies off the ground;
- rigidity and lack of clear standard rules for articulation between education and vocational training;
- the fact that test panels are tripartite makes assessment by examination of training and experience cumbersome and expensive;
- the illusion that the labour market would base all its recruitment on the basis of certificates issued by the SNCP and that salaries would be automatically indexed to these documents.

<sup>1</sup> Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos, 2005, Estudo de Avaliação das Políticas de Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida

## 29.3 Private Sector

### 29.3.1 Novas Oportunidades

According to Prodep III (2000-2006), 55% of the entities which promote Novas Oportunidades Centres are from the private sector. Private and local entities establish a local network of relationships. In November of 2005 there were 32 centres in private company associations and two in private companies. For example, Portugal Telecom SGPS<sup>1</sup> is a private company which promotes a Centre Novas Oportunidades.<sup>2</sup>

### 29.3.2 Involvement of Social Partners

The Social Partners participate in the National System for Professional Certification. Representatives from Social Partners and from IEFP continued their work on approving occupational profiles and manuals for workers' and trainers' certification in the respective areas.

Social Partners value the Network of Centres for Recognition and Validation of Lifelong Competences and Qualifications and make efforts to inform companies and workers about these, since the system gives them the opportunity to make progress concerning both career and new training directions.<sup>3</sup>

### 29.3.3 Activities at individual company level

Some Portuguese companies, which carry out vocational training actions, perform evolution tests at the end of the training actions, in order to recognise and validate competences and qualifications acquired by their workers. In the case of other companies, external training actions are provided by vocational training entities duly accredited by IQF (Institute for Quality in Training).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.telecom.pt/InternetResource/Ptsite/pt](http://www.telecom.pt/InternetResource/Ptsite/pt)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>3</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, January 2006, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

<sup>4</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, January 2006, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

## 29.4 Third Sector

Non-profit organisations are among the entities which promote *Centres Novas Oportunidades* (New opportunities centres). In addition, there are many entities within the third sector which have a partnership with *Centres Novas Oportunidades*, in order to provide their employees with the opportunity to participate in processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences. This appears to be a very common trend. In fact, there is a great diversity in the nature of organisations which promote *Centres Novas Oportunidades* - they can be either schools, centres of professional training, corporations, NGOs, etc.

The literature consulted gives no indication of the role of third sector organisations in the development or delivery of their own validation of non-formal and informal learning initiatives. Moreover, we have not been able to identify any projects within the European funding programmes that finance actions of this type, which have involved third sector partners.

## 29.5 Conclusions

There has been significant activity in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Portugal, in response to the qualifications deficit of the adult population and the impetus of European Community guidelines. National systems have been put in place for the validation of informal and non-formal learning acquired through life experiences, which have engaged a great number of individuals, particularly since the introduction of the *Novas Oportunidades initiative* in 2005.

These public initiatives have been in place for a number of years and have now been the subject of several studies and reports to assess their impact. These studies have identified not only the benefits of the systems but also the problems and barriers encountered. Future actions should thus endeavour to continue to build on the systems' strengths and to overcome these problems and barriers.

While partnership-working and collaboration are valued in the development and implementation of the systems in place, the challenge for the future is thus to engage and involve more partners from the private and third sectors, to ensure that validation initiatives are delivered and developed in line with learning and good practice from both a practical and a policy perspective.

## 30.0 Romania<sup>1</sup>

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*By Rasa Juciute (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 30.1 Introduction

This national report aims to provide an overview of developments related to validation of informal and non-formal learning in Romania, with a particular focus on developments that are taking place in the context of the newly-adopted national policy for lifelong learning and the concrete steps that have been taken for its implementation.

The European Commission policies and papers that provide a strategic framework for building up the European lifelong learning community have been analysed and discussed in Romania in order to enhance a culture of lifelong learning and also to follow the EC guidelines. The country has, in fact, seen significant developments in the legislative and policy spheres for recognition of informal and non-formal learning – and indeed, is one of the few new Member States with an established system to recognise prior learning in the adult education sector.

Despite these wide-reaching developments, Romania is yet to develop a national system for the assessment of prior learning, which can be applied/adapted to all educational environments. This report contains references to political and practical initiatives regarding the on-going development of validation systems and processes in the public sphere as well as in the private and voluntary ones. The existing practices reveal that there is a growing consensus for the need to develop a global approach to validation of both informal and non-formal learning.

The final section of the report synthesises the key issues and the main strategies and suggests the actions required to build a comprehensive framework for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Romania.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Romania chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Prof. Anca Dumitrescu (University of Bucharest)

## 30.2 Public Sector

The public sphere has seen a great number of developments in relation to the validation of informal and non-formal learning since the Inventory of 2005 was written. We start off by describing the historical context, key policy developments and changes in the relevant legislation.

The second section provides examples of existing initiatives (most importantly, the certificates for the recognition of prior learning awarded by the National Adult Training Board) and projects implemented to develop the system to recognise prior learning outside the adult education system (under the EU Phare programme). It also discusses the role of validation in the higher education sphere and in compulsory schooling.

The final section discusses the main barriers for the development of coherent lifelong learning policies, including development of one coherent national system for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

### 30.2.1 Background: legislation and the development of national policies

Romania is a country with a solid tradition of lifelong education, especially in adult education. This developed in different socio-economic, political and cultural environments over the past 100-150 years. During the fifty-year communist period adult education lost its status, although it became a mass phenomenon during the very same period. During this period, a strong institutional network was built up but theoretical approaches and scientific research were neglected, especially in the eighties.

In the nineties, in spite of considerable efforts<sup>1</sup>, the educational policies focused on sectoral approaches (formal education, VET system and higher education) rather than on a holistic approach to lifelong learning. However, the negotiations on EU membership and then the full membership from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 accelerated the development of lifelong learning. In fact, due to the fact that Romania has constantly striven to follow European trends in education, the country was the first in Central and Eastern Europe to start developing competency-based occupational standards. Since the late nineties, VET in Romania has been using vocational training standards to develop broadly formulated competence-based learning outcomes that provide young people with access to a range of occupations.

Romania is yet to finish the development of a national integrated strategy for lifelong learning. Nevertheless, the decision-makers' and experts' interest in the development of a

<sup>1</sup> We refer especially to the projects co-financed by the World Bank for the reform of pre-university education, of university scientific research and human resources development, as well as Phare-VET Program.

coherent national lifelong learning strategy has increased considerably<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the principles for lifelong learning have been included as priorities in policy documents related to education, continuous training and employment. For example, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) and the Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources (SOPDHR) are the main Romanian policy documents for attaining the benchmarks set in the Lisbon Agenda for education, training and employment.

Some lifelong learning objectives are also explicitly found in sectoral strategic documents, such as<sup>2</sup>:

- The National Employment Strategy 2004-2010 (The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family (hereafter MLSSF), 2004)
- The Short- and Medium-Term Strategy of Continuous Vocational Training 2005-2010 (MLSSF, the Ministry of Education and Research (hereafter MER), National Adult Training Board, (NATB), 2005)
- The Tripartite Agreement on Development of a National Qualification Framework – the strategic document regarding the NATB and the setting up of Sectoral Committees - signed in 2005 by the Romanian Government representatives, employers and trade union confederations representatives at national level
- The Ministry of Education and Research Strategic Guidelines for 2006-2008 (MER, 2005).

At the level of public authorities, a series of initiatives have been introduced mainly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity (MLSS), Ministry of Culture and Cults (MCC) and the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) to establish specialised institutes or departments dealing with lifelong learning issues, including the validation of informal and non-formal learning. For example, the Culture Vocational Training Centre is a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Cults, where specific activities for continuous vocational training, lifelong learning and management in the culture field are developed. From 2007, the Centre has been authorised as an assessment centre for informal and non-formal learning for three qualifications.

Under the Law 132/1999, the National Adult Training Board (NATB) was established. Its role has developed over time from being consultative in 1999 (the development of CVT policies and strategies), to decisional in 2003 (Law 253/2003 - the coordination of the CVT providers' authorisation process; the authorisation of the Assessment Centres of informal

<sup>1</sup> National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania. Bucharest, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania. Bucharest, 2007.

and non-formal learning; the approval of the occupational standards). Since 2004, the NATB has been the National Authority for Qualifications (Law 559/2004).

The establishment of the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ) is an ongoing process started in December 2006 by the Phare project 2004/016-772.04.02.02.02, the first stage of the multi-annual technical assistance project financed under Phare 2004-2006 – Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications, within the sub programme Economic and Social Cohesion, Priority B – Human Resources Development.

The Adult Education Act no. 375/2002 (which completed and changed the Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 - The Adult Training Law), which entered into force in 2004 and the National Strategy concerning continuing professional training, adopted by the Government Decree 875/2005, are probably the most important elements of legislation to support lifelong learning measures passed so far. The Law 129/2000 (completed and changed by the Law L375/2002 and Governmental Ordinance 76/2004) stipulates that assessment centres are accredited by the NATB to conduct assessments and to deliver the certificates issued by NATB for the recognition of a professional competency, based on the assessment of the individual against an occupational standard.

These occupational standards are already the reference points for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the local level, there are accreditation committees for the training providers, without any involvement in the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Another key development from the past few years is the Order No. 3329/81/2005, which was issued by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity in 2005. The Order establishes the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the occupational standards, carried out in centres of validation. If they are successful at demonstrating the skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, they receive an official certificate. The certificates are issued by the National Adult Training Board (hereafter NATB) – and the impact of this initiative is discussed in the following section.

Although these recent pieces of legislation are a move forward in the development of policies that recognize learning gained outside the formal education system in Romania, they still do not create one single framework for validation of informal and non-formal learning. In addition, though these laws are modern and designed with a view to lifelong learning, many of the provisions regarding the vocational training of adults are still non-functional, especially those regarding the recognition of learning achieved in non-formal and informal contexts<sup>1</sup>. Besides, the National Development Plan for 2007-2013 and the National Employment Action Plan define lifelong learning as a fundamental principle, but the implementation strategies and the running programmes often fail to reflect the developments which have occurred in the initial vocational education and training system.

In February 2005, the Romanian Government concluded a tripartite agreement with the national employer and employee organisations in order to promote a national and coherent framework of qualifications for the initial and continuous training. The agreement officially defines the institutional responsibilities specific to the development of such a framework, with the sectoral committees playing a very important role in the process.

The external assistance programmes are providing important support to the NQF policy development. As indicated above, the multi annual Phare 2004-2006 project 'Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications', started in December 2006, has as a general objective the creation of a national-level qualifications authority for vocational education and training, in order to support the enhancement of the coherence between the initial vocational education and training and the continuous vocational education and training in a LLL perspective, benefiting from the active participation of the social partners through sectoral partnerships.

Another example is the Investment in Social Partnership (2005 – 2008) Project, initiated by the British Council and NCDVTE in cooperation with NATB, aiming to transfer British experience in order to support the establishment and development of sectoral committees<sup>2</sup>.

## 30.2.2 Examples of existing systems and projects

### 30.2.2.1 *Certificates awarded by the National Adult Training Board (NATB)*

In the previous section we briefly touched upon the introduction of the Order No. 3329/81/2005, which establishes the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young

<sup>1</sup> Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Romania. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

<sup>2</sup> National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania

or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the occupational standards, carried out in centres of validation and if they are successful at demonstrating skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, they receive an official certificate.

The certificates are an integral element of the Romanian National Adult Training and Learning system, which encompasses three key elements<sup>1</sup>:

- Process of assessment of competences against endorsed national standards (National Standards)
- Offers recognition for informally acquired skills, knowledge and competences (Assessment)
- Provides recognition with national certification process (Certification).

The certification is a collaborative process between the National Adult Training Board and recognised Assessment Centres. Certificates are issued by the NATB and delivered by Assessment Centres to customers of the on their successful completion of the assessment process. In addition, a number of major companies (e.g. McDonalds Romania) have been significantly engaged in both the development and piloting of the system<sup>2</sup>.

The Assessment Centres are accredited by NATB.

For accreditation, all Centres must meet the following eight quality requirements

1. Records Management
2. Appeals Process
3. Materials Development
4. Access Arrangements
5. Assessment Processes
6. Information Distribution
7. Facilities and Personnel
8. Up-to-date knowledge & expertise in the occupations being assessed

The generic model for setting up an Assessment Centre is as follows:

1. Organisation discusses with NATB to become assessment centre
2. Plan developed for setting up an assessment centre
3. Facilities prepared

<sup>1</sup> Emerging initiatives in the EU Partner Countries – Romanian National Adult Training Board. Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, OECD, Paris, January 30-31, 2006. Conference proceedings.

<sup>2</sup> Duvekot et al (2005) The unfinished story of VPL; valuation & validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures.

4. Assessors certified
5. Assessment instruments developed and tested
6. Assessment recording system installed
7. Assessment centre self assesses against NATB quality standards
8. External verification by the external verifier certified by NATB
9. NATB accreditation

The assessment process has several different components. The assessment starts off with an enquiry from a candidate, review of available information between the candidate and assessor and is followed by the candidate's preparation for the enrolment. The process then continues with an agreement on the assessment plan. This agreement is made between the applicant and the assessor, and includes information on the actual assessment procedure.

The results of the assessment are recorded, and they include information on whether the individual meets all the occupation requirements or whether she/he needs to undertake training or develop specific competence areas.

The actual assessment procedure is followed by a process of internal verification, and an opportunity for the applicant to appeal against the decision. Certificates issued by NATB are delivered by the assessment centre to the successful candidates.

#### The assessment process in brief

- Identification of aim and scope of assessment;
- Identification of competences;
- Setting up assessment methods and assessment instruments;
- Planning and organising the assessment process;
- Selection of the assessment instruments;
- Analysing evidence produced by the candidate and making decision upon competence;
- Final feedback for the candidate;
- Recording and reporting the results
- Deliver the certificate to the successful candidates

*Source: Emerging initiatives in the EU Partner Countries – Romanian National Adult Training Board. Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, OECD, Paris, January 30-31, 2006. Conference proceedings.*

The Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație (TRCSO Pro Vocație), which was set up in 2002, is an Assessment Centre for a number of social occupations. More detail of the work of this Centre is given in the box below:

#### Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație

The Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație was actively involved in elaborating the occupational standards in the social field. It has been authorised as an assessment centre for the following occupations: trainer and home care, social worker, personal assistant for persons with severe disabilities, foster care, baby sitter, elderly home care, illness home care, socio-educative animator, trainer

and nurse. The centre also offers training courses, modularised on competences, to those who are unable to give evidence that they have all the specific competences required for a certain qualification/occupation.

Pro Vocație elaborated its own internal procedures for the development of the assessment processes (accessible to the candidates), the contestation process, and for the registration of the assessment results.

To be certified through the Pro Vocație, each candidate, assisted by an assessor, analyses his/her own professional performance in relation to the occupational standard's content. The professional competences assessor explains and gives detail of the content and the stipulations of the occupational standards, and, according to the results of the self-assessment, the assessor recommends to the candidate to join the assessment process for the whole standard, for a part of the standard or not to join the assessment process. The ultimate decision to join the assessment process lies with the candidate.

Assessors use a transparent assessment process, which ensures the quality of the competence assessment. The assessor presents to the candidate the assessment methods that he/she will utilise and establishes the developing programme of the assessment process, together with the candidate. The developing programme of assessment is approved by the management team of the Assessment Centre Pro Vocație.

The Assessment Centre Pro Vocație has produced sets of documents for each occupation. These include: direct observation, simulation, written test, oral test, project, portfolio, report, to which are added the assessment file, the self-assessment, and the feed-back of the whole assessment process. For the assessment of each candidate, at least three methods are used, one of which must be direct observation. These are completed at the beginning of the assessment by the self-assessment and at the end, by the feedback of the whole assessment process.

The decision concerning the candidate's competence is established for each competence unit that the candidate was assessed for. Individuals who are pronounced 'competent' after the assessment process, obtain a certificate of professional competence for the relevant competence units. Individuals who are pronounced competent for all the competence units specific to an occupation / qualification, obtain a certificate of professional competences that represents the entire professional competences specific to the occupation/ qualification in accordance to the occupational standards. In accordance with the existing legislation, these certificates have national recognition and the same value as the graduation/ qualification certificates, released in the formal system of professional training.

If, after assessment, the candidate is not satisfied by the decision "not yet competent", reported to some competences units, he / she has the right to contest the decision. The Centre nominates another professional competences assessor, who organizes a new assessment process for the competences units that do the object of the contestation.

By March 2007, Pro Vocație had issued a total number of 1590 competence assessments.

With regards to take-up and impact, between 2003 and June 2007 the NATB issued 6,050 certificates in 38 assessment centres<sup>1</sup>. Certificates were available for 84 different occupations/qualifications, of which the most popular were construction, social assistance, agriculture, commerce.

<sup>1</sup> NATB website

The number of qualifications awarded increased rapidly in recent years. For example, in 2004 only 9 assessment centres were authorised to carry out assessment in 25 different occupations.

The certification process however needs to be further developed in order to better integrate it with the emerging National Qualification Framework.

#### 30.2.2.2 *Validation of informal and non-formal education in the higher education sphere*

Validation of informal and non-formal learning has to date only been available in non-academic sectors<sup>1</sup>. However, some initial efforts have been made to bridge VET and higher education, which in turn *could* set the foundations for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Higher education institutes are also experimenting with European projects dealing with recognition of prior learning.

Furthermore, in addition to the National Adult Training Board, which acts as the National Qualification Authority, Romania has established a specialised body with a focus on higher education. The National Qualifications Authority for Higher Education (ACPART) is the national authority for the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, according to the Government's Decision no. 1.357/ November 3rd 2005. ACPART operates within the Bologna framework and is committed to the promotion of outcome-based qualifications in higher education<sup>2</sup>. With the support of the Phare RO 2004/016-772.05.01 Project named 'Development of Qualifications Framework in Higher Education', ACPART has developed during the first six months of 2007 a Methodology for the development of a qualifications framework for the higher education in Romania. This methodology is original by the fact that it put together the principles of the Bologna process regarding the common construction of the European Higher Education Area with the most recent documents and recommendations of the European Commission for the life long learning qualifications framework.

In fact, starting in 2007, new qualification profiles in HE will be developed by eight university consortia, which will pilot the new qualifications developed in terms of learning outcomes. The qualifications will be developed for those economic sectors recommended by the labour market survey results.

Moreover, ACPART is the promoter of a two-year project named "*Developing Key Methodological Units for the Implementation of EQF by Means of NQFs – EQF by NQFs*", co-funded by the European Commission under the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2006-4607/001-001 LE2 707EQF) .

<sup>1</sup> Radu Mircea Damian (2005) Bologna process national reports 2004-2005: Romania.

<sup>2</sup> Developments in vocational education and training (VET) at EU-Level, in the Member States and in acceding and candidate countries – July 2005 to March 2006, published by CEDEFOP.

The two general objectives of the project are: to develop and test modular grids of competences and key methodological units comprising principles, mechanisms and guidance tools for ensuring the transparency of process and procedures related to the implementation of EQF by means of NQF; to exchange experiences through the development of partnerships among European, national, regional and sectoral organisations that will allow the conception of national and sectoral frameworks using the EQF as a common reference point and thus ensuring the comparability and compatibility among all NQFs involved. The partner countries in this project are: France, Ireland, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. During the project modular grids for two sectors will be developed (informatics and economics), which will be based on the recognition of the prior learning and the agreement between secondary and tertiary education.

#### 30.2.2.3 *Validation of informal and non-formal learning in compulsory education*

In the early nineties the length of compulsory education was cut down from ten to eight years, at the request of parents who did not see benefit in the education system. In 2003 the duration was extended to 10 again.

The extension of the school system included the creation of common learning standards for all pupils / students. Common standards are used, both in current assessment and in the final tests at the end of an educational cycle. The tests are set at the local level but national standards are used, in addition to lifelong learning portfolios.

These portfolios include the results of learning gained in the formal contexts and competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning, too. This means that students attending the theoretical (general), military, theological, sportive, artistic and pedagogical high schools, may receive, depending on the area of specialisation, a Competences Certificate.

This view on assessment of the non-formal learning is particularly relevant to the re-integration of those who have left / dropped out of the education system.

#### 30.2.2.4 *The Phare VET projects in the development of systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning*

The **Phare 2001 VET programme (RO0801)** has contributed to the development of an institutional framework for the validation of informal learning in Romania. The project started in April 2003 and ended in 2005, covering the provision of initial and continuing (vocational) education and training, as well as non-formal and informal learning. With regards the outcomes, based on the proposal of the Phare TVET 0108.01 Project, and according to the recommendations adopted by the Phare ESC Sub-Committee on the Human Resources Development (hereafter HRD), MoLSSF and MER decided to designate NATB as the National Authority for Qualifications in 2003.

The multi annual **Phare 2004-2006 project Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications**, started in December 2006, has as a general objective the creation of a national-level qualifications authority for vocational education and training, in order to support the enhancement of the coherence between the initial vocational education and training and the continuous vocational education and training in a LLL perspective, benefiting from the active participation of the social partners through sectoral partnerships.

Specific objectives of the project Phare 2004/016-772.04.02.02.02 (*first stage* of the multi annual project) are:

1. Strengthening the capacity of the NATB and of the Sector Committees for the development of the National Qualification System
2. Development of a coherent and transparent qualification system, which links the qualifications through a credit transfer system compatible with the EQF
3. Development of an operational methodology for the certification of qualifications and competences, based on the common principles specific for initial VET and CVT, taking into account the formal, non-formal and informal context of learning outcomes achievement
4. Development of the national registry for qualifications as a basis for obtaining information regarding the quality, accessibility and recognition of qualifications and the link with the labour market.

The implementation period for the Phare 2004 project is from December 2006 to November 2007. The envisaged results are:

- Strengthening the institutional capacity of the ANC through achievement of required competences
- Full participation of social partners and interested parties in the development and validation of qualifications, through enhanced sectoral committees
- Development of a coherent and transparent national qualifications system, which points out the link between qualifications, through a credit transfer system
- Development of an operational methodology for the certification of qualifications and competences, correlated to the TVET system
- Development of technical specifications for the database of qualifications of the National Register of Qualifications.

The *second stage* of the multi annual project - Phare 2005 /017-553.04.02.02.02 supports the National Adult Training Board and the sectoral committees in the continuing development of a national transparent qualifications system in vocational education and training, in a lifelong learning perspective.

The project will assist NATB and sector committees to achieve the following objectives:

- building capacity as regards the development of the National Qualification System;

- applying the methodological framework developed under the Phare 2004 sub-project for qualifications development and certification;
- developing the Professional Qualifications National Register database and the related portal based on the specifications of requirements developed under the Phare 2004 sub-project
- developing the common quality assurance principles for Vocational Education and Training
- disseminating the project's results.

#### 30.2.2.5 *Other projects*

The most recent programmes and projects in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning are as follows:

1. Ministry of Education and Research Programme – “Education and Vocational Training 2010” – Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal education;
2. “CALIST” Project – National Research Programme in Evaluation;
3. “Operational Sectoral Programme for Developing Human Resources 2007-2013” – promoted by POS – DRU from Ministry of Education and Research;
4. Phare RO R02/IB-SO-03 Project – “Supporting the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family in Continuing Vocational Training” – in partnership with Ministry of Education from Denmark;
5. Phare RO 02/IB/SO-01 Project – “Setting up The National Agency for Equal Chance between Women and Men”;
6. “ICOVET” Project - Informal Competencies and their Validation, Leonardo da Vinci Pilot Project, 2004-2006 ([www.icovet.eu](http://www.icovet.eu));
7. “ACE – Adult Craft Education” Project ([www.crsfts4u.ro](http://www.crsfts4u.ro)).
8. The most recent project 2006-2894/001-001LE2-73MOT between the Italian Leonardo da Vinci National Agency (ISFOL; project coordinator) and ANPCDEFP (Romania) “*TG4 - Transparency of qualifications, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Credit transfer*”.

#### 30.2.3 Barriers to further development

It is recognised that the stimulation of interest in developing systems to recognise learning achieved in informal and non-formal settings can contribute to the development of and participation in life-long learning, and it would also contribute to the introduction of

Europass and increase the possibilities for labour mobility. Yet a lack of standardised methodologies for the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is seen among the main obstacles for the development of a national strategy on mobility<sup>1</sup>.

Ensuring coherence in formal, non-formal and informal education and promoting lifelong learning remain among the main strategic objectives for reform and investment priorities in the development of the Romanian education system<sup>2</sup>. However, the key obstacles for promoting and developing the validation of informal and non-formal learning are mainly related to the fact that this process is still relatively new:

- There is a lack of an integrated and coherent approach towards lifelong learning, with a view of the whole educational progress of an individual<sup>3</sup>. Each of the educational levels and segments and active employment measures have developed their own legal framework, which include some principles of lifelong learning. However, they do not link to a common framework of public policies. It is, thus difficult to ensure coherence and flexibility.
- There is a divide between initial and lifelong learning. For example, the main law concerning education - the Education Law - only includes recommendations for reforming programmes concerning initial vocational education and training, while a different law – the Law of Vocational Training for Adults (Law no. 375/2002) – defines VET for the adult population.
- There is a gap between the provisions of laws and their actual implementation<sup>4</sup>. In terms of declarations, the measures are connected with the most advanced lifelong learning European approaches, including aspects such as access to training, recognition of prior learning and quality assurance system for the training provision. But in most of the cases, the provisions lack actual content to make them work in practice i.e. aspects are presented in very general terms, without being followed by concrete

<sup>1</sup> Implementing the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Romania. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

<sup>2</sup> 1. The Strategy of the Romanian Pre-university Education for 2002-2010. The prospective planning until 2010 (updated in 2002). Bucharest: Ministry of Education and Research, 2002. <https://www.edu.ro>

2. The Strategy of the Romanian Higher Education for 2002-2010. Bucharest: Ministry of Education and Research, 2002.

3. The National Development Plan 2007-2013. <https://www.mfinante.ro>

4. The Government Programme. Chapter 5 – The policy in the education field. <http://www.guv.ro>

5. The Law no. 133 of 21st July 2000 which approves the Government Ordinance no. 102/1998 on the organization and functioning of the lifelong learning system in the educational institutions - opened the way to a common framework.

6. GO no. 129/2000 on the vocational training of adults, republished and the related methodologies and rules

7. Common Order MER no.4543/23.08.2004 and MMSSF no.468/08.09.2004 on the approval of assessment and certification procedure of competences acquired in learning context other than formal. education.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

strategies and measures, without establishing deadlines and performance indicators for impact assessment.

- Romania has not yet reached a partnership agreement on the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning, which includes in a comprehensive and integrative manner all the aspects related to lifelong learning.

At the end of 2006, there were no proposals for methodologies or tools to apply the recognition of non-formal and informal competences in the adult education and training system as a transversal measure characterised by coherence and unity<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania

### 30.3 Private Sector

#### 30.3.1 The developing role of social partners

The role of the social partners in VET increased in 2002. Regional consortia have been set up with representatives from county school inspectorates, county employment agencies, regional development agencies and social partners. The regional consortia have a role in all Phare-funded HRD activities, including VET projects and the CVET Twinning project. The Local Development Committees have been active in the planning for TVET in all counties, and county employment agencies have witnessed the start of the activities of county tripartite boards. These developments give social partnership an important local and regional dimension. However, sectoral issues are not raised, because sectoral representation of social partners is still relatively weak.

A leading part in developing the Romanian National System of Vocational Qualifications is played by the Sectoral Committees – recently established structures which involve social partners – under the coordination of the National Adult Training Board, acting as the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ). Sectoral committees are social dialogue structures within the context of vocational training. They have, generally, a multipartite structure (social partners, government, professional associations, trade chambers, training providers), work with technical staff (permanent and short time experts) and have the following responsibilities:

- Participation in the development of the normative framework for training, evaluation and certification of competences;
- Promotion of the competence-based training and evaluation system;
- Development and updating, under the coordination of the National Adult Training Board, the relevant qualifications for each domain;
- Validation of qualifications and associated standards;
- Identification of specialists in order to carry out occupational analysis, define competences, qualifications, evaluation methods and certification based on standards;
- Encouraging participation of organisations and individuals in continuing vocational training and in technical and vocational education.

### 30.3.2 Individual companies

The importance of different fields of lifelong learning varies according to activity sector, company size and property type. For instance, in the public sector, a special focus is on foreign language learning, in the private sector on trade and marketing issues, whereas in mixed property units the target is personal skills development.

More and more private institutions offer courses for career progression, especially in the fields of IT and telecommunications, foreign languages, management, etc. Not all of them impose a quality standard in the respective targeted area or internationally recognised certificates. A good example of a centre which does is the Centre for IT Training that also offers Microsoft Certificates.

Labour legislation obliges enterprises to record the functions of employees in their staff registers only on the basis of formally recognised qualifications. However, there are individual Romanian companies that are interested in developing validation methodologies. Indeed, there are companies that have utilised the certification system of the National Adult Training Board to assess and certify competencies of employees that have been gained in informal and non-formal settings. For example, the Romanian Commercial Bank had an assessment centre for the validation of the competencies specific for occupations within the banking field. The Romanian Crafts Foundation<sup>1</sup> also promotes professional certification of competences, acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

The Centre for Rural Assistance – AGROTOUR – is currently implementing a Project *Trainers' training in agro-tourism sector from Belgium, Poland and Romania* (AGROTOUR TOT), which is due to be finished by the end of 2007. The main aims of the project are the improvement, assessment, validation and dissemination of the curriculum for agro-tourism learners as well as the promotion of innovative and qualitative educational instruments addressed through the teachers and trainers in vocational sector. The outcome of the project is expected to be an educational model for the agro-tourism sector for three different regions: Wallonia in Belgium, Nowy Sacz in Poland and Timis, Caras-Severin and Constanta in Romania, which will include a framework for the validation of competences and a procedure for the adult learners.

Radiocom, the national radiocommunications company, has employed validation techniques since 2000, as outlined in the box below:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crafts.ro>

## Validation at Radiocom, the National Radiocommunications Company<sup>1</sup>

The certification of competences (knowledge and abilities) is considered to be a necessity in the radio communications industry. The communication sector is subject to fast transformations and evolutions and there is a need for individuals to maintain the level of competence required by market conditions and changes in modern technology.

Radiocom is keen to maintain a high professional standard and at the same time, for its employees to acquire new competences. In addition, the company also allocates a special moral and material importance to the certification and validation of competences. Thus, the company has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios. Assessments are then conducted by internal assessors (specialists in the field of the respective occupation) who are certified as assessors of competencies by the National Adult Training Board.

Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies. These certificates have national recognition and are treated similarly to the study certificates obtained through formal learning. Individuals who partake in the validation processes thus benefit from regular performance assessment, as well as career and salary progression. For the employer organisations, the benefits are: achievement of better working collectives, reduced time of the personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced in the system and reduced time for personnel to learn, know, work and monitor equipment.

Scattered initiatives in the private sector show that there is already a need and potential for using better developed and more standardised assessment and recognition methodologies and procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning of employees. The process of creating a suitable foundation and environment has already started at the national level, which in turn will lead to better take-up of life long learning by the private sector. There will gradually be a revival of the lifelong education traditions Romania had in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and which are so necessary for developing the knowledge economy and society of the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>1</sup> Information based on the text of an interview, supplied by a representative of the NATB (National Adult Training Board), Romania

## 30.4 The Third Sector

Within the third sector, some informal and non-formal learning initiatives can be identified which have been implemented by different NGOs. These training courses cover a range of fields:

- a. Second-chance courses, for those who have dropped out of school early, without gaining any qualifications or for people who wish to gain a new qualification. A good example of a validation methodology within such a programme was:

Euro-Child-Centre<sup>1</sup>, funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme (2001-2004). This project was promoted by the Romanian Save the Children Foundation and coordinated by Economic Software Systems International, Romania. There were a number of partners from other European countries. One of the project aims was to develop vocational training and certification for educators and social workers in this field. The intended results were curricula and educational modules for educators and social workers - traditional and ODL courses, finalized with certification at the level of the participating countries.

- b. Courses for personal development, especially organised in people's free time, where the participants attend on their own initiative, mainly for their overall cultural development. In many cases, the participants' indirect aim is socialisation.

The National Association of Folk Universities in Romania (NAFUR), a provider of cultural courses, has contributed significantly to the development of validation methodologies. In 2001, for instance, these universities were the main providers of courses in the cultural area and organised 2,467 courses, attended by 42,785 participants who received different types of certificates.

- c. Courses for community education development focusing on topics such as: democracy, intercultural education, political culture, etc., which are part of larger projects, with mixed activities (festivals, exhibitions, conferences, etc.). In most cases, a clear-cut distinction can not be made between the different types of courses, as the participants have a mixed motivation or the organisers' target is combined (e.g. vocational training courses also used for the participants' personal development).

A good practice in this respect was the contribution of the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning to the European Project entitled Animated Debate - Computer

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.eurochild.ro/>

animation workshops for disadvantaged groups with a view to foster European partnership (funded through the Minerva action of the Socrates programme).

This project took place between 2003 and 2005. The coordinator was Bielskie Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Teatr Grodzki, in Poland. Partners from across Europe participated in the project, including Societatea Romana de Educatie Permanenta, Romania. The main objective of the AD Project was to create a new learning environment in which disadvantaged young people can develop artistic talents in close cooperation with their European counterparts. This was facilitated by communications technology. Specific Objectives were: to encourage the use of new technologies and multimedia in institutions providing care for disadvantaged children and young people; to record and disseminate the results of experiments with new forms of art based on multimedia and ICT; and to advocate the promotion of traditionally overlooked talents, especially those that relate to visual domain.

In the voluntary sector, a very good, efficient program was Art for Social Change (2000-2004) organised by European Cultural Foundation and implemented in Romania in partnership with the CONCEPT Foundation.

This program, through its component for Eastern Europe entitled 'Play against Violence' introduced theatre as an education method for young people facing violence, in order to prevent the effects leading to quick changes of attitude or conflict situations. To achieve its main target, the program offered training courses for artists and other professionals (teachers, psychologists, social assistants, educators) who work with young people, as well as support for running local and regional projects carried out by the persons already trained in this respect.

Another target was to contribute to social change by providing for the young generation instruments that could help them to participate in the (re)construction of civil society. The beneficiaries in 2002, for instance, were about 200 young people (12-21 years old) from 16 institutions of Constanta and Targu Mures and also over 30 artists, psychologists, social assistants from Bucharest, Constanta and Targu Mures, who were trained in the respective field. In 2003 two resource centres for the youth facing violence were set up to help them.

This section has considered qualitative and quantitative information on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Romania. Further efforts should be made to bring added value to this ongoing work at local, sectoral, regional and national level, as validation is a question of sound methodologies and transparent institutional arrangements, but it represents also a question of making political choices on how to value knowledge and experiences. As Romania is now a member of the EU, its endeavours to contribute to the

development of a set of common European principles on validation are even more relevant.

### **30.5 Conclusions**

The long tradition of adult education in Romania has demonstrated its synchronism in time, and more importantly, also at the conceptual level, with the European concerns and developments in this field. In the context of the EU accession strategy and very recent post-membership developments, the efforts of this country have been focused on harmonising lifelong learning with today's standards in the Member States.

As key action points in this area, priority has to be given to:

- Support for non-formal and informal learning by social and managerial recognition, extension and diversification of learning provision;
- Promotion of training and education incentives within economic, social and regional programs;
- Provision of an increased and diversified number of training opportunities to stimulate a greater demand.

A much needed policy is to increase the accessibility of guidance and counselling services for adults and members of the local community, as well as for these services to extend beyond the strictly vocational and educational dimension and to include more and more social and citizenship aspects.

NATB is coordinating the developments of the VET qualifications system and is the national authority for the development of the VET National Qualifications Framework. It also has responsibility for designing, implementing and maintaining the National Register of Qualifications as a tool for identification, registration, permanent consultation and updating of qualifications.

In spite of the general efforts and obvious progress made in Romania in implementing the EU Memorandum on lifelong learning, there are still many drawbacks, difficulties and constraints, which must be tackled and solved appropriately over time. The wide range of initiatives aimed to promote various aspects and compound elements of lifelong learning are currently rather scattered.

In the near future, further policies and measures are necessary to break down the existing divisions between formal initial and continuing (vocational) education and training and non-formal and informal learning. One of the locally accepted tools to achieve this goal is a common National Qualification Framework (NQF). Although the conceptualisation of the NQF is incorporated in existing Phare projects under the responsibility of the Ministry of

Education and Research or the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and Family, there is a risk that implementation will be fragmented. It is anticipated that progress will be slow without a common endeavour in which these two ministries and the social partners are equal participants<sup>1</sup>. In order to ensure the labour market value of the NQF, the development needs to be facilitated through social dialogue taking into account sectoral interests. This implies measures to strengthen sectoral representation of social partners<sup>2</sup>.

This national chapter has tried to identify good practices and validation initiatives already used in Romania, which are interesting to report, as they significantly illustrate the process of reasoning and also the state of progress in this particular field.

Significant progress has been made, including further development of the Romanian National Adult Training and Learning System, the establishment of the National Authority for Qualifications, further development of national occupational standards and the establishment of additional assessment centres and the number of qualifications to be assessed, in order to foster the validation of professional competences based on occupational standards. All these actions show considerable steps forward in developing a national framework for lifelong learning. Parallel developments such as the activities of the National Agency for Labour Force Employment and the establishment of a specialised body focused on higher education - the ACPART agency - also prove that the issue is very relevant, although complex and that the major work is still ahead in order to bring these single initiatives into the one whole.

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Progress in Vocational education and Training Reform in Romania*, European Training Foundation, Turin, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

# 31.0 Slovak Republic<sup>1</sup>

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*By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research)*

## 31.1 Introduction

On a national, public sector level, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has a much higher profile in the Slovak Republic now than it did in 2004, when the last inventory was written. Although there is currently no legal framework covering validation, a policy document has recently emerged entitled “Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme”, which gives validation of non-formal and informal learning a very specific focus. Furthermore, a legal framework is intended in the future, under the Lifelong Learning Act, which should be approved by the end of 2007.

In addition to this, the Slovak Republic is in the process of developing a new qualification system, which should be available in 2009. This will further support validation by adopting a credit system capable of offering parity between formal, non-formal and informal learning. Such initiatives have been considerably influenced by the EU policy agenda.

## 31.2 Public Sector

The key public sector document emerging in recent years that is relevant to validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Slovak Republic is the “Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme”. Due to the fact that this document has been published so recently, it should be noted that work on implementing the policy has not yet started and work on validation of non-formal and informal learning specifically is not expected to commence until 2008<sup>2</sup>.

### 31.2.1 Education Policy 2007

This section of the report offers a summary of the Education Policy 2007 as relevant to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is the key policy document emerging from the SR since the last ECOTEC report was written in 2004.

#### 31.2.1.1 Key Stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is the central body responsible for lifelong learning (LLL). There is now a separate department dedicated to LLL, which will ensure the SR adheres to EU

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Slovak Republic chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Olga Strietska-Ilina

<sup>2</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

policies, implements the LLL strategy and within that supports the validation of non-formal and informal learning. They will work with other Ministries e.g. the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, self-government and social partners in implementing the 2007 education policy.

#### 31.2.1.2 *Key Features*

The LLL Strategy itself has a number of priorities. For example, monitoring and forecasting the educational needs of citizens and employers, providing information services etc but those specifically relevant to validation include “*recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes*” and “*transmittance between the non-formal and formal educational systems*”.

In line with EU policy the LLL strategy relating to validation of non-formal and informal learning looks to:

- Verify knowledge, skills and competence gained in non-formal or informal learning;
- Validate non-formal and informal learning through the use of ‘credit’, which will allow parity to be achieved within the formal and non-formal education sectors;
- Allow flexibility across national boundaries e.g. EUROPASS, ECTS, ECVET;
- Allow citizens to shape their educational activities according to their own need e.g. accumulating credits at his own discretion and according to his personal or work needs.

Work on this will commence in 2008 by the Ministry of Education. They will:

- Authorise “*natural and legal persons*” to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes for the purpose of attaining partial or full qualifications or for recognising the non-formal education in itself by assigning credits to non-formal education programmes;
- Implement a system of quality management, which will be managed nationally and will allow educational institutions to accredit non-formal education “*in modular form with assigning credits to particular modules; to certify lectors and managers of non-formal education and career guidance counsellors*”<sup>1</sup>.

The focus on **quality management** is new and should be noted. It demonstrates progression against the last Inventory report (2004) which stated an absence of quality management systems. It is certainly a priority within the Education Policy 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

### 31.2.1.3 *Barriers to Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning*

Stakeholders are already envisaging some **barriers** to implementing policy relating to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Notably in “*resistance of the formal system towards validation in the non-formal system*”. Also in “*lack of interest within the decisive sphere to create conditions for implementation of innovative features into the non-formal system and resistance of formal educational system to accept these features*”<sup>1</sup>.

The SR recently carried out a SWOT analysis of their educational system and found that, in relation to non-formal and informal learning:

- There is a mutual separateness between formal and non-formal learning;
- There is an absence of recognition of non-formal education for the purposes of gaining a qualification;
- There is insufficiently guaranteed quality from the state for non-formal learning;
- There is not a transparent or effective way financing formal, non-formal and informal learning.

In recognising this, the LLL Strategy will aim to confront these problems.

### 31.2.1.4 *Funding and Monitoring*

Considering the current issues with funding non-formal learning, the stakeholders will be implementing “financing tools” to finance non-formal learning according to the following criteria:

- Level of financial requirements to public resources;
- Administrative complexity of implementation and realisation;
- Multi-source principle including ensuring share of non-formal education participants;
- Transparency;
- Controllability and degree of misuses.

In addition to funding by the SR, there is expected to be financial support from the EU, for example through programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF).

The Education Policy 2007 does not talk specifically about monitoring any actions carried out as a result of validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, it does suggest that monitoring and forecasting will be important to the implementation of the LLL Strategy and this should include the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>1</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

### 31.2.2 The existing initiatives

Due to the fact that work on validation of non-formal and informal learning has not yet started, the legal basis and the initiatives mentioned in the previous ECOTEC report are still relevant.

Vocational education and training (VET) for performance of specific vocational activities require the prescribed competency is covered by regulations of state administration for individual fields of activities. **Act No. 455/1991 on Small Business as amended**<sup>1</sup> stipulates special qualification requirements for doing business in handicraft industry or in selected crafts (e.g. blacksmiths, construction workers, food production etc.). The requirements may be fulfilled by the presence of a certificate of a formal vocational qualification in the relevant field or a certificate of completion of general education along with the proof of at least three years of experience in the given profession. These documents can be substituted by other certificates of a relevant or a 'kin' vocational qualification from other upper secondary, post-secondary or higher education and by documents certifying certain years of practical experience in the relevant or 'kin' occupation, whereas the number of years of experience stipulated in the law depends on the type of prior education. The certificate of completion of a training course in one of the accredited continuing training providers according to Act No. 386/1997 is not sufficient and has to be accompanied by a qualification examination. Such examination is regulated by the **Decree No. 323/2001**<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of the qualification examination is to verify theoretical knowledge (professional terminology, characteristics of materials and technology procedures) and practical skills (working procedures, mechanisms, machines, instruments, equipment, technology processes, etc.) used in the process of execution of the appropriate professional activity. The examination consists of the written, verbal and practical parts and is evaluated by the Examination Commission designated by the Regional Governmental Office. The proposals on the composition of the Commission come from the Slovak Small Business Chamber, which organises qualification examinations. Successful passing qualification examination grants the individual the same rights for execution of professions as to those who obtained their qualification in the formal education system. We cannot speak here of a large-scale practice: according to the results of the questionnaire answered by NARIC<sup>3</sup>, only 87 individuals passed the qualification examination by 2002, of which 48 were cosmeticians. Other professions were

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.madeinslovakia.sk/zakony/zivz.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Decree No. 323/2001 on Details of the contents of the theoretical knowledge and practical skills which are required for the execution of certain regulated professional activities, about the mode of the completion of qualification examination and issuing the certificate, Ministry of Interior. [http://www.szk.sk/ako\\_zacat/vyhlaska.pdf](http://www.szk.sk/ako_zacat/vyhlaska.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Finding the synergy between International Credential Evaluation (ICE) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Questionnaire to NARICs, 2002, Results published at <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/pdf/NARICsonQuestionnaire.pdf>

hairdressers, waiters, bakers, bricklayers, etc. The success rate was quite high with the drop out at around 10%.

The Act on Small Businesses in its later amendments on the one hand, introduces a real possibility to obtain qualification in a much shorter period of time by means of completion of a (re)training course (the length is not specified) and passing the qualification examination. On the other hand, the Act's later amendments (2001), restricted the earlier possibility given by the law to go through examination without any prior training or education, to get recognised practical experience or non-formal training<sup>1</sup> and to substitute formal qualifications by the prove of inventions, patents or patterns in the relevant trade<sup>2</sup>. From this point of view the current version of the law is more restrictive and gives less space for manoeuvre for older workers who might be very experienced in their performed trade but do not hold a formal qualification in the relevant field and do not wish to go into training. Such arrangement, may become a good stimulation for workers' participation in CVT but needs to be linked to an efficient system of counselling and guidance.

The Ministry of Education and Science issued the **Decree No. 41/1996 on Professional and Pedagogical Competence of Educational Staff**<sup>3</sup> on 26 January 1996 as amended later, which stipulates the qualification requirements and organization, contents and procedure for qualification examination for teachers in kindergartens, special, basic and secondary schools. Professional capacity is understood by the Decree as a set of vocational knowledge, skills and competences gained through the studies in higher education, secondary education and in professional experience. The decree stipulates that after 5 years of teaching experience certain conditions can be recognised as a substitute to the 1st qualification examination, fulfilment of which gives a right to obtain higher teaching positions and incorporation to a higher salary scale. Among others such substitute conditions could be:

- Completion of two-years specialised innovative course or two-years specialised qualification course accredited by the Ministry of Education;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition of independently developed, accredited and patented teaching tools submitted to the mass production,
- Authorship of textbooks and syllabi, approved by the Ministry of Education and published;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition in pedagogical reading.

<sup>1</sup> According to NARIC's questionnaire until 2001, about 30 people managed to receive recognition of their prior informal/non-formal learning as a substitute to a formal qualification in accordance with the Small Business Act before its amendment. Finding the synergy between International Credential Evaluation (ICE) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Questionnaire to NARICs, 2002, Results published at <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/pdf/NARICsonQuestionnaire.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning, Slovakia, ETF, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/1996\\_41.pdf](http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/1996_41.pdf)

Act No. 279/1993 on School Establishments regulates certain types of non-formal training, for instance, at state language schools, where learners can undergo preparatory training for the state language exam and/or pass the examination (with or without a preparatory course).

Non-formal training: is also regulated by other laws (e.g. Employment Act<sup>1</sup>, Labour Code<sup>2</sup>), without specific reference to validation of competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning.

An important legislative change was introduction of **8 self-governing regions** and the transition of some competencies from state administration to self-government, including those in the field of education and its establishments (Act No. 302/2001 on self-government of higher territorial units, Act No. 416/2001 on transition of competences, and Act No. 596/2003 on state administration and school self-government)<sup>3</sup>.

Although the process of decentralisation and the administration reform has been criticised for insufficient transfer of responsibility to the regions and preservation of 'corporativism' in public administration. The decentralisation reform is associated with high aspirations in terms of (i) granting greater role for the social dialogue in training and human resource development, (ii) bringing training provision closer to local needs, (iii) better targeting and integration of various policies in the implementation at regional level. The weak role of social partners in lifelong learning is expected to be boosted by interaction with regional actors. The Regional VET Councils, whose creation is in progress, are expected to incorporate the dialogue on lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>. These can become important players in the development of the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning at regional level.

Slovakia adopted **legislation necessary to harmonise with EU requirements** in the field of recognition of qualifications<sup>5</sup>. The adopted Act No **477/2002** deals with recognition of certification of vocational qualifications issued in the EU Member States for the execution of regulated professions on the territory of Slovakia. It stipulates different means of recognising qualifications. In those professions where there is co-ordination of minimum educational requirements among EU Member States, there is automatic recognition (e.g.

<sup>1</sup> No. 397/1996

<sup>2</sup> No. 311/2001

<sup>3</sup> Vantuch, J., Jelínková, D. Current Status of Vocational Education and Training in Slovakia (Vocational Education and Training on the Verge of the Millennium). Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training, State Institute of Vocational Education and Training, Bratislava, 2002, p.57. See also: Vantuch, J., Pauk, J., Jelínková, D. Recent developments in vocational education, Training and employment policy in Slovakia (2003 Short Country Report for ETF). Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training, State Institute of Vocational Education and Training, Bratislava, 2003, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Act on recognition of vocational qualifications No 477/2002 reflecting European directives No 89/48 and No 92/51

medical professions, architects) or special regime of recognition, which is practically automatic but under certain circumstances may involve an aptitude test (e.g. lawyers). Semi-automatic recognition involves a comparison of the length and content of the applicant's education with the host country's professional requirements. Substantial differences in length can be compensated by the proof of the work experience and major content discrepancies by aptitude test or an adaptation period. In some regulated professions like masonry, hairdressing, massage, and tourist guide services, qualification can also be recognised through work experience<sup>1</sup>. Although the law does not deal directly with the provisions for validation of non-formal and informal learning for the Slovak citizens, it stipulates important legal, institutional and procedural arrangements, which can be applied for the validation in the future.

**The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** was effectively introduced in 2002 under the **new Higher Education Act** and the following **Decree on the Credit System** (No. 614/2002<sup>2</sup>). Prior to 2002, several higher education institutions used a credit system but there was no standard model. According to the new law, all higher education institutions are required to introduce a credit system based on the ECTS by September 2005. Currently, ECTS or other credit point systems are largely used in the first two cycles of the tertiary education and to a lesser degree at the PhD level<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.; also see interview with Mária Hrabinská, Head of the Slovak Ministry of Education's Centre for the Equivalence of Diplomas, in 'Spectator' periodical, 3/1/2004

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/2002\\_614.pdf](http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/2002_614.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report. Berlin Summit 2003, pp. 3-4, [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Slovak\\_Republic.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Slovak_Republic.pdf); also Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.), p.25

### 31.2.3 Special Projects

#### **The Leonardo da Vinci Programme**

The Slovak Republic is one of the members of the Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Credit Transfer”, which restarted its activities in 2006. The thematic group has a strong focus on<sup>1</sup>:

- The European Qualifications Framework (and related national frameworks),
- The European Credit Transfer System;
- The promotion of a single framework on transparency of qualifications and competences;
- The implementation and development of the Common European Principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and;
- The Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

The projects that have been carried out specifically under the priority for ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning’ have not thus far included the Slovak Republic as a partner. However, outcomes of projects such as “Assessing Voluntary Experiences in a Professional Perspective”, “European Network for Valuation Prior Learning”, “FAIR” and “The Role of Social Partners and Public Authorities in Training System Development” should provide useful information to the SR in developing their own systems<sup>2</sup>.

The Institute of Lifelong Education at the Technical University of Kosice was created in 1996. It coordinates the activities in the field of open and distance learning in the region and it is a part of the Slovak Distance Education Network. The Institute aims to widen the existing cooperation with Košice institutions of higher education, private education institutes, local government, and education institutes of industrial enterprises. It provides continuing education and training, guidance, information and consulting services in the framework of university services for the region, contributes to the development of the systems of lifelong learning in cooperation with the local firms and industrial enterprises.

Among others the Institute of Lifelong Education of the Technical University of Košice in cooperation with the *VSŽ Vzdelávacie a poradenské centrum* (Educational, Training and Consulting Centre) and with a consortium of European partner institutions implemented a Leonardo da Vinci project EDUCRATOS (1998-2001)<sup>3</sup>. The project’s aim was the creation of the centre of educational advisory and consultation services for vocational training, design of the methodology for identification and anticipation of training needs,

<sup>1</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer” Background Report 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer” Background Report 2007.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

development of educational standards and of the methodology for accreditation of prior experience and learning. The project's target group were consultants, trainers, training officers, training experts, manager training programs and human resource directors. The project elaborated a Methodology for identification of training needs<sup>1</sup> at the organisation, group and individual levels. It also developed a methodology for accreditation of prior experience and learning<sup>2</sup> and for the development/adaptation of educational standards<sup>3</sup>, and ran a pilot course on APEL.

The Institute of Lifelong Education of the Technical University of Košice offers now a modular course of distance education combined with computer-supported and attendance-course training '**Person APEL**' (168 hours, 10 modules)<sup>4</sup>. The course is targeted at personnel managers in enterprises, employees in higher education, training providers and counselling and guidance services with a minimum of complete upper secondary education.

The course provides information on the approach and principles of accreditation of prior and experiential learning, instructs on how it can be used for the development and management of human resources. The main principles of APEL's application at various stages, including assessment of competences and identification of strong and weak points of employees and methods of the subsequent skills development of employees.

In cooperation with the European partners **the Technical University of Kosice** and the **University of Zilina** worked on the elaboration of a competence management tool entitled 'The European Record of Achievement' (**EuroRecord**) targeted at **the engineering industry**<sup>5</sup>. The EuroRecord is a software-supported tool for planning and recording individual training and development needs with the support of mentoring and guidance, in a dialogue with the employer, designed to record prior learning achievements and to link it to the individual strategy for personal and professional development and advancement. The tool supports a credit system recognising continuing training courses, experiential learning and accreditation of the in-company training. It is targeted at individual employees, employers, universities and professional organisations.

The EuroRecord helps individuals to manage their professional development and career providing methodology for documentation of competences, identification of the requirements for further learning and with the subsequent design of the development plan. The method records learning achievements and professional development, regardless of

<sup>1</sup> [Methodology for identification of training needs](#), 2000, 30 pp., English and Slovak versions.

<sup>2</sup> *Manual Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL)*, 2000, 92 pp;  
[http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

<sup>3</sup> *Educational standards*, 42 pp; [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/kurzy/kurz\\_person-apel.php](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/kurzy/kurz_person-apel.php)

<sup>5</sup> The project was coordinated by European Society for Engineering Education, [www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/](http://www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/).

where and how they occurred. The EuroRecord was developed by a consortium of companies, professional organisations, trade unions, universities and other training providers in seven countries, along with a number of European networks and organisations. The project was completed in 2001. Information on the actual application of its results in the Slovak engineering industry is currently not available.

Another recent project which was funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme is the EPANIL (**E**uropean **C**ommon **P**inciples for the **A**ccreditation of **N**on-formal and **I**nformal **L**earning in Lifelong Learning) project<sup>1</sup> which ran from 2005-2006. The project was concerned with improving adult access to further education, for people with basic or no formal qualifications but who have experience of paid or unpaid voluntary employment. With reference to established European common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the project established a framework for accessing further VET for persons with basic or no formal qualifications, specifically in the economically deprived regions of the partner countries.

Project partners undertook a needs analysis of the informal/non-formal VET situation in established and new EU Member States. Both possibilities and obstacles concerning accreditation for informal/non-formal VET in central and east European countries were outlined and tools were developed to enhance accreditation in this area, based upon successful practices elsewhere. Educational courses for VET advisors were developed to enable them to deliver information about non-formal/informal learning. These courses were piloted with those with basic or no formal qualifications. An evaluation of the pilot informed the project's recommendations with regard to dissemination of project outputs and sustainability of the end results.

The evaluation of the EPANIL project<sup>2</sup> confirmed that “all the evidence points to a highly successful project, which has not only achieved what it set out to do, but has done so very well indeed”. Moreover, the evaluation went on to state that “in terms of sustainability and impact, the project has been a key player in the wider evolution planning and activity of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning in the three target countries and in the ‘Learning Region of Moravia’. It is clearly part of a significant and longer pathway of progress in this area.”

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.epanil.net/aindex.html>

<sup>2</sup> Zamorski, B., 2006, Final Evaluation Report of the EPANIL Project. Taken from the world wide web, 14 September 2007. Available at: <http://www.epanil.net/download/evalrep.pdf>

### 31.3 Private Sector

It is very difficult to find information relating to private sector initiatives in the Slovak Republic. One reason for this is because there is currently no overarching national strategy in place for validation and hence any initiatives that are being undertaken are limited to specific companies and sectors. However, it is also the case that there are simply very few private sector validation initiatives and those that are in place are mostly confined to large companies with foreign investments.

The public sector is however trying to create the conditions for acceptance of non-formal learning in the private sector. For example, by piloting surveys with non-governmental and private institutions that will help the government supply education to suit business needs.<sup>1</sup>

#### 31.3.1 Initiatives taken by individual companies

Foreign companies transfer their international know-how via their national branches to Slovakia. Therefore such initiatives are not strictly Slovakian. Some examples are listed below:

**Accor Services** - the Accor Group's second largest international line of business – aspires to improve the performance of companies and local authorities by fostering the well being of their employees and citizens.<sup>2</sup> Accor Services designs, develops and manages innovative solutions that enable businesses and local authorities to create new sources of motivation and loyalty for their employees. Among others, Accor Services offers a management tool enabling companies to meet their employees' needs in terms of information, psychological support and coaching, formative skills assessment and subsequent training of employees.

**Ibis Partner Ltd** - is a German-Slovak private training and counselling company. It was established in Slovakia in 1992. The company transfers modern international trends and know-how in the field of enterprise development, training and development of top management and human resources in enterprises. Ibis partners Ltd. provides assessment, training and counselling to enterprises, personal counselling and coaching also in specific cases of career change and development, new assignments for employees etc.<sup>3</sup>

**PricewaterhouseCoopers** - in the Slovak Republic provides human resource consulting to enterprises<sup>4</sup> The service Training and Development Systems includes an assessment of employees' potential, an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and preparation of personal development plans. The company also performs a special evaluation method

<sup>1</sup> Vladislav Rosa "Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer" An OECD Report.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.accorservices.sk/sk/abouttheorganization/anex/anex.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ibispartner.sk/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pwc.com/sk/slk/about/svcs/ghrs.html>

Individual and Group Psychological Evaluation (Assessment Centre): evaluation of abilities, skills and qualities, using proven standardized psycho-diagnostic tests and questionnaires, together with a structured interview conducted by a qualified psychologist. The Outplacement Program provides advice and effective support to employees who are forced to leave their jobs due to company downsizing, organisational changes, etc. It provides an individual approach to employees in all working positions, an in-depth assessment of their professional opportunities and training in the skills necessary for gaining an appropriate working position.

### 31.3.2 The Role of Social Partners

Social partners are not currently influential in shaping government policy on LLL/VET.<sup>1</sup> There is no record of sectors' participation in the development of the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia. One of the reasons for such situation is an overall weak interest of social partners to debate on lifelong learning. Social dialogue in this field is formally established at the top level but is very weak when it comes to sector and enterprise level. Trade unions concentrate on the 'traditional' agenda of wages and working conditions bargaining. Analysis of collective agreements for the period of 1999-2003 indicated that social dialogue very rarely touched lifelong learning issues and is limited to indirect general proclamations<sup>2</sup>. This is still the case today.

One of 'active' sector actors in education and training issues in general is the Guild of Motor Vehicle Dealers and Services. The Guild contributed to a major VET curricula innovation for **the rapidly growing automotive industry** in Slovakia<sup>3</sup>. The industry's demand for qualified workers is growing and the industry may be well interested in exploring the potential for validation of informal and non-formal learning of its workforce.

## 31.4 The Third Sector

Overall there is little information available relating validation of non-formal and informal learning to the third sector. As explained in the previous ECOTEC report, the third sector is not at the forefront of policy development and there are no third sector organisations driving the agenda forward. That said, since 2004, there has been work carried out as part

<sup>1</sup> The Vocational Education and Training (VET) System of Slovakia. Published by Cedefop.

<sup>2</sup> Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> Cedefop Info 3/2003.

of the EU Youth Programme, which has contained some validation of non-formal and informal learning. Some relevant examples are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- EDIN – this is an international voluntary programme of ecumenical council. They now offer certificates to volunteers describing their skills and experience gained through the voluntary sector;
- YOUTHPASS – this is a certificate confirming skills gained from the programme Youth In action;
- Implementing the ‘Common Objectives’ of the EU Youth Programme – the SR will be preparing a strategy to implement the common objectives. This will involve an action plan “*solving the question of consistent certificate of acquired skills and information necessary for lifelong education*”. It is hoped that this will promote the idea of participating in voluntary service. It is thought that the introduction of the credit system will further support the cause, for example by allowing voluntary service to be included in CVs and adding value when it comes to job applications or applying for studies etc.

<sup>1</sup> National Report on the Implementation of the Common Objectives for Voluntary Activities of Young People in the Slovak Republic (2006). Published by the European Commission.

## 31.5 Conclusions

The Slovak Republic currently does not have legislation in place to support validation of non-formal or informal learning. It does not have a National Qualification Framework capable of recognising formal, non-formal or informal learning collectively. The country does not have any experience nationally of developing methods or 'tools' to validate non-formal or informal learning and does not have the necessary quality assurance systems in place to ensure the quality of non-formal or informal learning.

However, since the last Inventory was written in 2004, the Slovak Republic has developed a Lifelong Learning Strategy (published in 2007) that addresses these issues. This means that legislation to support validation should be in place by the end of 2007. Work on developing quality assurance, authorising organisations to validate non-formal and informal learning etc should commence by 2008 and a national qualification system compatible with the European Qualification Framework should be in place by 2009. The Slovak Republic has therefore documented its commitment to these aspects of European LLL policy and is in the very earliest stages of implementation.

In implementing the plans for validation of non-formal and informal learning, the SR recognise the importance of learning from other EU countries, especially in developing standards and mechanisms for validation, developing methods of assessment etc. A recent OECD report confirms this view and states that the SR will need to build a "joint framework for continuous activity", establish a "database of effectual know-how", create an "interchange of experience amongst persons/institutions in various countries", establish a "collection of representative benchmarks" etc<sup>1</sup>. In short, the country is committed to the EU policy agenda but needs to learn from other countries that have more developed validation systems.

<sup>1</sup> Vladislav Rosa "Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer" An OECD Report.

## 32.0 Slovenia<sup>1</sup>

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*By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 32.1 Introduction

Slovenia faces similar development changes and challenges to those which confront a majority of EU member states - an ageing population, constant changes at the workplace and in everyday life due to the rapid development of technology, scientific revolution and the globalisation process. The country is also characterised by increasing social stratification. Moreover, the fact that for a long time, Slovenia had a relatively high drop-out rate from education makes validation of prior learning a potentially important factor in the national policy for a higher skilled labour force.

The Slovenian education system has gone through many changes in the last 15 years, in particular following the 1996 White Paper on Education. This was a comprehensive and radical reform, which affected all the sectors and levels in formal education.

Transformation and upgrading of the system of non-formal learning in many fields also took root

A new National Vocational Qualification Act introducing a certification system was passed in 2000. The Act enables the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school - it makes it possible for individuals to obtain a vocational qualification in ways other than through formal education. Vocational qualifications obtained in this way can be used to find a job or move into further training.

National Vocational Qualifications and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on professional standards, made on the assessed needs of the economy for new knowledge and competences. This strengthens the link between education and the labour market and improves the relevance of programmes.

Slovenia is thus one of the new member states with a clear policy for validation of prior learning. The benefits of non-formal forms of learning (contribution to a rise in participation of the population in lifelong learning, access to the labour market, inclusion of disadvantaged groups in learning and transnational mobility) are recognised in the national strategy for lifelong learning. As a new member of the European Union, the country aims to fully implement the Lisbon strategy, namely the objective of Life Long Learning. Therefore, in the framework of the European Social Fund, it will continue to develop the

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Slovenia chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by Nataša Cvetek (BBJ Consult Inc. – Slovenia)

certification of non-formal and informal knowledge as a strategic tool for improved employability and better adaptability to labour market trends.

## 32.2 Public Sector

### 32.2.1 Policy Background

The **National Vocational Qualification Act** adopted in 2000<sup>1</sup> and the accompanying regulations<sup>2</sup> provide a legislative basis and framework for links between formal and informal education, one of the pre-conditions for implementing the concept of life-long learning. The Act introduced a certification system, which provides access to nationally recognised certificates for specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), enabling recognition of prior learning and experiences of adults. The text itself generally regulates the procedure, bodies and organisations competent for approving standards for selected qualifications as the basis for assessing and recognising prior and non-formal learning.

The act was amended in 2006 in order to link formal and informal education and work experience, to ensure partnership and cooperation in the development of NVQs and in their promotion, in order to enable transfer between different fields and levels of education and training and to ensure transparency of implementation of the certification procedures. It already largely respects the European principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2004, and a comprehensive system of quality assurance will be set up in the coming years.<sup>3</sup>

### 32.2.2 Validation in practice

#### 32.2.2.1 *The National Vocational Qualification*

The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a working vocational or professional qualification, required for an occupation or an individual set of tasks within an occupation.

It can be obtained by achieving:

- vocational or professional education, or
- completing parts of educational programmes, or
- completing vocational training and advanced training programmes,
- completing parts of programmes of higher education or
- meeting the standards of professional knowledge and skills.

<sup>1</sup> *Official Journal of RS, No. 81/3708/2000*. It was amended in 2006 (No. 118/20/2006).

<sup>2</sup> such as *The Regulation on Method and Procedure of Assessment and Certification of NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 97-4339/2003) and *The Regulation on Procedure on Acquiring NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 017-01-015/99-005), some of them currently revised

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MoLFSA) is responsible for the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and work experiences, in order to provide a nationally recognised certificate. The validation procedure takes place as follows;

- 1) The first step is the submission of a personal application to an authorised and registered organisation by the National Examination Centre.
- 2) On the job assessment and certification of the individual is then carried out by a nominated commission (whose members must obtain a special licence from the National Examination Centre)
- 3) The NVQ may be obtained a) by certification - direct assessment of professional knowledge, skills and abilities determined in the catalogue or by recognition of a person's skills and knowledge on the basis of the individual's portfolio or b) in school - on the basis of documents acquired in educational programmes.

The forms, duration of assessment and the composition of the commission may be adapted for persons with special needs.

The system of assessment and certification of NVQs is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of how the knowledge, skills and competencies were obtained. It is targeted at adults and takes place on the basis of direct demonstration of knowledge, skills and capacities or on the basis of documents and other evidence collected in the individual's portfolio. They thus become visible results of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>1</sup>

#### 32.2.2.2 *Occupational Standards*

The knowledge and skills required to acquire an NVQ are determined by a catalogue of standards for professional knowledge and skills. These catalogues are developed on the basis of the relevant occupational standard.

Occupational standards define the code and the name of occupation, level of difficulty of work, competence, and field of work, main tasks, knowledge and skills.

Occupational standards are prepared for the following levels: Lower vocational qualification/education (ISCED level 3C) / Middle vocational qualification/education (ISCED level 3C) / Middle technical qualification/education (ISCED level 3B) / Higher non-university technical qualification/education (ISCED level 5B).

<sup>1</sup> Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

The initiative for the new occupational standard may be given by anybody to the CPI<sup>1</sup>, starting the preparation of the proposal. They must meet the following requirements: stability, long-lasting, widespread, appearance in different work situations, employability of significant number of people, comparability with occupations on foreign labour markets.

Development and modernisation of occupational standards in respective fields is the main task of the nominated “sectoral committee”, composed of the representatives of chambers, ministries and trade unions. The sectoral committees may also propose modification or development of a new job profile, occupational standard or catalogue to the responsible chamber or ministry.

After the positive opinion on the proposal by the expert board, the SSPIU<sup>2</sup> submits it to the MoLFSA for approval.

The initiative for the adaptation of either an occupational standard or a catalogue of professional knowledge and skills may be proposed by anyone to the CPI, which decides on the relevance of initiative. Proposals for a catalogue are developed by the responsible chamber (or ministry for activities for which the chambers are not organised) or by CPI in close cooperation with the professional and vocational associations and trade unions.

Expert boards, nominated by SSPIU, are responsible for coordination of the proposed catalogue in line with the established needs for vocational qualification, international comparability and compliance with the Slovene legal system and EU regulations. The proposed catalogue is then determined and published by the MoLFSA.

### 32.2.2.3 *Progress to date*<sup>3</sup>

By 2007, 15,271 NVQ certificates had been awarded, of which 3,961 certificates in 2005 and 8,158 in 2006.

279 occupational standards and 69 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills had been published in the Official Gazette by 2007. Of these, 210 professional standards were prepared and adopted by the Expert Council in 2005 and 2006 (source: Department for Professional standards, National Institute for VET) and 25 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills. Thirty catalogues of standards were in preparation.

Seventy five providers were entered in the register of providers of procedures for assessment and recognition of NVQs, of which 35 new providers were entered in 2005

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Vocational Education (Center RS za poklicno izobraževanje - CPI)

<sup>2</sup> National Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training ((Strokovni svet RS za poklicno izobraževanje – SSPIU).

<sup>3</sup> All data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

and 2006. 594 members of committees for assessment and recognition of NVQs have been appointed, 146 of which in 2005 and 109 in 2006. There are 80 candidates in the process of obtaining a license as a member of a committee.

Training for counsellors in the procedure of assessment and recognition of NVQ's had been attended by 166 counsellors, of which 91 in 2005 and 2006.

#### 32.2.2.4 *Higher Education (HE)*

The Council for Higher Education determines the criteria for recognition of knowledge and skills acquired prior to enrolment, which are part of the new Criteria on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.<sup>1</sup>

The amended National Vocational Qualification Act introduced the possibility for higher education institutions to implement the system of assessment and recognition of NVQs as well. However, there have not been any initiatives carried out by higher education institutions to date.

#### 32.2.2.5 *Further developments*

The introduction of a **credit system** is an important transversal activity. For credit evaluation of learning outcomes in secondary VET and in higher vocational education programmes, the legal bases have been provided, a model has been prepared and preparation of educational programmes that will have a credit evaluation is under way. A credit system has already been functioning in practice for some years in the field of higher education. The credit system relates primarily to assessing formal educational programmes and subjects/modules, but the same credit system is expected also to apply in the certificate system and with *non-formal* knowledge. In relation to VET, harmonisation with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) is envisaged.<sup>2</sup>

Extensive **curricular changes** in all branches of education have been co-financed by ESF funds. New framework national curricula have a module structure, are based on *competences* and evaluated in terms of credit points. Learning outcomes are specified in terms of obtaining professional competences (connecting theory and practice, training in companies) and building on key competences and general knowledge. New programmes facilitate easier vertical and horizontal transition for students, and enable adults to obtain certificates on non-formal knowledge that are recognised in further education.

In April 2006, the Slovenian government adopted a decree on the introduction and use of a classification system of education and training (Klasius), which is one of the formal bases

<sup>1</sup> Towards the European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, National Reports 2004-2005

<sup>2</sup> Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

for building a Slovenian **qualification framework**. It is based on eight levels, in which are placed all qualifications, from primary school to doctoral, in relation to learning outcomes. Conceptual bases are in preparation and a working group has been appointed for the construction of the national qualifications framework. Preparation of the national qualifications framework will require fresh consideration of the placing of individual fields and levels of education, e.g., vocational and technical education and training (VET).<sup>1</sup>

#### 32.2.2.6 *Other validation initiatives*

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education trains accredited assessors and vocational advisors for the validation of prior learning.<sup>2</sup> It is also currently carrying out a project entitled “Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL”.

#### Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education is the national institution for development, research and counselling in the field of adult education. The Institute's basic mission is to foster the culture of lifelong learning and education in Slovenia.

The Institute is currently managing a development project entitled “Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL”. The project was established in order to set up a network for the accreditation of non-formal (prior) learning.

It is recognized that, owing to the fact that the drop-out rate from the Slovenian formal education system is fairly high, the APL system could bring significant benefits. Until now, certificates issued in a particular work organisation have not been transferable to new working environments - not even in the case of college degrees in higher education.

APL project tasks:

- evaluation of prior (non-formal) learning,
- preparation of standards of knowledge,
- non-formal knowledge/qualification,
- criteria for accreditation of evidence,
- training of advisors and assessors/evaluators.

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) is a public institution which was founded in 1995 by the Government and co-founded by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia and the Chamber of Craft of Slovenia. In accordance

<sup>1</sup> Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

<sup>2</sup> Freitag, Dr. W.K., 2007, Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning

with the legal basis passed by the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette No. 12/96), the Centre performs research, developmental and advisory activities and is the focal point where interests of the state and social partners in vocational and technical education converge, coordinate and connect.

The Centre is also the National Reference Point for national vocational qualifications which includes databases on vocational standards, catalogues of standards of subjects of specialisation for assessment as well as providers of procedures for the assessment of national vocational qualifications.

The Centre is a partner in the transnational project which is funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, entitled “New Hospitality”. This project which falls under the programme priority “Promotion of the transparency of professional qualifications”, aims to identify a methodology and instruments for the description, comparison and promotion of qualifications and competences in the hotel/hospitality sector, in support of their transparency, recognition and transferability, in order to foster employment opportunities and the competitiveness of the sector in the European reference area. More detail is given in the box below.

## New Hospitality Project<sup>1</sup>

The New Hospitality project began on 1 October 2006 and will terminate on 30 September 2008. The lead partner for the project is the Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sul Turismo e sulla Promozione Turistica in Italy. Other partner countries are Bulgaria, Malta, Romania and Slovenia (represented by the CPI and the Trade Union for Workers in Hospitality and Tourism).

The project proposes:

- o to indicate the evolution of typical professional figures, identifying their competences and picking up variances in contents and in professional dynamics;
- o to compare the professional competences found in the individual Partnership nations to reach common, homogeneous definitions;
- o to develop a common reference framework to adapt the portfolio of the competences and knowledge of workers to the ever renewing needs of the businesses operating in the sector;
- o to promote transparency of the competences, which can be acquired in formal, non-formal and informal ways, through the creation of a concrete device for the description and cataloguing of competences integrated with the Europass instrument.

Direct target groups and potential users of the final products include:

- o Hospitality industry workers, for whom the formal recognition and transparency of competencies and knowledge, acquired in various ways, are guaranteed to permit European mobility of professional qualifications
- o European educators and trainers, because the instruments proposed for the analysis of competencies are of interest in planning training interventions and for the dissemination of instruments for the transparency of qualifications.

Indirect targets, which can be identified in the public and private entities operating in the hotel sector: businesses, unions and category associations, political decision-makers who regulate orientation, training and the labour market.

The output which is expected to be produced over the two years of activity includes:

- o New hospitality research kit - Study and definition of the methodology and parameters of the research
- o New hospitality desk research – Study and analysis of the demand and supply in the hospitality sector, of the employment situation of the sector and of the skill and competence certification systems used.
- o New hospitality field research -Questionnaires exploring professional skill and competence needs will be distributed to entrepreneurs and workers in the sector. The results of the survey will be used to elaborate and test the research instruments.
- o New hospitality competence units database - Database of the minimum competence units with reference to the hospitality sector and with detailed descriptions, in correlation with the professional figures, by activities, by area of learning, by training credits, by ECTS credits.
- o New hospitality europass - Software and the related instructions manual which will guide workers in the sector through the preparation of a European curriculum vitae (for the part concerning individual skills/competences), in order to guarantee the legibility of the information contained therein, by following a common protocol which responds to the need for comprehension, a sharing of language and of a glossary and the focusing of information on the relevant aspects.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from the project website: [www.newhospitalityproject.com](http://www.newhospitalityproject.com)

### 32.3 Private Sector

The positive impact of the 2000 National Vocational Qualification Act is recognised among employers and other private sector stakeholders. Benefits include: rapid response to changes in working processes; shorter and cheaper procedures of introducing knowledge and competences; and that candidates who must prove vocational capacities do so by direct testing and certification.<sup>1</sup>

#### 32.3.1 Social Partner involvement

Social partners cooperate in planning vocational and professional training at all levels, defining occupational standards, adopting and implementing training programmes. The partners' authority at the national level, the National Council of Experts of the RS for Vocational Education and Training, deals with the proposals regarding occupational standards.<sup>2</sup>

Social partners are following the strategic objectives within the national programme of lifelong learning and are developing the culture of lifelong learning through collective agreements. The social partners have helped to raise the educational level and lower the structural discrepancies on the labour market, through education. Trade union representatives in companies encourage and motivate workers to access education. They try to implement, on all levels of collective agreements, a duty for the employer and right for the employee to lifelong learning.<sup>3</sup>

Lifelong learning centres include the following social partners: employees, schools which provide adult education, regional development agencies and providers of counselling and independent learning.

#### 32.3.2 Chamber activities in validation of informal and non-formal learning

In the last ten years a number of sectoral chambers have been established and many of these are very active in the system of recognition and assessment of NVQs. Among the chambers, it is important to mention the Chamber for Agriculture and Forestry, the Social Chamber, the Chamber for Health Care, Chamber for Private Security, Slovene Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chamber of Craft.

<sup>1</sup> Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

<sup>2</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications, Third follow-up report, 2005

<sup>3</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

The Chamber for Agriculture and Forestry has initiated the development of a wide range of NVQs in the field of agriculture, aimed at those farmers who wish to broaden their business.

The Slovene Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GZS) has elaborated a system of “Chamber exams” for the certification of non-formal learning.

Standards for certification are prepared by the different professional associations that are organised within the GZS. However, there is only a control of the final knowledge, and not of the learning path.

These chamber exams are available for all qualifications / knowledge that cannot be included in the NVQ, for example:

- if the qualification is very limited/narrow and specific (e.g. safety in the work place)
- if the occupation is new for Slovenia and therefore only a limited number of people have acquired knowledge in that field through non-formal and informal learning (e.g. real estate, accountancy for small companies...)

However, at the end of the procedure, the individual receives a letter of reference (and not an official certificate). This letter (and the qualifications indicated inside) can be recognised by all the firms that are members of the GZS<sup>1</sup>. There is no automatic recognition and no official regulation. This means that a firm can also refuse to recognise this validation.

The Chamber of Craft (OZS) has been a partner in the process of preparation of two occupational standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- for truck drivers
- for people responsible for logistics in international freight / international truck traffic.

These 2 certificates were developed to certify the knowledge of people already working in that field for many years, but who didn't have any official recognition. In fact, to be in line with an EU directive in this field, Slovenia, as a new member state, needed to establish a system of certificates in the field of international truck drivers.

Alongside their initiatives within the framework of NVQ, the two Chambers have developed another scheme for the recognition of non-formal and informal knowledge in the field of small-scale catering (cooking, service, food safety...). This certificate is needed if people wish to start an independent small catering business.

<sup>1</sup> Registration of firms in the Chamber was compulsory until 2006. Now the Chamber has voluntary membership.

Even though it has existed for more than 15 years, it is not yet recognised officially at the national level (it is not a NVQ). However, the two Chambers are planning to have it included in the NVQ system in the near future.

### 32.3.3 Private companies

A number of companies have now brought in validation for the certification of their employees. Most companies in the pharmaceutical sector have followed the example set by Krka, Slovenia's largest pharmaceutical company.

Along with in-house training, courses and workshops and training on the job, Krka was the first company to develop and start implementing six standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- production of final products (in the pharmaceutical sector)
- production of raw products (in the pharmaceutical sector)
- logistics.

Partners in the process of developing the system were the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (which provided the basic documents and implemented the law regarding the NVQ), Novartis, the second pharmaceuticals company in Slovenia (who helped to prepare and agree the content of the standards, together with CPI), the trade union confederation (a national level partner), the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and the Chamber of Commerce (a national-level partner).

These qualifications have been officially accepted by the Minister responsible for labour. As a result, NVQs at Krka can not only be obtained by completing in-house training (working on the job in production, storage etc) and attending in-house lectures (some 150-200) but crucially also by carrying out practical on the job training and then meeting the official standards in written and practical tests.

Having built a strong network with the other Slovene firms from the pharmaceutical sector, Krka has been designated as the only institution which can assess and certify the NVQ for these six standards. To date, more than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Education and Training Centre, Krka.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system in Slovenia. These institutions are prepared to compile the portfolio and assess the knowledge, skills and competences of the candidates. The firms are

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of Krka, October 2007

mostly located in the capital city, Ljubljana, but also in other large towns such as Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto, Nova Gorica (where the main actor is the Technical school centre) and Murska Sobota.

All fields of activity are represented. The two largest companies are Krka (pharmaceuticals) and Elektro Slovenija –Eles (the only electric power transmission company in Slovenia). Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation (to have the necessary materials, financial conditions and human resources in place) to become certification centres.

### 32.4 Third Sector

Several other initiatives have been developed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education together with local actors in the field of non-formal and informal learning, but even though they receive financial support from the Slovene state (Ministry of Education, National employment Agency...), the knowledge acquired is not officially recognised nor validated:

- Centres for self-directed learning are active (*središča za samostojno učenje*).
- The Learning Exchange (*borza znanja*).
- Study Circles (*študijski krožki*).
- Folk universities
- Project Learning for Young Adults (*Projektno učenje za mlade*) who dropped out of school;
- A literacy programme Training for Life Efficiency (*Usposabljanje za življensko uspešnost*).
- Programmes developed within the University of the Third Age.

Our review of the literature has not identified further activity carried out within the third sector, relating to informal and non-formal learning.

## 32.5 Conclusions

Procedures for setting standards and for the assessment of prior learning have been in place since 2000 in Slovenia. The **National Vocational Qualification Act** adopted in 2000<sup>1</sup> and the accompanying regulations<sup>2</sup> introduced a certification system, which provides access to nationally recognised certificates for specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), enabling recognition of prior learning and experiences of adults. The knowledge and skills required to acquire a NVQ are determined by a catalogue of standards for professional knowledge and skills. These catalogues are developed on the basis of the relevant occupational standard.

By 2007, 354 occupational standards and 105 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills had been published in the Official Gazette. Further, the legislation was amended in 2006, in order to link formal and informal education and work experience, to ensure partnership and cooperation in the development of NVQs and in their promotion. This should enable transfer between different fields and levels of education and training and ensure the transparency of implementation of the certification procedures.

The positive impact of the 2000 National Vocational Qualification Act is recognised among employers and other private sector stakeholders. Social partners cooperate in planning vocational and professional training at all levels, defining knowledge standards, adopting and implementing training programmes. There are notable validation initiatives which have been led by the Chambers and there is evidence of the involvement of private companies in the development of validation, most notably in the pharmaceuticals sector.

In contrast, there is little evidence of third sector involvement in the development validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovenia.

<sup>1</sup> *Official Journal of RS, No. 81/3708/2000*. Amended in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> such as *The Regulation on Method and Procedure of Assessment and Certification of NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 97-4339/2003) and *The Regulation on Procedure on Acquiring NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 017-01-015/99-005), some of them currently revised

## 33.0 Spain<sup>1</sup>

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*By Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 33.1 Introduction

There is an ongoing increase in awareness in Spain of the benefits of recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning. Spain is firmly committed to lifelong learning, and the recognition and validation of informal and non formal learning is seen as fundamental in its development.

Policies have been designed in the different public administrations in line with this aim, which have been further consolidated through legislation. Recognition and validation mainly takes place in relation to the qualifications which are awarded through the formal education system.

Recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning was already implicit in the Spanish legislation in the seventies, in particular with regard to facilitating access to formal education through recognition of competences acquired via non-formal experiences and mechanisms. Subsequently, it was made possible to accredit informal and non-formal learning through partial or complete diplomas and certificates of professionalism.

At present, legislation is being developed explicitly and directly dealing with the recognition and validation of competences acquired through professional and social experiences and in non formal education. The national framework is widening opportunities to accredit non-formal and informal learning.

### 33.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

#### 33.2.1 Legal and Structural framework

The legal Framework related to recognition of non-formal and informal learning is made up of the following Acts:

- The Education Act (Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006, de 3 de mayo de 2006) which regulates the educational system, except higher education
- The Higher Education Act (Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril)

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Spain chapter of the 2005 Inventor, by Mencia de Lemus

- The Employment Act (Ley de Empleo 56/2003) - currently under revision, includes continuous education and occupational training as an active employment policy
- The Qualifications and Vocational Training Act (Ley Orgánica 5/2002 de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y la Formación Profesional)

The **Education Act** (Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006, de 3 de mayo de 2006) regulates the educational system, except for higher education. It is based on the principle of lifelong learning, establishing that every person should have the opportunity to be educated throughout his/her life, both within and outside of the education system, and that public administrations should provide flexible learning opportunities.

The Act contains a chapter dedicated to adult education, in which it is established that adults are able to learn through both formal and non-formal methods, such as through work and social experiences. For this reason, the Act states that there should be pathways between the two types of learning and mechanisms for validation of informal and non-formal learning (art. 66.4). Among the different measures included within the act are measures to permit access to formal education for individuals who do not meet the academic requirements, and measures to evaluate and accredit partial or full general, vocational and arts qualifications.

The **Higher Education Act** (Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril) rules that the government will regulate the requirements for academic validation of professional experience. In addition the government will regulate the procedures to provide access to higher education, through accreditation of a determined professional experience, for individuals who do not comply with the academic entry requirements.

The **Employment Act** (Ley de Empleo 56/2003), currently under revision, includes continuous education and occupational training as an active employment policy. This act establishes the certificates of professionalism as an official accreditation of professional competences. These certificates do not have an academic value.

The **Qualifications and Vocational Training Act** (Ley Orgánica 5/2002 de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y la Formación Profesional), adopted in June 2002, aims to create a “National System of Qualifications and Professional Training”. It involves both the programmes of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and introduces greater flexibility, which enables vocational education and training to be linked more closely to the labour market and opens up possibilities for lifelong learning and the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning. Among other instruments, a National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications is created. Its principle task is to act as an observatory of the productive sectors, providing a catalogue of the standards of professional competences in the labour market, which serves as a reference in the design of VET qualifications and

certificates of professionalism. This technical body provides support to a consultative body. The government has the obligation to establish the procedures and requisites for validation of professional competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning. These procedures and requirements are currently under development and discussion in a working group in the General Council for Vocational Training.

### 33.2.2 Principles and objectives of the legislative framework

The legislation develops measures to allow assessment and accreditation of non formal and informal education with a view to:

- Facilitate the return of adults to the education system to continue their education, without having to comply with the academic requirements
- Promote lifelong learning by validating partially or completely a qualification or a certificate of professionalism
- Respond to the need for validation of professional competences acquired through vocational training, professional experience and other non formal education
- Create, in vocational training, a common national standard of professional competences.

### 33.2.3 Background

Recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning was already implicit in the Spanish legislation in the seventies, in particular with regard to facilitating access to formal education for adults. Subsequently the possibility of partial or complete accreditation of informal and non-formal learning in diplomas, and certificates of professionalism were incorporated.

At present, regulation is being developed explicitly and directly dealing with the recognition and validation of competences acquired through professional and social experiences and in non formal education.

Changes in legislation aim to address the following challenges:

- Adapting the Spanish education system to the common goals of the EU
- Promoting Lifelong learning
- Boosting the role of education to provide equal opportunities and social inclusion
- Promoting the return to the education system of adults
- Creating a more flexible education system with more pathways
- Labour mobility within Spain and abroad

In particular, labour mobility highlights the importance of validation of qualifications in order to:

- Guarantee recognition of competences by companies and training providers in Spain and in the EU
- Facilitate job searching
- Facilitate mobility in education
- Prevent having a significant number of citizens without official accreditation of their competences

#### Main Actions

- **Entry tests**, which permit access to an education level without complying with the academic requirements. The tests do not provide accreditation of an education level, but prove sufficiency of maturity and knowledge to study in that education level. There are entry tests to grant access to vocational training at different levels, art studies, sport studies and higher education.
- **Tests to attain qualifications** exist to obtain the certificate of Secondary education, certificate of post-secondary education, VET system qualifications and some university degrees. In the case of VET, some involve the assessment of professional competences, using interviews, observation on the job, projects, etc.
- **Candidate Initial Assessment** (only for orientation purposes, it does not provide official accreditation) provides an assessment of the experience and knowledge to assist the candidate in choosing the "module" with a view to obtain the certificate of secondary education
- **Assessment and Recognition of occupational competence** is still in development. It will rule out the procedures and requirements to assess professional competences acquired in non formal or informal context and will provide the partial or complete validation of a VET diploma or a professionalism certificate
- **Special awards or occupational licences** which are needed for concrete activities of a certain profession. These are granted outside of the education system. Nevertheless, VET graduates are increasingly, depending on their speciality, obtaining the appropriate occupational licence simultaneously.

#### 33.2.4 ERA 03 Project

The ERA 03 project is a pilot programme which was undertaken in 2003. It was initially proposed within the General Vocational Training Council<sup>1</sup> and promoted by the Ministry of

<sup>1</sup> This is a consultative institution with institutional representation of both the public administration and social actors and embedded within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Education and Science, with involvement from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the social partners (through their representation in the General Vocational Training Council)<sup>1</sup>. In order to ease the follow-up of the project, was concentrated on a limited number of Autonomous Regions (seven in total), each of them implementing the pilot accreditation experience for one or two occupations.

The project was an experimental programme in which for the first time the assessment, recognition and accreditation of professional competences had been tested. It made use of the units of competence of the National Catalogue of vocational qualification which was still under development at that time.

Beneficiaries of this project were workers with professional competences without official qualifications. Documentation of their professional experience was required to undergo the validation procedure.

Beneficiaries, observers and evaluators who took part in the project received guides with supporting material<sup>2</sup>:

- Beneficiary guide: includes supporting material, the application form, the training/professional career record and information about the evaluation's process and framework.
- Observer's guide: includes supporting material for initial orientation, advice and assessment, documentation for the interview with the candidate, proficiency reference points, self-evaluation questionnaires, initial assessment report and proficiencies dossier.
- Evaluator's guide: includes description of their role, evaluation planning, proof of proficiency guides.

In total 302 candidates were evaluated, with an average of 20-25 applicants for each of the 9 chosen professional reference points (related to certain occupations) and Autonomous Communities. Of these, 235 received full accreditation (78%), 35 partial accreditation (12%) and 32 (10%) did not obtain accreditation.

Some measures have been proposed for improvement. The majority of the beneficiaries noted that the evaluation should be closer to the reality of their profession. They considered evaluation on the job and the gathering of direct evidence of performance on the job to be essential. In addition, some beneficiaries were discouraged by the fact that

<sup>1</sup> *Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

<sup>2</sup> *Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

the gap between the proficiencies to be evaluated and their real experience on the job was too large<sup>1</sup>.

### 33.2.5 Higher education

Universities have regulations regarding the validation of prior qualifications and degrees, which are applied with a wide degree of autonomy. However, the Act on higher education rules that the government will regulate the specific rules for the validation of prior learning acquired by non-conventional means or by professional experience.

Some higher education institutes are involved in EU (Leonardo and Socrates) and national projects dealing with the issue of recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning. Examples are the Fundación General of the University of Valladolid, Research Centre on Adult Education of the University of Barcelona, Deusto University and Granada University. For example, the Research Centre on the Education of Adults of the University of Barcelona and the Association for the Lifelong Learning of Adults were Spanish partners in the Grundtvig project APEL (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning) (2000-2002). This project examined how systems to validate non-formal and informal learning work from a student perspective. Through interviews with adult learners, a variety of validation methodologies were evaluated, leading to recommendations for improvement in policy and practice. One of the end results was a handbook for adult learners to assist them in the validation process<sup>2</sup>. Another example is the Fundación General of the University of Valladolid that has developed tools for the validation of competencies, in a project financed by the INEM in the context of the accompanying and complementary measures to training.

### 33.2.6 Regional public initiatives

Besides the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training, the National Catalogue of vocational qualifications, etc. many less centralised initiatives are set up in parallel. These initiatives often do not exclusively focus on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, but are set up in a wider perspective.

An example is the "Integrated Employment Service Plan" (SIPES) of the Ministry of Labour which focuses on the establishment of personalised employment programmes for disadvantaged groups among the unemployed. The SIPES plan is run by town halls, amongst other institutions, and is linked with the "trade houses" (Casas de Oficios) and "workshop-schools" (Escuelas-Taller), whose purpose is to share the training of young people - in craft trades and professions - with work on useful public tasks such as restoring historical buildings, repairing parks and gardens and so on. Part of the SIPES plan consists of the development of procedures for competence-based assessment among the

<sup>1</sup> Theme 8, *accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

<sup>2</sup> ISOC, Socrates project database, retrieved 2007: <http://www.isoc.siu.no/isocii.nsf/projectlist/88271>

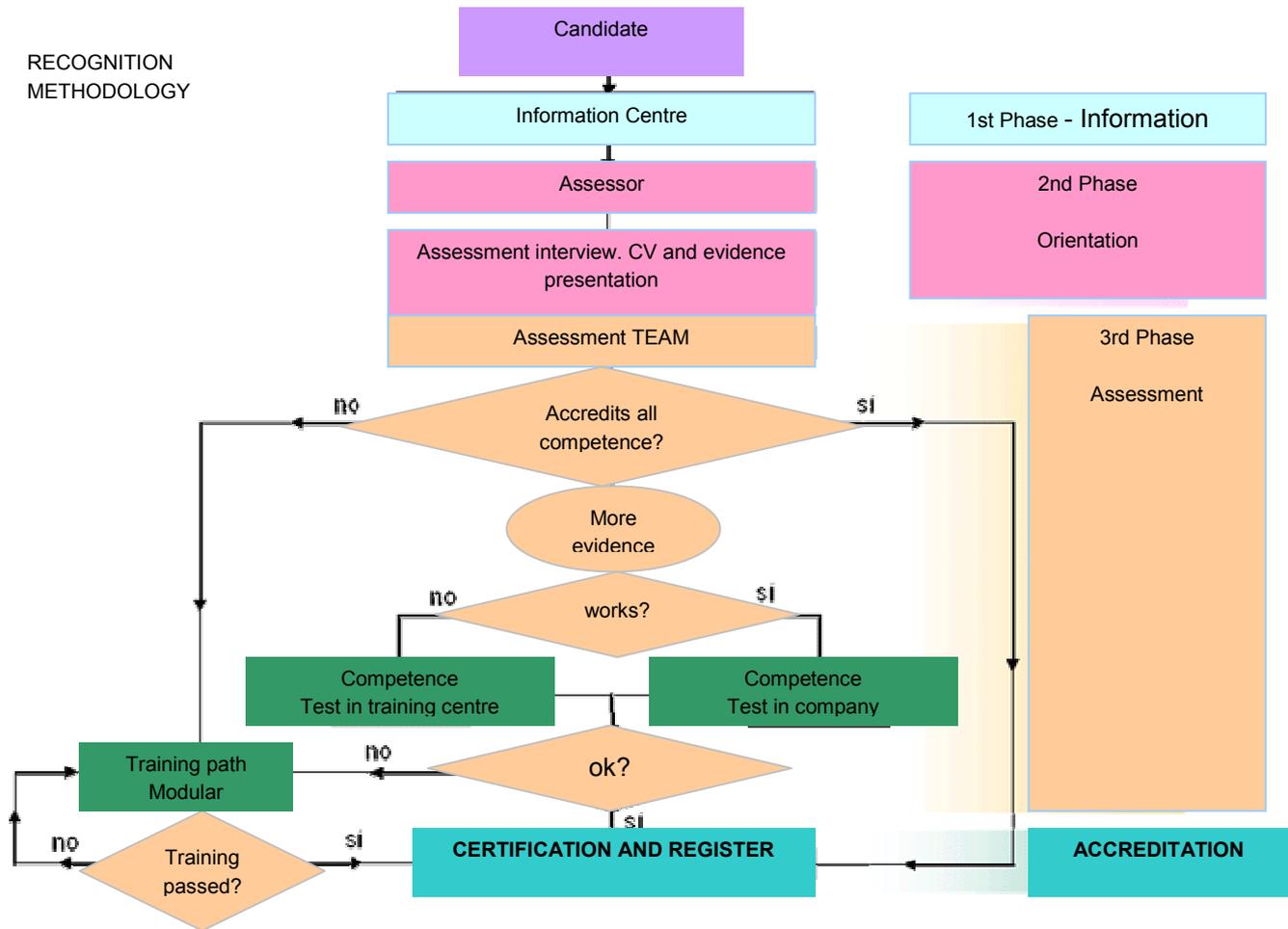
unemployed. It offers a combination of interviews and tests to develop the professional and competence profile of an individual. The procedure does not lead to formal accreditation but has the objective to improve the supervision and awareness of an individual's own abilities<sup>1</sup>.

At regional level, the Basque country was the first region to accredit professional training in October 2004. The Basque country has its own Institute of Qualifications (Agencia Vasca para la Garantía de la Calidad) which has implemented since October 2004 the assessment and recognition process presented in the diagram below<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Duvekot, R, Schuur, K., Paulusse, J. (editors), 2005, The unfinished story of VPL, valuation and validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures, Kenniscentrum EVC, Netherlands; Eiro online, active employment policies in Spain, an overview. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/1997/07/feature/es9707214f.html>

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo da Vinci programme, professional competences and credit units in craft firms and SMEs, national system and best practices in Spain about identification, assessment and certification of competences, retrieved September 2007: [http://www.ecipar.it/ifppmi/materiale/Documenti/Report\\_Spain.doc](http://www.ecipar.it/ifppmi/materiale/Documenti/Report_Spain.doc)

**Figure 33.1 Assessment and recognition process introduced in the Basque country**



### 33.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

#### 33.3.1 Social partners (sectoral)

Some social partners support the development of a national approach to validation of informal and non-formal learning, while others promote some sectoral recognition (the construction sector, etc.)<sup>1</sup>. For example, the employer's organisations CEOE (Confederation of Spanish employers) and CEPYME (Confederation of Spanish SMEs) believe that the methods to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning should be based on objective criteria, set by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The trade unions, Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), believe that methods for recognition and validation should be based on more qualitative criteria within concrete jobs, since that is the only place where social partners have the opportunity to participate in accreditation<sup>2</sup>.

Several initiatives are financed by FORCEM (Foundation for Continuing Training - Fundación para la Formación Continua); a joint national organisation empowered to put into practice the national continuing training agreements which have been agreed among the most representative employers' organisations and trade unions. These initiatives mostly focus on developing within industrial sectors (particularly those with difficulties finding accredited workers) a credible procedure of recognition and certification of professional competences acquired through professional experience.

When other sectoral initiatives have been initiated, they mostly have been developed within the framework of the Complementary Actions and Accompanying Measures in Relation to Training or through the Leonardo da Vinci II 2000/2006 Community vocational training programmes. Most of these initiatives examine to what extent recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning are included in policy and how continuing training can be improved, rather than focusing on the creation of methods for the validation of informal and non-formal learning<sup>3</sup>. Examples of social partners involved are the Spanish Association for welding and union technologies; the National Federation of Food, Beverage and Tobacco; the Spanish Confederation of Young entrepreneurs; the Unión General de Trabajadores; and employer organisation of Cataluña (SEFES).

An example of a project is the 2003 Toolbridge project (Tools for assessment and recognition of skills in the building sector), funded by the Leonardo programme, that analyses existing tools and mechanisms to recognize informal and non-formal learning

<sup>1</sup> *Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006*, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

<sup>2</sup> Duvekot, R, Schuur, K., Paulusse, J. (editors), 2005, *The unfinished story of VPL, valuation and validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures*, Kenniscentrum EVC, Netherlands

<sup>3</sup> Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

towards skills accreditation and proposes new or revised tools/methodologies for use, particularly in the construction sector. The coordinator is the Spanish Instituto de formacion y estudios sociales (IFES) which is a non-profit foundation created by the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT-General Workers' Trade Unions, one of the two most representative Trade Unions in Spain)<sup>1</sup>. This organisation has also been involved in a Socrates project Che-mi-tec (System of evaluation, recognition and validation of proficiencies sensitive to technological changes in the chemical sector) (2004-2006). This project analysed trends in the chemical sector to identify associated proficiencies in processes of change in order to create adequate reference points; evaluation instruments to assess available proficiencies and an instrument for the validation of proficiencies<sup>2</sup>.

### 33.3.2 Individual companies

A number of larger companies have shown good practices in developing policies of ongoing assessment of all their human resources. This has helped not only to identify gaps and define competence development activities, but to make the most of human capital and to increase efficiency. SMEs are slightly lagging behind in this respect<sup>3</sup>.

We can outline that there are some common aspects in these projects: mainly there are three key efforts:

- An effort towards the recognition or analysis of the new skills or new training needs that are needed in some sectors of the economy;
- An effort towards a validation, at regional, national and/or European level, of certain trainings or certain skills as valid to undertake certain professions
- An effort to draw up guides or methodologies for recognising and validating informal learning within a sector of the economy.

Examples of companies/institutes focusing on developing initiatives towards the validation of informal and non-formal skills are the Institute of Theatre of Barcelona (Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona) and the Technological Institute of Castilla y León.

Most of the initiatives are undertaken through EU programmes such as the Leonardo and Socrates programmes.

An example of such a project is “Inflow – informal learning opportunities in the workplace” which is a Leonardo project focusing on developing a model for the identification and

<sup>1</sup> ETV. Retrieved September 2007:

[http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects\\_Networks/SocialP/project\\_details.asp?id=1146](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/SocialP/project_details.asp?id=1146)

<sup>2</sup> Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM t; SREP lifelong learning, *details on European projects*. Retrieved September 2007:

[http://www.srep.ro/english/detalii\\_proiecte.html](http://www.srep.ro/english/detalii_proiecte.html)

<sup>3</sup> Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

recognition of informal learning taking place within SMEs. The idea is to develop methodologies for accreditation of these informal learning achievements across the EU, among others in the hotel and hospitality sector in Spain (Balearic Islands). The Spanish partner - BDF (Balear de desarrollo y formación) - is an SME active in both the research and training fields, with close links with regional actors and social partners in the hotel, catering, travel and tourism sectors<sup>1</sup>.

Another example is the CAST (Competencies and skills in tourism) project, a Leonardo project with two Spanish partners: BDF (Balear de desarrollo y formación) and Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma (2003-2006). The aims of this project were to analyse what ICT professional competences are required in the tourist sector in Spain and other countries; what training in ICT is performed; and what training is necessary. The end results of the projects were a methodology for the recognition, validation and accreditation of competences in the work place in the tourist sector and a handbook for the harmonisation of professional competences in the tourist sector. The accreditation methodology made use of a web tool (CREDICAST) and an ePortfolio. The accreditation process involved the participation of an evaluation organisation, in this case the business itself as well as a certifying organisation.<sup>2</sup>

### **33.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector**

There is little information available on activities undertaken in the third sector regarding the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. INJUVE (Youth Institute) – which has been appointed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to undertake initiatives in the youth sector - and the Consejo de la Juventud (Youth Council) do not consider the issue of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in any of their programmes. However, INJUVE does authorise some organisations to issue a non-formal certificate to trainers which allows them to work with children. As INJUVE is aware that these certificates are not enough, they have contacted the INCUAL (Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones) to ask for a clear definition of necessary qualifications so that they can be validated under the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training.

### **33.5 Conclusions**

In Spain, several initiatives with respect to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning are being and have been set up, and concern the complete education system.

<sup>1</sup> Inflow website. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.inflow.eu.com/index.asp?s=pubpartners>

<sup>2</sup> Contribution of BDF and information retrieved from the web. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.castsite.net/descripcion.asp?idioma=2&conexion=>

In 2003, the ERA 03 project was undertaken to test for the first time the assessment, recognition and accreditation of professional competences, making use of the National Catalogue of vocational qualifications. On the basis of the project several new measures have been proposed for the future and several Spanish Autonomous Regions are taking further action.

In higher education, attention to recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is given in the recently approved Act on Higher Education (ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril), which clearly rules out that the government has to regulate the requirement for academic validation of professional experience. In addition, several universities are involved in pilot projects, mostly funded through EU programmes.

Social partners and individual companies – particularly the larger ones - seem to be involved in many different small-scale initiatives, either funded through the EU or through national or regional funding. In the third sector, very little activity is taking place and publicity of existing initiatives seems to be low.

## 34.0 Sweden<sup>1</sup>

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By Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 34.1 Introduction

The validation of informal and non-formal learning is considered to be a key issue in Sweden with respect to the overall lifelong learning strategy.

Validation is defined by the Swedish government as: “A process which involves a structured assessment, evaluation, documentation and recognition of knowledge and competence possessed by a person independently of how it is acquired.”<sup>2</sup>

At the moment, no national regulation exists with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning. The National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 to enhance regional cooperation and to explore quality and methodological issues around the topic.

.The responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level and strongly embedded in the municipal adult education system. Emphasis is put by the Swedish government on the importance of involvement of educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities.

### 34.2 Public Sector

#### 34.2.1 Policy on validation

Since the late 1990s, the concept of validation has been mainly used in Sweden in the public education system for adults and is considered to be a key issue in lifelong learning<sup>3</sup>. The first initiative in the field of validating informal and non-formal learning was the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) (1997-2002). This initiative aimed to combat unemployment through the expansion of adult education in Swedish municipalities. During this initiative a number of pilot projects were launched, focusing on developing new forms of accreditation of prior learning and validation.

This initiative was soon followed by the bill on Adult Learning and the Future Development of Adult Education (*Vuxnas lärande och utvecklingen av vuxenutbildningen*)

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the Sweden chapter of the 2005 Inventory by Vasilios Nikitas

<sup>2</sup> Vuxenutbildningslag (Ds 2005:33).

<sup>3</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006; *Implementing the “education and training 2010” work programme, 2005 progress report, Sweden*, December 2005, European Commission Education and Culture

(2000/2001:72). In this bill, emphasis is put on the fact that any resident in Sweden should be able to have his or her knowledge and competence validated within the framework of municipal adult education, and this validation should be documented. As a result, this bill granted additional funds - until 2008 - to municipalities to undertake further development projects in a range of issues, including validation<sup>1</sup>.

Subsequently, in 2003, this bill was followed by the bill on Validation (Ds 2003:23) (*Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande*). In this bill the government stated that it was too early to regulate validation. More time should be given to pilot projects to gather more experiences, and to further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing acts. In the bill, the government emphasises that the responsibility for validation should be shared between educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities and that especially regional cooperation is essential.

As a result, in December 2003, the Swedish government appointed the “Swedish National Commission on Validation” (Valideringsdelegationen) for the period 2004-2007 to promote and further develop validation methods and enhance (regional) cooperation. The Commission works under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Research (Utbildningsdepartementet). Its main responsibilities are the following<sup>2</sup>:

- The development of common principles for validation to ensure quality, legitimacy and equivalence;
- The development of a methodology for validation;
- The strengthening of (regional) cooperation with educational authorities, business organisations, social partners and municipalities;
- To promote and inform about validation; and
- To work out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

In addition, the Swedish National Commission on Validation has been commissioned by the government to investigate, in cooperation with the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and the National Agency for Services to Universities and University colleges, how validation of foreign academic degrees, education and work experience could be organised and carried out in a more efficient and qualitative way

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>2</sup> Valideringsdelegationen website. Retrieved 31 August 07:

[http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/om\\_oss/in\\_english.htm](http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/om_oss/in_english.htm); *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

One of the most stringent questions in Sweden at the moment is the quality aspect of validation. Due to the very varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, one of the main objectives of the Commission is to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation<sup>1</sup>.

The Commission is financed by the Swedish government and has at its disposal €6.5 million (SEK 60 million) until 2007 for its activities. At present there are also a number of ongoing collaboration projects involving the Commission, central industry associations and existing validation providers<sup>2</sup>.

#### 34.2.2 Top-down initiative

The Swedish government has given the National Agency for School Improvement (*Myndigheten för skolutveckling*) the task of extending adult skills validation pilot schemes in different sectors from 2003-2005. These pilots have been carried out mostly by trade organisations in cooperation with the labour unions and the institutions performing validation, particularly in the following sectors: plastic, chemistry and moulding; house maintenance; transport and environmental protection; building and construction; heating, ventilation, plumbing and sanitary engineering; and the service sector.

The pilots also resulted in an agreement with representatives of the different sectors on ten general competences or key qualifications that should facilitate the identification of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to certain subjects or vocations. These ten competences are: (1) ability to handle information; (2) ability to use the language of the country for communication; (3) ability to solve problems and to plan and organise the work; (4) ability to take responsibility and carry out tasks; (5) ability to cooperate; (6) ability to use different kinds of equipment and tools; (7) quality awareness; (8) aesthetic awareness and attitude; (9) awareness of and attitude to work ethics; and (10) ability to innovate, change and develop.

Although the experimentation period has been short, an evaluation of the University of Göteborg indicates that results have been positive. The following conclusions were drawn<sup>3</sup>:

- Several different methods have been used for validation, but it has not yet been established how to guarantee quality, equivalence and legitimate authority;

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>3</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

- Validation must be carried out in close cooperation between the social partners and education and training institutes;
- Traditional methods of validation using written tests and practical work have dominated validation activities;
- There are great differences to be observed among sectors. It is necessary to develop general criteria, which are essential for all sectors; and
- Experimentation will have to continue before general principles can be decided upon.

### 34.2.3 Regional and local public sector initiatives

Swedish municipalities are very engaged in validation activities in the framework of municipal adult education. It is estimated that in 2000, two thirds of all municipalities were involved in validation projects and activities and that in 2005 this number increased to 90%. In 2000, approximately 2300 persons had their competence, knowledge and skills validated and in 2005 this number increased to approximately 8000 persons within municipal adult education<sup>1</sup>.

In 2005, there were about ten regional operations which provided a “brokerage function” or were in charge of coordinating validation operations in their respective regions. This number has gone slightly up in 2006, but the problem is that their funding is mostly linked to a variety of projects whose funding is external and temporary. In most cases, the responsible authority for these regional operations tends to be the regional skills council (*regionala kompetensråd*), an association of local authorities or similar entity<sup>2</sup>.

CityAkademin holds the role of the centre for validation in the Örebro municipality. The box below outlines its responsibilities and some projects which the organisation has carried out.

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

## City Akademin, a local learning- and validationcenter for adults in Örebro

The commission of CityAkademin is to be the centre for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VPL) within the Örebro municipality through:

- coordination of the VPL process locally and regionally
- being responsible for study and vocational guidance prior to validation
- pursuing visiting work and information work
- developing instruments for validations towards new areas
- producing material for self-evaluation and mapping
- development of methods and documentation
- creating networks for validation of prior learning
- competence development within validation of prior learning
- follow-up, evaluation and quality assurance.

In May 2005, the Adult Education Board and the Labour Market Council assigned CityAkademin an enhanced commission to create a centre for validation of prior learning. A team (two full-time and four part-time employees), is working strategically and operatively with method development, organisation and spreading knowledge about validation to citizens, companies and education providers. The key goals are to increase the number of persons who are validated and the number of occupations which can be validated.

There are numerous areas of validation, but with a focus on cookery, ventilation and sanitation, industry, forestry, administration, information technology, transport and childcare. The number of validations has increased from 34 in 2004, to 128 in 2005 and 214 in September 2007.

Three method development projects have started with support from the County Administrative Board and the Swedish National Commission on Validation. During 2007, a project with support from the European Social Fund makes it possible to work with a model where the validation process is separated from the education plan with 100 long-term unemployed persons, in cooperation with the local job centre.

The CityAkademin also has a mission from the county administrative board to be responsible for a network with study and vocational counsellors and a web site [www.orebro.se/valideringsguiden](http://www.orebro.se/valideringsguiden). In September 2007, the CityAkademin received a European VPL-award for its work on validation.

There are also about ten validation centres which have been established by a local authority, a skills council or a local-authority association. These centres are often involved in the actual performance of validation and the co-ordination and development of validation measures<sup>1</sup>.

Another group of institutes involved in validation on a local/regional level are adult educational associations and folk high-schools<sup>2</sup>.

Another large regional and local actor in validation is the employment agencies. They commission validation from a municipality or validation centre. In a questionnaire (September 2005) they filled in for the Swedish National Commission on Validation they indicated the follow sectors in which validation takes most frequently place: (1) production and manufacturing; (2) healthcare, (3) transport, (4) building and construction; (5) handicraft; (6) hotel, restaurant and meal services; (7) installation; (8) management and maintenance; (9) business and administration; (10) computers, ICT and communication; (11) pedagogical work; and (12) buying, selling and marketing. According to the Swedish National Commission on Validation, no validation activities have been commissioned in culture, media, design, environment, national resources or security<sup>3</sup>.

The Malmö Centre of Validation carried out a project over the period 2004-2006, working with immigrants as a specific target group. The project is described in more detail in the box below:

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>3</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

## Making newcomers competencies visible

The Malmö Centre of Validation, with support from ESF funding, ran a validation project with the specific target group of immigrants, during the period 2004-2006.

As part of the city's induction programme, newly-arrived immigrants prepared a portfolio of their competences. The participants, with guidance from teachers and counsellors, prepared a qualification portfolio which gave a detailed description of their knowledge and skills. 1200 participants took part - either newcomers or unemployed people with a foreign background. Among them there were 200 who carried out an occupational assessment and 100 who were given opportunities to validate their competencies against the upper secondary vocational programme.

The external evaluation of the project found, among other things, that the participants were able to better present their competencies. The support from teachers meant that newcomers were given better opportunities to learn basic Swedish language. The support from guidance counsellors and employment officers meant that they have a well-prepared document for matching individuals against work.

In an on-going project, "Making newcomers competencies visible in Skåne" with contribution from the (ERF) European Refugee Fund, the Centre of Validation is implementing this way of working in the 33 municipalities in the Region of Skåne. For the moment the Centre of Validation is co-operating with 24 municipalities. The aims of the new project are:

- that all newcomers in the Region of Skåne work with their qualification portfolio during their introduction to Swedish society and their training in the Swedish language.
- to create more assessors within a great number of occupations.

Another example of a regional validation project is Meritea AB, the Centre for recognition and assessment of prior learning (validation) in the Western Region of Sweden.

## Meritea AB, Centre for recognition and assessment of prior learning

Meritea AB has two different areas of business: validation and strategic competence support. It has existed since 1998 and started as a project financed by the EU.

Today Meritea AB is still publicly financed and it is an institution, steered by many actors in society, with representation from the public as well as private business world and social partners.

One success factor of Meritea is its strong network of stakeholders, for example in steering groups and working groups. This close cooperation enables the validation process to be flexible to real demands and qualifications in the labour-market. In contrast to the steering groups, the working groups are operative, i.e. they work together to find out which methods are the most suitable ones to be used within the specific sector/vocation.

The validation methods used have to take all kind of learning into consideration; formal, informal as well as non-formal. The setting where knowledge and competence have to be recognised depends upon the purpose and expected outcome of the validation. The documentation and outcome might be upper secondary school grades (not the grade "fail"!), competence certificates of different kinds as well as different kinds of qualification portfolios depending upon purpose, vocational background and ethnicity.

In the portfolio, the individual draws up his/her knowledge and competence based upon his/her own experience and ten general key competences, as well as those designed by the Folk High Schools. This is prepared individually, but in group for the benefit of reflection and coaching.

Another focus for the methods of Meritea AB is accentuating situated learning, which is expressed through an ambition to assess knowledge and competence in a "real/authentic" setting, i.e. a work environment. If this is not possible, a realistic setting in a VET-school is created.

A key aim of the validation process for Meritea is the individual's employability. The results of validation for construction workers show its usefulness and importance - 85 % of participants in the whole validation-process to obtain the qualification for a skilled worker gained employment immediately after the validation process was completed.

## 34.2.4 Validation in practice

### 34.2.4.1 *Benefits*

For participants, validation of skills and competences can be seen as a “ritual” which increases their self awareness and gives them a chance to clearly identify their skills and competences which can help them to gain a documented qualification or to find the right level of education at which to start. It leads to a more professional and reflective attitude as the participant’s knowledge is confirmed and challenged, which leads to more reflections on what one does and wants to do in the future.<sup>1</sup>

### 34.2.4.2 *Legal framework*

In order to qualify to enter a national upper secondary programme, a student needs to have completed compulsory education with pass grades in Swedish, English and mathematics. However, there are three ways to by-pass this regulation through the validation of prior learning<sup>2</sup>:

1. Municipal adult education accepts students without any formal qualifications. The student’s previous knowledge and experiences are validated and the student is accepted to enter a course when they see fit. Municipal adult education is part of the formal education system so the credits and qualifications the student receives are equal to those in upper secondary education both in the labour market and as entrance requirements for higher education.
2. Folk high schools are part of the non-formal education system. They decide their own entrance requirements and have no fixed curricula but can decide what education and training programmes to offer. A three-year education at a folk high school qualifies for university entrance, which means an entrance into the formal education system. Folk high schools also offer vocational training programmes, of which their qualifications are usually accepted on the labour market.
3. Until 2008, an adult of 25 years old with at least four years of work experience and with a knowledge of Swedish and English corresponding to upper secondary school education, fulfils the requirements for basic eligibility to higher education. From 2008, universities and university colleges can decide themselves on the grounds of selection to be used for up to one third of their places. This gives the higher education institutions a possibility to assess informal and non-formal learning, work experience etc. with relevance to the education they are applying for<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fejes. A, power point presentation: *Transition of care workers to assistant nurses- recognition of prior learning in in-service training*. University of Linköping.

<sup>2</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>3</sup> This regulation is not entirely new, but an amendment has been made to increase the number of student places this ground of selection can be used for.

#### 34.2.4.3 *Participants in validation*

Three main categories of adults can be identified as target groups for validation of their competences<sup>1</sup>:

1. Adult immigrants with vocational training and/or experience from their country of origin who apply for a job in Sweden or who might need additional training;
2. Adults who apply for education or training and who have competence from non-formal and informal learning. They can get their training duration reduced, if their competences can be documented and acknowledged; and
3. Employees and unemployed persons who wish to start a new career.

#### 34.2.4.4 *Elements of the validation procedure*

In terms of the validation procedure itself, the National Swedish Commission on Validation has identified a list of elements in the validation process. This list does not imply that all elements must always be performed, or that they have to take place on a single occasion<sup>2</sup>.

Elements of a validation procedure and structure to be followed<sup>3</sup>:

- **General competence mapping** :The individual performs - either alone or together with a guide or official - a first exploration of knowledge and skills. The reason for validation is examined and a decision is made on whether to continue to the next phase or not. Interviews and self-assessment tools are used to provide a more diverse picture of the real skills possessed by the individual. The estimated time for this phase is 1-2 hours and should lead to a recommendation or formal statement.
- **In-depth competence mapping**: Specialists (vocational teachers, occupational assessors, representatives of industry associations or a vocational committee) in the specific subject or occupational fields intended for validation should participate in this phase. Together with the individual, the specialist will agree on the level and status to which the knowledge and skills validated correspond. This phase will require 2-8 hours and consists mainly of various theoretical and practical elements resulting in a more detailed description of skills. Documents are to be issued in the form of a formal statement or a certificate.
- **Competence assessment – statement of attainment**: The third phase can consist of an assessment of skills in relation to established skills descriptions or course objectives. The assessment is done by a vocational teacher or occupational assessor. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is implemented in the form of theoretical and/or practical elements. A certificate is normally issued at the end of this phase.

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>3</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

- **Competence assessment by formal means – certificate, authorisation, examination etc.:**The fourth phase focuses on verification. The objective is to issue a final documentation in the form of a relevant legal document. There is a risk that the individual may not reach the level of knowledge required in the tests or exams. If this is the case, a certificate can be issued indicating the modules or elements that the individual passed during validation. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is to be performed by a quality-assured assessor.

The Commission indicates that each validation procedure should result in some form of documentation indicating<sup>1</sup>:

- The aim and objective;
- The model(s) used for validation;
- The method(s) used for validation;
- The supporting materials or tools on which the assessment - if any - was based;
- The validation provider's authority to issue documentation; and
- The method used for quality assurance of the process.

The Commission hopes that lead times in the validation process are reduced - as models and methodologies are further developed - to between two and ten days at most<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

### 34.2.5 Higher Education

A factor which complicates matters in the field of higher education is that the concept of validation in this sphere is also used to refer to measures to “validate” foreign university graduates and the extent to which they can have their academic documentation “valued”. As such, these measures do not fall under the definition of “validation of informal and non-formal learning” but under the definition of “professional or academic recognition”. The Swedish National Commission on Validation emphasises this distinction. Professional recognition refers to the assessment of a completed and documented foreign academic degree and to value it in relation to the nearest equivalent Swedish degree while academic recognition refers to the “crediting” of subjects included in a non-completed degree. The validation of informal and non-formal learning does not involve an evaluation of documents but an assessment of the individual’s actual knowledge and skills<sup>1</sup>.

Since autumn 2003, all higher education institutions are obliged to assess prior and experiential learning of applicants who demand such an assessment and who lack the formal qualifications (or the documentation of such qualifications)<sup>2</sup>.

Higher Education institutions in Sweden have shown an increasing interest in validation and are expected to play an important role in the development of a common validation system. Several universities and Folk High Schools (Folkhögskolor) have either jointly or individually set up initiatives to explore the issue of validation.

An example is the centre for adult learning and lifelong learning in Sweden – Encell. The Centre has put aside funds for a research initiative, which aims to explore and develop the validation concept. The different projects in this initiative are “owned” by several of the key stakeholders, such as municipalities, universities, adult education institutions and trade unions<sup>3</sup>. Encell has been set up in 2001 by the School of Education and Communication in Jönköping in assignment of the Swedish government.

Another example is the Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF) which is an organisation for institutional co-operation on a voluntary basis. In total, 42 universities and university colleges in Sweden are members (15 universities, 20 university colleges and seven university colleges of art). In the period 2002-2003 they undertook a project "Validering av reell kompetens inom högskolan" to coordinate an assignment given by the Swedish government to the higher education institutions – to develop methods for validation of competences. The project also functioned as a support to higher education institutes with respect to their work to build up their own systems for validation. The project

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> *National reports 2004-2005, towards the European higher education area, Bologna process, Sweden*, 14 January 2005

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.encell.se/projekt\\_validering.asp](http://www.encell.se/projekt_validering.asp)

was funded by the member education institutes (which receive funding from the Swedish government to undertake validation activities)<sup>1</sup>.

Then, in the period 2005-2006, three universities (*Linköping, Umeå and Malmö*) have experimented with the validation of previous experience and competences to shorten the training for nurses and teachers. The University of Malmö developed a specific method to validate the practical experience of nursery assistants (*barnskötare*) with previous university experience.

The requirement is that the person will have been credited with at least 40 credits (*poäng*) at higher education level, and then also credited with 40 further credits due to their previous work experience within a nursery. This ensures the person fulfils the requirement of 80 credits needed for acceptance onto *Särskild Lärarutbildning* ("Special teacher programme").<sup>2</sup> The programme (60 credits) leads to a university degree for teaching at a nursery and/or primary school.<sup>3</sup>

The key issues highlighted in the validation process could be traced back to the curriculum of the introductory university courses<sup>4</sup> and their aims. The validation process includes tasks which need to be completed individually or within a group, in a report or in a seminar. By this process the examiners receive the required information to judge, value and confirm the nursery assistant's competence, in relation to the aims of the course.

A target group of 110 individuals were identified with the help of a questionnaire, which was sent to the three districts of Sweden.<sup>5</sup> The programme has so far had three rounds of admission and the last group will start this autumn. Currently, 45 of the 48 nursery assistants who have completed the whole process<sup>6</sup> have received university credits for their previous work experience.

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by email by the Association of Swedish Higher Education; SUHF website. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.suhf.se/Templates/Article0.aspx?PageID=58c7c228-167e-47a2-8c6e-8ac7d250da94>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lut.mah.se/ruc/utv\\_2002.asp](http://www.lut.mah.se/ruc/utv_2002.asp)

<sup>3</sup> A requirement is that the person works part time at a nursery/primary school during the degree.

<sup>4</sup> *Att bli lärare* ("To become a teacher") (10 Credits) and *Utveckling och lärande* ("Development and teaching") (10 Credits)

<sup>5</sup> Skåne, Blekinge och Halland

<sup>6</sup> For further information see [www.lut.mah.se/utbildning/validering/](http://www.lut.mah.se/utbildning/validering/)

### 34.3 Private Sector

#### 34.3.1 The role of social partners

Swedish social partners play an important role in the education and training system in Sweden and are involved in validation projects with the Swedish National Commission of Validation and often involved – at sectoral level - in validation projects together with other national, local or regional stakeholders. Several examples below are illustrative of this.

The Swedish Locksmith's Association initiated a project focusing on criteria for validation of competence for locksmiths<sup>1</sup>.

SFCC (Swedish Federation of County Councils) and SALA (Swedish Association of Local Authorities), and their members engaged in the development of methods for validation of competences for teaching, care and health care at upper secondary and university level<sup>2</sup>.

The Non-manual Workers' Union developed an interactive tool for members to identify and organise existing competences and to identify competences that need to be developed through further studies<sup>3</sup>.

The Food Workers' Union initiated a lifelong-learning project focused on validation and skills development for employees in the food sector<sup>4</sup>.

#### 34.3.2 Individual companies

Validation by individual Swedish companies is mostly used as a tool when recruiting new employees - for example when identifying competences in relation to job tasks – and as a tool to secure and value competence at the work-place<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

<sup>2</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

<sup>3</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

<sup>4</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

<sup>5</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

## 34.4 Take-up of validation activities

### 34.4.1 Take-up rate of validation activities

According to the Swedish National Commission on Validation, approximately 25,000 people had their competences or part of them validated - taking into account validation activities of employment agencies, folk high schools and in-service training in companies. Of these, approximately 10,000 have so much of their informal and non-formal competences validated that they can get documentation or credits for it or can use it to reduce their period of formal training<sup>1</sup>.

The Swedish National Commission on Validation estimates that the beneficiaries of validation can be divided into three groups<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) unemployed (often immigrants) and have their competence validated as part of a counselling or training programme;
- (2) employees in municipalities or private companies and have their competence validated as part of an in-service training programme;
- (3) students who want to change career or enter a new programme and therefore need to have their competence validated.

The main reasons to participate in validation are: employability, change of career or wish to have to follow reduced period of training.

However, there are reports of validation costs as high as €5000. In this case, formal education would actually cost less.

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

<sup>2</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

#### 34.4.2 Barriers influencing the take-up rate of validation activities

The following factors and circumstances are mentioned to be a barrier blocking the take-up of validation activities<sup>1</sup>:

1. Many social partners and other organisations are reluctant to start validation activities because they are concerned about how much work is involved;
2. Most municipalities and other actors are only small and only have limited competence;
3. Sometimes validation is seen as a part of training activities and thus only available for enrolled students;
4. Validation is particularly difficult for immigrants who lack a thorough understanding of the Swedish language. Most institutes demand that they first learn Swedish instead of integrating it in the same process.
5. Lack of motivation among individuals because Swedish education institutes (folk high schools, municipal adult education and higher education) offer access without formal qualifications. Thus validation is not necessary.
6. Adults with basic education are often not convinced that it will lead to a job.
7. The Swedish labour market is open and not regulated, with few regulated occupations. So employers do not ask for formal qualifications or documents, but increasingly ask where the individual worked before and then hire him or her on a trial basis. Formal qualifications do not automatically lead to higher salaries as personal performance is more important, reducing the need for validation.

<sup>1</sup> *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

## 34.5 Conclusions

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is considered to be a key issue in Sweden with respect to the overall lifelong learning strategy. The first initiative in the field of validating informal and non-formal learning was the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) (1997-2002). This initiative aimed to combat unemployment through expansion of adult education in Swedish municipalities. During this initiative a number of pilot projects were launched, focusing on developing new forms of accreditation of prior learning and validation.

At the moment, no national regulation exists yet with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level and strongly embedded in the municipal adult education system. Emphasis is put by the Swedish government on the importance of involvement of educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities.

Due to the much decentralised nature of validation and varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, the National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 not only to enhance regional cooperation, but also to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation<sup>1</sup>. The Commission is responsible for working out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

At the moment, Swedish social partners are involved in initiatives of the Commission and in other local/regional initiatives. Several individual companies are offering validation to their employees, but our research suggests that this is not taking place yet on a very high scale. Validation activities in the third sector seem to be negligible.

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

## 35.0 Turkey<sup>1</sup>

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*By EDUSER Educational Consultancy*

### 35.1 Introduction

Informal learning is a very new concept in Turkey, which has been discussed by the parties concerned. It is considered to be the sum of all overall skills individuals have acquired through the education system, through paid and unpaid work, through organisational activities and family life/life in society. It is considered to be very important for an individual to acquire a qualification on the basis of learning which takes place outside formal education and training. Therefore it is necessary to establish a system which gives individuals the right to document their informal learning without having to undergo traditional forms of testing, by building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning. The future of lifelong learning is bound up with the success people as individuals, groups and collectives have in extracting learning from informal experiences, which is relevant to advancing their overall fulfilment.

These issues will not only serve to create the grounds for development of partnerships at all levels of public administration but also between relevant social partners. The benefits will include: identification of the needs of the learner and labour market; identification of adequate resources by encouraging an increase in public and private investment and new investment models in lifelong learning; more accessible learning - notably as a result of multiplying local learning centres in the workplace and by facilitating learning on the job; the creation of enabling environments for persons who are particularly at risk of exclusion, including the disabled, migrants and the rural community; and the creation of a learning culture to motivate potential learners, to increase levels of participation and to demonstrate the need for learning at all ages.

The creation of platforms and the establishment of enabling fora for the debate concerning the validation and certification of non-formal and informal learning will contribute to enhancing awareness of the Turkish public of the importance of non-formal and informal learning, to foster better cooperation between education and training structures and the relevant social partners, and to stress the contribution made by education and training to the equality of opportunities.

In this report we will come to demonstrate that while Turkey has some existing laws in place to enable recognition of prior experience within the VET system, the country does

<sup>1</sup> Revisions provided by Ibrahim Bükel, Member of the Board of Education, Lisbon 2010 Education and Training Country Coordinator

not have a standard validation methodology in place to enable individuals to get their informal and non-formal learning identified, assessed and recognised in a way that would lead to a nationally acknowledged competency.

## 35.2 Public Sector

### 35.2.1 Legislative background

The **Basic Law on National Education No. 1739** arranges the non-formal and formal education in a manner that they complete each other, and if necessary they offer the same qualifications and they benefit from all their opportunities. Non-formal education is composed of two basic components: general and vocational technical educational programs. These two parts are prepared in a co-dependency manner.

Vocational and technical training was rearranged by the “**Vocational Training Law**” no. **3308**, which came into force in 1986. In this law, it is stated that the competences gained through informal and non-formal training can be assessed when an individual enters an apprentice training and the competences gained during the apprenticeship training can also be assessed when an individual enters formal education. The Rules and Regulation “the Assessment of Documents and Diplomas in Apprenticeship Training and Vocational Training” determine the rules for the assessment of the competences gained during apprenticeship training.

Upon entering into force of the **Law No. 5544**<sup>1</sup> (Vocational Qualifications Authority Law) in the year 2006, a new period was started in Turkey regarding the recognition and certification of professional competences. The objective of the Law is to determine the principles of national qualifications in technical and vocational fields and to establish the National Vocational Qualifications Authority to set up and operate the national vocational qualifications system<sup>2</sup>, linked to the national qualifications framework. The law also states that based on a portfolio of questions, a document or a certificate approved by the Authority indicating the professional competency level will be awarded to the individuals that succeed in examinations.

The basic rationale for the development of a validation system is to enable the transition between different types of vocational training for individuals. The individual can utilise his/her competences gained through non-formal training when moving, first to apprenticeship training and then, to formal training. Therefore, validation of non-formal

1 Official Gazete, nb.26312, 7 October 2006; [www.meb.gov.tr](http://www.meb.gov.tr)

2 The National Vocational Qualifications System (NVQS) planned to be established in this scope is defined in the aforementioned Law as follows: Rules and activities concerning the development of technical and vocational education standards and qualifications based on these standards, their implementation, authorization, supervision, assessment and evaluation, documentation and certification related to these” [Law No. 5544, Article 2ç].

training will enable attainment of a nationally recognised certificate. Since the regulations (to be in accordance with the Law in question) are still being prepared, the implementation has not started as of yet. Validation and certification of informal learning will also be evaluated in the framework of the “National Vocational Qualification System” by taking into consideration the fact that many adults do not have previously and formally evaluated/certified skills and knowledge.

In order to be in harmony with the European Union Member States, Turkey is also committed to adapting to the common European principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning which have (May 2004) been endorsed by the (Education) Council.

In accordance with the amendments brought about by the Law no. **4702** and the arrangements in the “Regulation on Vocational and Technical Education”, the “Vocational Education Committee” at the central level and “Provincial Vocational Education Committees” at provincial level have been established, in order to ensure the wide and effective representation of the government, employees, employers and other social partners. These committees ensure the wide and effective participation of the sector representatives who produce goods and services, into the activities of the determination of manpower and educational needs.

### 35.2.2 Stakeholders

Non-formal education is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), Directorate General of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education. The said Directorate General governs the non-formal education services through 925 public education centres and 303 vocational training centres that are found across the country. Other ministries, official institutions and organisations, universities, municipalities, associations, trade associations, foundations and volunteer organisations and private education institutions can also offer non-formal education activities and they can open courses and award certificates of accomplishment.

There are various types of educational institutions at every level which provide non-formal learning opportunities and choices. These institutions offer educational activities to individuals in accordance with their interests, demands and needs.

The list below outlines the responsibilities and activities of some key stakeholders in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal learning:

- The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has been playing an important role in developing non-formal learning facilities. MoNE organizes the courses in a flexible way, in terms of their duration, location and level, in order to accommodate the needs of those who are employed at the same time they are seeking further education.

- Some universities also provide these opportunities for those who would like to develop their professional knowledge, skills and experiences.
- The Vocational and Technical Education Research and Development Center (METARGEM) was established in 1986 to provide planning, research and development services to the MoNE. Its responsibilities cover research and planning, curriculum development, design of projects, testing and evaluation, educational technology and technical publications.
- Despite the fact that MoNE maintains primary responsibility for non-formal education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security is the Government's primary institution responsible for policy and administrative issues related to employment and the labour market. Conducting training activities based on "labour market needs analysis" is the responsibility of The Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR). İŞKUR targets young people, women, those who have lost their jobs, those receiving unemployment allowance, people with disabilities, and ex-offenders. It is responsible for dealing with (i) employment and unemployment issues, (ii) job brokering in both the public and private sector, (iii) active employment measures and (iv) accreditation of private employment services.
- KOSGEB (Small and Medium Sized Industry Development Organization) is a non-profit, semi-autonomous organization linked to the Ministry of Industry and Trade. KOSGEB has been established for the purpose of supporting SME development. It offers consultancy and training services to contribute to the creation of self-employment through business start-up training to SMEs in order to increase their competitiveness both in the internal and in the international market. KOSGEB, through its 25 enterprise development centers, 12 technology development centers and ten laboratories spread throughout the country, is one of the major providers of consultancy and training services to SMEs and potential entrepreneurs.<sup>1</sup>

1 <http://www.kosgeb.gov.tr/>

### 35.2.3 Validation in practice

Two different methods of evaluation have been adopted:

- In the first method, exemptions from the apprenticeship training can be awarded on the basis of an evaluation of certificates from non-formal education institutes <sup>1</sup> (e.g. duration of training is assessed).
- The second method is an evaluation of the competences gained by the individual him/herself through work experience. This method is limited to the evaluation of the experiences gained before the apprenticeship training. For the evaluation, an individual is required to document his/her actual work in that profession.

It is also necessary to emphasise a different implementation aspect of the validation system that was started in 2005. In this implementation, an individual having a mastership certificate<sup>2</sup> in a professional sector is also awarded a certificate of salesperson in areas closely related to the mentioned profession. For instance, anyone who has a mastership certificate in the professional sector of furniture is also directly awarded certificates for;

- Furniture salesperson,
- Industrial machinery salesperson,
- Construction materials salesperson.

Individuals that moved to apprenticeship training by evaluation of the certificates received from non-formal training, must, in the end, prove their competences in assistant-mastership or mastership examinations. However, the assistant-mastership and mastership examinations are not fulfilled in a way that measure defined national competences. In this context, it is also observed that no continuous mechanisms have been developed regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the methods being implemented at the moment. However, there are supervision mechanisms that hinder the

- 1 In the context of certification system, according to the Circular 2007/17 of the Prime Ministry Regarding the Coordination of Education and Training “Except in-service training, all education activities that are arranged by public or private organisations will be coordinated with Ministry of National Education, in determining the required terms for the employment the candidates will be asked certificates that are approved by Ministry of National Education and assistance will be ensured for the surveillance and audit roles of the said Ministry.”
- 2 The arbitrament according to temporary article 1- b/1 of the Vocational Education Law number 3308, “Those who owned a workplace and worked there as a master before the enactment of Law may directly apply to obtain a proficiency certificate in three months.” has been improved and revised such as “those who didn’t own a workplace but worked there as a master..” by General Directorate for Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education, and the said article bides to become a law in Turkish Parliament. This article will provide those who achieve vocational skills by informal learning, to obtain a proficiency certificate.

performance in a way that does not conform to defined principles of the concordance procedures<sup>1</sup>.

It is possible to move to apprenticeship training through evaluation of the certificates received from non-formal training, and to move to formal training through assistant-mastership or mastership certificates received from apprenticeship training. Assistant-masters and masters can be graduates of vocational high schools provided that they succeeded in compensatory training programmes. The Ministry of National Education determines what lessons these individuals would be exempted from. In general it can be said that, among the individuals possessing the certificate of mastership, those willing to obtain the diploma of a vocational high school are exempted from professional lessons.

#### 35.2.4 Examples of Prominent Activities, related to validation of informal and non-formal learning

In the scope of the “On-the-job Training Project”, the Ministry of National Education organises courses and seminars including “Computer Programming”, “Web Designing”, “Programming Languages”, “Project Cycle Management”, “Total Quality Management”, “New Approaches in Education”, “Presentation of the EU Educational Programs” (and the related projects) and “Development of Educational Materials in the Internet media”.

New standards have been established from 2001 forward for the creation of practical training opportunities. According to these arrangements, small enterprises with less than 20 employees may provide skills training to vocational students if they desire. Additionally, larger enterprises with 20 or more employees that operate in fields covered under the “Vocational Education Law No. 3308” have to provide practical training in the ratio of 5%-10% on the basis of the total number of the employees. In addition, enterprises employing more than 200 people must establish a unit for practical training and appoint training personnel to the unit for this purpose<sup>2</sup>. And, by law, trade unions in Turkey are under the obligation to allocate 10% of their resources for training of their members.

According to the “Vocational Education Law”, development and harmonisation courses are organized for the personnel who want to have a proficiency or to promote in his/her career. These courses are organized by the Ministry of National Education in cooperation with the related institutions and bodies. In this framework cooperation activities have been carried out according to protocols which have been signed with various foundations and institutions.

1 The principle of concordance is applied when the certificates received from non-formal training are evaluated for transition to apprenticeship training; and the theoretical and practical parts of the training received are taken into consideration separately.

2 VET Reform Policy Peer Review Turkey, 2004

The principle of concordance is applied when the certificates received from non-formal training are evaluated for transition to apprenticeship training; and the theoretical and practical parts of the training received are taken into consideration separately.

Formal and non-formal educational activities (such as computer literacy, computer programming, computer based accounting; courses on the use of communication technologies-such as the internet; carpet weaving courses; courses for adaptation to industrial machines and new technology; foreign language courses; income-generating skill and vocational courses that encourage entrepreneurship and employment and socio-cultural educational programs according to the interests and needs of the individual) are provided free of charge in the “Public Education Centres” and “Vocational Education Centres” which are opened by the “General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education.”

In vocational and technical schools “modular programmes” are applied and a flexible structure that facilitates the vertical and horizontal transitions between the programmes is now available.

### **35.3 Private Sector**

Both sectoral and company-specific initiatives organise various lifelong learning activities in Turkey. There are many private education institutions addressing both students and adults, aiming to teach skills and professions in certain areas. These institutions train intermediate manpower through short-term education. Private Vocational and Technical courses provide programmes in hundreds of different areas such as ICT, foreign languages, ballet, music etc. - courses may be opened for any programme that teaches a skill or a job.

#### **35.3.1 Social partner involvement**

The leading sectoral stakeholders are employers’ associations (TOBB, TİSK and TESK) and workers’ and civil servants’ trade union confederations (TURKİŞ, HAK-İŞ, DİSK, KESK, KAMUSEN and MEMURSEN). Most social partners and especially trade union confederations wish to establish a partnership with MoNE and commence active participation in the design and implementation of policies in order to strengthen their institutional capacity on education and vocational training.

**TOBB**<sup>1</sup> (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) has 362 members of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and over a million member companies. TOBB participates in a wide range of social dialogue committees as the representative of the private sector in the areas of commerce, industry, maritime commerce and commodity exchange. It has the authority, under Article 12 of the Law No. 5174, to open vocational training courses in the areas of its competence and to issue training certificates for training provided to its members on subjects that are not within the scope of the Vocational Training Law, no. 3308. Moreover, TOBB has the responsibility to contribute to the strengthening of vocational training

**TISK** (The Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations) has 18 sectoral employment associations and numerous companies as members. It provides different types of training for its members in various sectors. More institutionalized and structured training courses are delivered through foundations established within the organisational structure of TISK such as The Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries (MESS), Turkish Textile Employers' Association (TÜTSIS) or Employers Association or Construction Industries (INTES) in sectors of metal, textile and construction. These foundations are capable of undertaking regular assessment for identifying sector needs. TISK and The Turkish Confederation of Trade Unions (TÜRK-İŞ) have been implementing the "TISK and TÜRK-İŞ Pilot Project to Enhance Efficiency in Education and Employment" within the scope of EU financed Strengthening Vocational Education and Training System in Turkey Project (SVET) since 20 April 2006<sup>2</sup>. According to the activity report prepared by TISK, 148.457 workers attended the courses organized by TISK and its employment associations between 2000 and 2005<sup>3</sup>

**TESK**<sup>4</sup> (The Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen) is considered to be the main representative of the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the country. It provides various types of seminars and information to member organizations in addition to its extensive role in apprenticeship training. For trades- and craftsmen, it constitutes the highest level of professional representation with around four million registered members. As a professional organization, TESK acquired a considerable weight in Turkey's socio-economic panorama with a significant employment potential and technical/technological capacity. One important role of TESK is to implement and manage vocational/occupational training activities in apprenticeship centres located in many small industry clusters. These activities of vocational education and training are carried out jointly with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of National Education. TESK

1 <http://www.tobb.org.tr/>

2 [http://www.tisk.org.tr/hakkinda\\_en.asp?dil=en](http://www.tisk.org.tr/hakkinda_en.asp?dil=en)

3 TISK, "2000 - 2005 dönemi, TISK ve Üye İşveren Sendikaları ile Bağlı Eğitim Vakıflarının Eğitim Faaliyetleri raporu", Ankara

4 <http://www.tesk.org.tr/>

evaluates and certifies the knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning (mainly work experience) of individuals in professions, which are not covered by the apprenticeship training system (as defined by the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training). Indeed, the Confederation awards the following certificates;

- The TESK certificate of assistant-mastership;
- The TESK certificate of mastership; and
- The TESK certificate of tradesman ship.

This certification process comes under the framework of "The Regulation on the Awarding of Professional Certificates for Provinces and Professional Branches for which the Apprenticeship Training is not provided".

Individuals who started working after 1993 in professions not covered by the apprenticeship training can attend examinations three times a year at the chambers of professions that are branch organisations of TESK. Those who successfully complete this examination can receive one of the above-mentioned certificates. The examination commission consists, under the presidency of the head of relevant profession chamber, of:

- Two members designated by the related chamber of profession.
- One member from the Chamber's Professional Training Consultancy Unit.
- A teacher designated by the Professional Training Center of the Ministry of National Education that provides apprenticeship training services.

The examination for "Tradesmanship Certificate" can only be taken in a written form, while the examinations for the certificates of assistant-mastership and mastership include both written and practical assessments. Unfortunately, no information is available on the number of individuals who have benefited from this certification process.

The certificates issued by TESK are replaced with their equivalent certificates by the Ministry of National Education, if that profession is taken into the coverage of apprenticeship training practice of the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training.

**TÜRK-İŞ**<sup>1</sup> (Public Workers Dominant Trade Union Confederation), according to available information, has the highest number of member workers, with 1,800,000 members, nine regional offices and 680 local offices. TÜRK-İŞ has more resources for training and more collaboration with MoNE than other confederations. Despite its limited co-operation with employers' associations, it appears to indulge in more training activities with employers

1 <http://www.turkis.org.tr>

than other trade union confederations. The Confederation's training targets are mainly member workers in a wide range of subjects and issues.

**HAK-İŞ**<sup>1</sup>, the Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions was set up in 1976. Today, HAK-İŞ has 8-affiliate trade unions and 400 members. Private sector and the municipalities are its pioneer sectors. HAK-İŞ has implemented an 18-month project in Kayseri with EU support to develop the involvement of social partners in vocational education. A centre for vocational guidance and consultancy has been established. At the end of this project it is aimed to reach 10.000 workers, 1500 enterprises, and 5000 students. The Confederation has also implemented an EU-supported project for training residential technicians and at the end of the project 250 technicians obtained certificates

**DISK** (Workers Trade Union Confederations) and **KESK**<sup>2</sup> (Civil Servants' Trade Union Confederation) also provide different types of training and information seminars to their members. These confederations increased their training activities through EU-funded projects.

**KAMUSEN** (Confederation of Unions of Public Servants) and **MEMURSEN** (Confederation of Unions of Civil Servants) also carry out educational activities in terms of lifelong learning. They take cultural activities and training like seminars, conferences, panels, public meetings, assemblies and courses, in order to support the vocational and technical training.

The Turkish Employers' Association of Construction Industries (**INTES**) has cooperated with **YOL-İŞ** Trade Union and tried to form a system with a view to issue internationally valid certificates to employees working in the construction sector. In relation to this development, a large training centre was built in Ankara, staff have been trained and employed and the standards for relevant professions have been prepared. Currently, these standards are being updated with the cooperation of INTES, MEGEP and sector representatives. Besides, INTES has been cooperating with different international and national organisations for the accreditation of its Training Centre and is thus to become an accredited Centre initially nationally and afterwards internationally. INTES is also a member of the Board of Directors of MYK (Vocational Qualifications Authority) and all of the activities of INTES related to non-formal education and certification of the skills are made in accordance with the Law No. 5544.

The Employer Confederation of Textile Industrialists trains and certifies skilled workers in six different professions in the field of textiles.

1 <http://www.hakis.org.tr/>

2 <http://www.kesk.org.tr/>

### 35.3.2 Individual companies

Some enterprises in Turkey implement programmes with a view to determine the competencies of their employees and to prepare them to their future duties under the scope of international performance development systems<sup>1</sup>.

The system implemented by one of large-scale companies in Turkey, which pays importance to the competence development and validation of its manual employees, is outlined below.

#### Example

The company employs vocational high school graduates through a three-stage examination. An interview is carried out following written and practical examinations. In the interview it is intended to measure candidates' skills such as flexibility, group-working, learning ability etc. Those who are employed are then subjected to a 4-stage on-the-job training and certified accordingly. These stages are as follows:

- Learning;
- Working under supervision;
- Working by him/herself alone; and
- The ability to teach others.

Those certified as being able to train others may also have the opportunity to be upgraded to the management level. The candidates for the management levels in the company are assessed on a 'case study' basis, and those who succeed are given management tasks.

1 Otto Bauer; Head of Board of Directors, Foundation for Development of Technological Education, Stiftung Zur Förderung der Technologieausbildung, TEGEV

## 35.4 Third Sector

Some associations and foundations, such as National Education Foundation (MEV), provide significant support for the development of non-formal education in Turkey.

The Vocational Education and Small-scale Industries Foundation (MEKSA)<sup>1</sup> was established in 1985 and has been working as a non-profit, public interest foundation to promote vocational training and small industry in Turkey. MEKSA has been successful in bringing together all the social partners involved in vocational training. It also carries out international cooperation in order to keep vocational training parallel to the recent developments all over the world. The projects are financed from abroad and have provided educational opportunities to many people, including women, children, and young people.

The Training Foundation of Construction and Installation Workers (İNİŞEV) provides training for workers in the construction sector. The Foundation made protocols with MoNE<sup>2</sup>, İŞKUR and MEKSA in terms of qualitative developments in education. The certificates and the training of İNİŞEV can be a model for other foundations and institutions that organise similar training. Within the framework of LLL, these training courses have a crucial importance, as they introduce a mutual benefit and promote collaboration as well as possible joint use of the trained labor among social partners.

The Turkey-Middle East Public Affairs Administration Institute (TODAI), the Turkish Industrial Management Institute and the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Institution (TÜBİTAK), the National Productivity Center (MPM), the Directorate for Developing and Supporting Small and Medium Sized Industrial Enterprises (KOSGEB), the Continuous Education Centers (SEM) and many other NGOs provide non-formal education services to their employees to help their career development, in cooperation with MoNE.

1 [www.meksa.org.tr](http://www.meksa.org.tr)

2 [http://www.meb.gov.tr/stats/apk2001ing/Section\\_6/7Protocols.htm](http://www.meb.gov.tr/stats/apk2001ing/Section_6/7Protocols.htm)

## **35.5 Conclusion**

It might be concluded that a consciousness, required for the implementation of validation of competencies acquired outside of formal education, has been developed in Turkey. There are a number of examples of the delivery of informal and non-formal learning across the public, private and third sectors.

Turkey is committed to adopting the common European principles on identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning. The Vocational Qualifications Authority Law No. 5544 that has entered into force in 2006 is expected to bring down some of the barriers to implementation of a national validation system.

Thus, progress in terms of awareness and legislation has been made - the next steps are to implement validation further in practice.

## 36.0 United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

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*By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research)*

### 36.1 Introduction

England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all developed, or are in the process of developing, new credit and qualification frameworks. These frameworks potentially provide a single overarching structure for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning in each U.K country. However, they are all at different stages of development and have different priorities:

- **Scotland** has a new qualification framework in place – The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and has developed a methodology for recognising both non-formal and informal learning within the new framework;
- **Wales** has a new qualification framework in place – The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and has a methodology in place for incorporating non-formal learning within this. Work will start on incorporating informal learning later this year (2007);
- The framework for **England** and **Northern Ireland** (the Qualifications and Credit Framework, QCF)<sup>2</sup> has not been launched yet but once established has the capability to include non-formal or informal learning if it fits with QCF technical specifications and is assessed through QCF quality procedures.

Scotland and Wales are therefore ahead of England and Northern Ireland in developing a national approach to recognising non-formal and informal learning within their national qualification frameworks. This is largely due to the fact that they launched their new credit and qualification frameworks earlier, which has allowed them to start broadening the scope of their frameworks sooner. It could also be argued that Scotland and Wales have been more influenced by the European policy agenda.

With the absence of a national approach to accrediting non-formal and/or informal learning in England and Northern Ireland at this moment, the methods that are in place are more disparate and only available in specific learning sectors. For example, the 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) is a methodology specific to Higher (and some Further) Education Institutions whilst a methodology known as RARPA is relevant only to public funded Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision. This is however likely to change in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> Update based on the United Kingdom chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by John Konrad (Konrad Associates International)

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the QCF also applies to Wales and forms part of the CQFW.

## 36.2 Public Sector

### 36.2.1 Background to the development of validation in the UK<sup>1</sup>

Development of processes for recognition of non-formal and informal learning became prominent in UK assessment and qualifications policy during the mid 1980s. The main emphasis in policy and in operational programmes was on portfolio preparation, with two parallel strands of concern:

- Further education (level 2 and 3 vocational provision – ISCED Levels 3 and 4) inclusion measures – enable access and credit recognition for ‘non-traditional’ participants in education and training;
- Higher education entry for the rapidly growing HE sector.

Colleges and local authorities – particularly in the big metropolitan areas of the UK – set up numerous short courses aimed at supporting learners in the preparation of portfolios of evidence. These have not survived since they have been replaced by the insertion of recognition processes into mainstream qualifications policy.

During the 1980s, qualifications policy in the individual awarding bodies for general and vocational education and training was underdeveloped in relation to recognition of non-formal and informal learning – many higher level professional awards incorporated the need to demonstrate effective practice, but the notion of bringing achievements as exemption or as credit to the programmes (rather than demonstrating competence through practice undertaken during the learning programme) was seen as very novel.

During this time, major transfers of knowledge were occurring between North America and the UK on accreditation of prior learning, and the general interest in accreditation of prior learning policy circles during the mid 80s was assimilated into the early deliberations of the newly formed NCVQ (1987) and the existing SCOTVEC. This affected directly the design criteria for the then-new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ). The design principles for these qualifications emphasised that the award of credit in the qualification should be independent of the mode, duration, and location of learning. The qualifications were designed as unitised, outcomes-based, competence-oriented, and assessed through evidence of performance. With this array of design principles, recognition of non-formal and informal learning was conceptualised as one means of generating evidence for the (accreditation) units, which comprised the qualification. This had two immediate effects:

<sup>1</sup> The information has been quoted from Refernet publication (2005/2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; United Kingdom. CEDEFOP.

- Firstly, accreditation of prior achievements processes (as it was then designated – ‘Accreditation of Prior Achievement’, (APA) - to reflect the outcomes orientation) was integrated fully into the processes for qualifications. It sat alongside observation of current performance as simply another means of generating evidence. This elevated its status within qualifications and conveyed a new form of legitimacy.
- Secondly, by reducing its ‘special’ status, it suggested that accreditation of prior achievements did not need to be attended to in any special way. This was a negative consequence. The elements of self-reflection and careful support in the emerging portfolio construction provision were devalued. By just being ‘another means of collecting evidence’, the logistical problems in assembling evidence and the values of support and guidance were severely downplayed.

This led to accreditation of prior achievements processes being regarded as time-consuming and tedious, with many NVQ learners complaining of the tedious tasks involved in portfolio construction. Although no systematic figures are available, educators and trainers operating in the early years of NVQs (late 80s early 90s) commented that this led to a sharp reduction in the numbers using accreditation of prior achievements as a means of presenting evidence for achievement. Some later projects – such as the ‘paperless portfolio’ approach developed in Northern Ireland in the late 90s – have continued to try to relieve the practical problems of assembling evidence and modernise processes.

However, the NVQ philosophy and the continued emphasis on validation of informal and non-formal learning by researchers and policy makers held the topic on the policy agenda. NVQs comprise around 50% of the vocational qualifications awarded in the UK, and continue to emphasise recognition of prior learning as a means of generating evidence. In fact, the majority of the British awarding bodies include APA as an explicit part of qualifications policy. Information on the number of beneficiaries is limited but the European Commission published in 2000 that in the UK some 28,000 students had benefited from methods to recognise prior learning – and it has been presumed that this figure relates to the vocational qualifications<sup>1</sup>.

We have now provided a brief overview of historical developments. The following chapters focus on explaining the development of national systems for validation in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – and provide more detail on key initiatives, such as APL and RARPA.

### 36.2.2 Current situation - the U.K Credit and Qualifications Frameworks

The qualification frameworks that have been/are being developed in each U.K country are all ‘credit’ frameworks, which have a number of similarities. They all adopt a common

<sup>1</sup> Freitag, W. K. (2007) Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

currency whereby 'units of learning' can be assigned a 'credit value'. For example, one credit may be awarded for learning outcomes achieved in 10 hours of learning time at a specified level of difficulty<sup>1</sup>. The levels of difficulty in England, Northern Ireland and Wales operate on a 9 point scale from entry level to level 8, whilst Scotland uses a scale ranging from entry level to level 12.

By using this system of awarding and assigning credit, it is possible to recognise learning outcomes achieved in any environment. For example, from mainstream qualifications achieved in a school, college or university to in-house training received within a company, non-formal learning undertaken in a voluntary sector organisation or even learning achieved through personal, work or leisure experiences. As long as there are specific learning outcomes that can be equated to certain 'units' of learning, credit can potentially be assigned or awarded. The key is to have robust quality assurance procedures in place to ensure that credit is awarded in a uniform manner across the board.

Assigning and awarding credit in this way allows parity to be achieved across the entire qualification framework. For example, allowing academic and vocational qualifications to be compared as well as equating mainstream qualifications with non-formal and informal learning. Hence:

- It allows learners to transfer between different types of courses e.g. from non-formal to more formal learning;
- It prevents learners from having to repeat units if they have completed them elsewhere;
- It allows learning to be recognised, even if full qualifications have not been achieved;
- It allows combinations of units to be studied, which may more closely match the student's individual learning requirements, and;
- It makes learning transferable across national boundaries.

In short, the U.K credit systems hope to offer more flexible qualification frameworks, which are better able to support learners through lifelong learning.

<sup>1</sup> The CQFW Credit Common Accord (2006);

### 36.2.3 England and Northern Ireland

#### 36.2.3.1 *The Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF)*

The QCF aims to have a broader scope than the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and will be capable of recognising the achievements of learners on any 'type' of learning activity, which could mean the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning. This is because credit can be awarded to any learning that fits QCF technical criteria and quality assurance procedures. However, there is no talk as yet of adopting specific methodologies for the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning in the way that the Welsh and Scottish models have done.

The tests and trials for the QCF will be completed in July 2008 with the launch of the QCF expected in August 2008. Since the QCF has not yet been launched, there is currently no single initiative governing the validation of informal and non-formal learning in England. There are however two other initiatives, APL and RARPA, that are currently being practised but which are limited in scope. APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) recognises both non-formal and informal learning but is restricted to the Higher Education sector whilst RARPA recognises non-formal, but not informal learning and is restricted to public-funded post 16 training provision. APL has been in place since the early 1990s and has not changed since the last report was written, whilst RARPA has changed significantly since that time.

#### 36.2.3.2 *The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)*

The first mechanism to validate non-formal and informal learning in England originated from the Higher Education sector. They established a mechanism for 'Accrediting Prior Learning', in the early 1990s, which was not connected to any government policy. It originated from the education providers themselves, hence a 'bottom-up' approach. APL also applies to providers operating in Further Education.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) became interested in recognising non-formal learning as a route for those with relevant knowledge and experience but no traditional qualifications to gain access to higher education. The majority of universities and some further education training providers in the U.K have APL at either institution or departmental levels, or both<sup>1</sup>.

In September 2004, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education published a set of guidelines to support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in accrediting prior learning. This provides an important quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions and thus maintains public confidence in the quality of education. These guidelines are extensive and can be found in "Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior

<sup>1</sup> Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Learning” (September 2004), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The key principles for accrediting APL are as follows:

- Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- Where limits exist on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicit<sup>1</sup>. The implications for progression, the award of any interim qualification and the classification or grading of a final qualification should be clear and transparent.
- Prior experiential and/or certificated learning that has been accredited by a provider should be clearly identified on students' transcripts.
- Providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning.
- The terminology, scope and boundaries used by a provider in its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.
- Information and guidance materials outlining the process for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or previously certificated learning should be clear, accurate and easily understood.
- Providers should consider the range and forms of assessment appropriate to claims for the recognition of learning.
- The criteria used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders, assessors and examiners.
- The assessment of learning derived from experience should generally be subject to the same internal and external quality assurance procedures as assessment of learning through more traditional routes. Assessment methods must be appropriate to the evidence provided, and the criteria used must be clear to applicants and staff.
- The locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly specified.
- All associated with the accreditation of prior learning should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined. Full details of all roles and responsibilities should be available to all associated staff and applicants.
- Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.

<sup>1</sup> Typically, these limits specify a normal maximum of 50% of the available credits for a particular qualification or, in the case of Bachelor's Degrees, for a particular Level.

- Clear guidance should be given to applicants about when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.
- Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for the accreditation of prior learning and to provide feedback on decisions.
- Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.

#### 'Types' of Learning Accredited by HEIs

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) include one or all of the following 'types' of non-formal and informal learning in their approach to the 'accreditation of prior learning':

- Accreditation<sup>1</sup> of prior learning (APL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL);
- Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated and/or experiential learning (AP[E/C]L);
- Accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APL&A).

The learning could therefore be previously certified or based on "experiences outside the formal and training systems".<sup>2</sup>

#### 36.2.3.3 *Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA)*

Public sector interest in validating non-formal (not including informal) learning commenced in 2001<sup>3</sup> when the Learning and Skills Council commissioned the former Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to look at ways of quality assuring non-formal education. The LSCs deemed this necessary because they were concerned about the quality of their non-formal training provision, particularly the unaccredited courses they were funding through the Adult and Community Learning (ACL) sector.

The work that the LSDA and NIACE carried out between 2001 and 2002 resulted in the development of a model for quality assuring non-formal learning in the ACL sector, which

<sup>1</sup> Accreditation is used as the English language equivalent of Validation. "The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities. informal / non-formal learning." Tissot P (2004), Terminology of vocational training policy, CEDEFOP, page 161.

<sup>2</sup> "Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning" (September 2004), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

<sup>3</sup> Implementing Measures for Success (2007) Published by the Learning and Skills Council

became known as 'recognising and recording progress and achievement' or RARPA. It was tested through a range of pilot projects between 2003 and 2004, embedded during 2005 and 2006 and now, in 2007, it is a key part of the LSC's quality assurance strategy - 'Implementing Measures for Success' (January 2007). This strategy is now in operation throughout England and hence gives the accreditation of 'non-formal' learning a very specific focus. All LSC funded ACL providers are now obligated to evaluate non-formal learning through the use of the RARPA method.

RARPA is the only method used by the Learning and Skills Councils to monitor non-formal learning and does not include 'informal' learning, as defined by the European Union. Currently this method is only applied to the ACL sector (since this is where most public funded non-formal learning is carried out), but it is constantly evolving. Further tests will be carried out during Summer 2007 to consider applications of the methodology to the Further Education (FE) Sector, the Work Based Learning (WBL) Sector and Sixth Form Colleges. It is therefore envisaged that RARPA will be the quality assurance mechanism used to monitor public funded non-formal learning throughout the post 16 learning and skills sector in England.

The RARPA method is envisaged to have such a broad application because it has been embedded into ALI and Ofsted's<sup>1</sup> 'Common Inspection Framework' (CIF). The CIF is the methodology used by all training providers in England to monitor and evaluate training provision. By incorporating RARPA into this framework, the monitoring of non-formal learning becomes another element of each provider's evaluation commitment. Moreover, because it has been adapted in line with the CIF, the method is broadly familiar to providers, which should facilitate the implementation of RARPA.

<sup>1</sup> ALI is the organisation responsible for inspecting Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers whilst OFSTED is responsible for monitoring primary and secondary schools.

## The RARPA Method

As specified in John Konrad's 2004 report, the RARPA approach is based around the application of a five-stage process to all programmes of learning:

- **Aims** appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners;
- **Initial assessment** to establish the learner's starting point;
- **Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives** (initial, renegotiated and revised);
- **Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during the programme (formative assessment)** including tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews;
- **End of programme learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment, review of overall progress and achievement** in relation to appropriately challenging learning objectives identified at the beginning or during the programme. It may include recognition of learning outcomes not specified during the programme.

Within each of the above stages, a number of questions can be asked, that link to the Common Inspection Framework (CIF)<sup>1</sup>.

Element of Staged Process	Mapping to CIF Questions
Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims)	How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of the learners?
Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning?
Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives (initial, renegotiated and revised)	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning? How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during the programme (formative assessment) including tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning?
End of programme learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment, review of overall progress and achievement	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning? How well are learners guided and supported?

<sup>1</sup> Implementing Measures for Success (2007) Published by the Learning and Skills Council

## RARPA and the QCF

Although the RARPA approach was initially developed to raise the credibility/ quality assure 'non-formal' learning, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have agreed that the RARPA approach should be developed to support learners transferring from 'non-formal' to more 'formal' learning. The obligatory use of RARPA in England since January 2007 should therefore help to widen participation in formal learning.

To support the new focus on recognising 'non-formal' learning, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (a non-departmental regulatory body funded by the Department for Education and Skills) has been tasked with modifying the qualifications framework in England. Hence the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which currently does not recognise non-formal learning carried out by the ACL sector will, in the future, incorporate this form of learning within the new QCF.

In practical terms, this means that a student that has completed a non-accredited course in the ACL sector may be able to proceed to an accredited training course. The quality assurance process (RARPA) enables the non-formal learner to gain a certain number of 'credits' for completing their course. The learner can then chose whether to 'bank, accumulate or transfer'<sup>1</sup> these 'credits' and hence could be given the option to use their credits towards a more formal learning route.

### The Limitations of RARPA

Despite the important and expanding remit of RARPA as a means of accrediting public funded, non-formal learning, it should be noted that RARPA does not include informal learning. It also does not have an application for Higher Education Institutions, employers (the private sector) or the voluntary sector. Considering that a considerable amount of unaccredited learning is carried out by these sectors, RARPA is certainly not an overarching, single initiative to validate informal and non-formal learning in England.

<sup>1</sup> [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)

#### 36.2.4 Wales

In Wales, the key initiative for validating non-formal and informal learning is the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

#### 36.2.5 The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

The CQFW is an all-inclusive framework, incorporating formal, non-formal and informal learning across all learning environments. The CQFW includes all 'types' of learning across the public sector i.e. higher and further education, the adult and community learning sector, work-based learning and the 14-19 age group as well as across the private sector (e.g. in-house training) and voluntary sectors. It is clear from this that the Welsh means of validating non-formal and informal learning fit well with, and have been influenced by, the European Commission's policy agenda.

##### 36.2.5.1 *Stakeholders Involved in the CQFW*

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), part of the Welsh Assembly Government, largely funds CQFW (although there has been some support from the European Social Fund objectives 1 and 3)<sup>1</sup>. DCELLS Qualifications and Curriculum Division includes regulatory activity (formerly ACCAC, the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) and the CQFW team; hence the department has overall responsibility for administering and quality assuring the initiative.

DCELLS works closely with a number of bodies to ensure the CQFW is compatible with the rest of the U.K and Europe. With respect to the QCF, which forms one of the pillars of the CQFW, there is cohesion with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England and the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. Work is also being carried out to ensure comparability and compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework.

Due to the all-encompassing nature of the CQFW, the initiative is reliant on the support, co-ordination and 'buy in' of a wide range of organisations. These include<sup>2</sup> the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Higher Education Wales, the Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium, the Open College Network in Wales, Careers Wales, ESTYN (the inspector of education and training in Wales), NIACE, Sector Skills Councils as well as individual training providers, higher and further education institutions, businesses and voluntary sector organisations.

<sup>1</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2006)

<sup>2</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2006)

### 36.2.5.2 *CQFW Developments 2003-2006*

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales was launched in 2003. Its first priorities, as detailed in the 2003-2006 Implementation Plan included<sup>1</sup>:

- Piloting and testing the quality assurance framework (the Credit Common Accord);
- Introducing credit rating across the Higher Education sector in Wales;
- Developing a marketing plan for the CQFW;
- Designing a credit related national funding system;
- Developing a more flexible Welsh curriculum (e.g. including the Welsh Baccalaureate, Modern Skills Diploma for Adults etc);
- Working in partnership to ensure quality assurance is in place;
- Accessing ESF support;
- Creating a lifelong learning pathway and qualification database i.e. to provide learners with an on-going record of achievement.

At present, it is therefore the case that the quality assurance principles needed to underpin the CQFW are in place, credit has been completely endorsed by the Higher Education sector in Wales and ESF support has been achieved. Significant progress has been made in all other areas and will be taken forward further in the Implementation Plan 2006-2009.

### 36.2.5.3 *Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2006-2007*

Now that the quality assurance principles are in place and the priority HE Sector has a credit system, the CQFW has been able to start work on incorporating non-formal learning. This is a priority within the Implementation Plan 2006-2009, which explicitly states that the CQFW will aim to build capacity within the non-formal learning arena e.g. 14-19, Adult and Continuing Learning, in-house company training, voluntary, community and commercial provision. In addition, the CQFW team will also work with more organisations to enable them to become recognised as accrediting bodies i.e. to be able to assign or award credit to non-formal learning.

A document has been produced entitled the “Recognition of Non-Formal Learning, Working Document” (2006), which enables applicant organisations to apply for recognition for their non-formal learning to be assigned and/or awarded credit. This application form clearly parallels the principles of the Credit Common Accord. For example, in determining why the learning should be awarded credit, in what units, at what level of difficulty etc. At the time of writing this documentation and related processes are being trialled. The administrative process needed to incorporate non-formal learning into the CQFW is therefore at an advanced stage of development.

There is a significant level of interest in applying for recognition from across the learning and training sectors. The interested organisations range in size and scope from Sector

<sup>1</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2003)

Skills Councils (e.g. SEMTA the SSC for science, engineering and manufacturing) to third sector community organisations (e.g. Sylfaen Cymunedol, based in North West Wales).

With respect to informal learning, work to develop systems and processes to incorporate this into the CQFW are scheduled to commence in winter 2007. This work will be informed by the outcomes of the trial of recognition of non-formal learning and the learning gained through other CQFW-sponsored projects.

## **Scotland**

In Scotland, the key initiative for validating non-formal and informal learning within the SCQF Framework is a methodology known as 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL).

### **36.2.5.4 *The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)***

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was launched in 2001, making Scotland the first U.K country to adopt a credit rating system. As with the Welsh model, it aims to provide an all-inclusive framework, including formal, non-formal and informal learning across all learning sectors (public, private and the voluntary sector).

### **36.2.5.5 *Key Stakeholders***

On the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2006, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership was established. This partnership consists of:

- The Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC);
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA);
- Scottish Ministers;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and;
- Universities Scotland.

This expands on the previously joint partnership arrangements of the Scottish Executive's Department for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The partnership is a company limited by guarantee, which has "responsibility for maintaining the quality assurance and integrity of the Framework, as well as its further promotion and development, whilst maintaining relationships with other frameworks in the U.K, Europe and Internationally"<sup>1</sup>.

### **36.2.5.6 *SCQF Developments 2003-2005***

Between 2003-2005 i.e. the duration of the National Implementation Plan, the SCQF focused on credit rating mainstream qualifications e.g. higher education, Scottish

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

Qualification Certificate, Higher National Units, SVQs etc. Once this had been completed it started work on credit rating courses outside of the SQA/HEI remit and began to look at areas such as community learning and development. At this time, developing the SCQF was naturally underpinned by significant work in establishing quality assurance principles, capacity building, developing a communications strategy etc.

During this time, developmental work started in assessing how non-formal and informal learning could be incorporated into the framework.

#### 36.2.5.7 *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 2005-2007*

Since July 2005, there has been a methodology in place for 'Recognising Prior Learning' (RPL). RPL in Scotland has two 'types' of recognition, RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition) and RPL for credit (summative recognition)<sup>1</sup>.

- RPL for personal/career development focuses on the process of enabling learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. The SCQF can be used to support this process through the mapping, or notional levelling, of this learning in order to identify future potential learning pathways as part of an educational guidance process;
- RPL for credit is often described as Accreditation of Experiential Learning (APEL), although the term RPL is becoming increasingly used. Since this is a resource intensive process, the methodology encourages the use of existing tools for support and assessment, as well as the development of more innovative, less resource intensive approaches, such as on-line tools, group support, and more streamlined forms of assessment.

The methodology for both formative recognition and summative recognition are documented in the SCQF's Guidelines. These guidelines<sup>2</sup>:

- Provide guidance to learning providers across all post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland on managing the process of recognising the prior informal learning of learners within the context of the SCQF;
- Provide a set of core principles and key features that will enable users of the SCQF to have confidence that there is consistency in approaches in recognising prior informal learning;
- Support the provision and provide guidance to providers on the key features of the RPL process.

Now that the administrative support needed to incorporate informal learning into the SCQF is in place, any organisation or individual who is interested in applying for their non-formal or informal learning to be recognised can do so, through the recognised, awarding bodies.

<sup>1</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

It is not known, however, how many organisations or individuals have **benefited from RPL** since it was launched. This is because the Scottish government does not fund RPL and therefore does not monitor the uptake of RPL. The only RPL projects that are monitored are special projects that have been funded by the public sector. The following table presents projects that have been undertaken<sup>1</sup>.

#### Examples of publicly funded RPL projects

##### **Social services<sup>2</sup>**

Within the social services sector, project work has been carried out with learners from Crossreach, ORCHA, Viewpoint and Inclusion Glasgow to recognise learning that has not been previously assessed within SVQ 2 or 3 (Scottish Vocational Qualifications). The purpose being to enable learners to complete the course without duplicating effort. The first stage of the project is now complete and two work-based programmes of learning have been credit rated and the materials and guidelines from this will be available later in the year.

Also within the social services sector, universities in Scotland are looking at ways of allowing credit transfer from informal-experiential learning to gain entry onto a Degree in Social Work<sup>3</sup>. This project will track learners at Glasgow Caledonian University and Open University, which includes advanced entry using RPL.

##### **Community learning**

Within Community Learning and Development (CLD), North Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire CLD staff will be amongst the first to use the on-line tool for Recognition of Prior Learning to support their work in the delivery of SVQ3 in Youth Work and Modern Apprenticeships<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Gallacher J Et. Al. (June 2006) Evaluation of the Achievements of the SCQF against the National Implementation Plan: An overview of Emerging Issues. Published by the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning Glasgow Caledonian University.

<sup>2</sup> SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

<sup>3</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk/who18.asp](http://www.scqf.org.uk/who18.asp)

<sup>4</sup> SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

### 36.3 Private Sector

The organisations that are involved in recognising non-formal and informal learning in the private sector, throughout the U.K, are the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). There are 25 SSCs in the U.K, which are monitored and funded by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). The SSCs are tasked with:

- Reducing skills gaps and shortages;
- Improving productivity, business and public services performance;
- Increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce; and;
- Improving learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The Skills for Business Network (SfBN) i.e. the network of 25 SSCs, emerged from other employer networks (industry training boards, NTOs etc) and therefore have been involved with recognition of non-formal and informal learning for sometime, albeit without co-ordination, adopting a 'bottom-up' approach<sup>1</sup>. The difference now is that with the launch of the new credit frameworks, the SSCs will be working with key partners in all four countries to ensure a co-ordinated approach to recognising non-formal and informal learning.

Currently, the SSCs are looking at the credit frameworks in a number of ways. For example, looking at how National Occupational Standards (NOS) can relate to credit and developing new Sector Qualification Strategies (SQS), which outline current and future learning and qualifications needs by employers within the context of the new frameworks<sup>2</sup>.

The rest of this chapter provides examples of how private sector organisations have recognised non-formal and/or informal learning within their industry sectors.

#### 36.3.1 Case Study: Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB)

WAMITAB was established in 1989 with a remit to determine and advise on policy and standards of education, qualifications and training for all employees in the Waste Management Industry. WAMITAB is the awarding body for the waste management industry in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and joint awarding body, with SQA, for qualifications in Scotland<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> [www.ssda.org.uk](http://www.ssda.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wamitab.org.uk/>

WAMITAB first became interested in the emerging credit and qualification frameworks in 2004. They could see that adopting credit values for their vocational qualifications would allow their learners to:

- Achieve mutual recognition with other qualifications. For example, allowing them to progress from one NVQ to another or from NVQ to academic qualifications both within and across industry sectors;
- Avoid repetition of units, particularly in skills such as communication skills, customer care, health and safety etc, which appear in many qualifications within and across industry sectors.

As a result, since April 2006, WAMITAB have had 90% of their vocational courses accredited within the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW). These units are mostly NVQs and range from levels 1 to 4 i.e. from operator through to manager level. Due to the fact that NVQs are competence-based qualifications, this system does facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. However, strictly speaking, NVQs are mainstream, formal qualifications.

With respect to using the credit system to full effect, WAMITAB will therefore need to wait for the mechanisms in place to recognise non-formal and informal learning to take full effect. They will also need to wait for the CQFW to incorporate more units of learning before students will see the full benefits of the new framework.

Currently, 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) is still the most common mechanism for recognising prior learning. This is a process which has been in place since WAMITAB was first established and offers students exemptions from units of learning if they can provide evidence that they have already undertaken this training. This process involves an assessor comparing units of learning, identifying any shortfalls in knowledge, assessing whether the past learning is up-to-date etc.

### 36.3.2 Case Study: SEMTA (Wales)

SEMTA is the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing. It operates U.K wide with representatives employed in each region.

In Wales, SEMTA has recently worked with the new credit framework (CQFW) to allow employees undertaking in-house training programmes to gain recognition for their learning and development. The in-house training could include technical training, company induction schemes, health and safety, Continued Professional Development (CPD) etc. However, for a unit to be accredited it has to satisfy the CQFW requirement of 'one unit achieving certain learning outcomes in 10 hours of learning time' and has to adhere to CQFW quality procedures.

SEMTA works with a number of companies e.g. Airbus, Robert Bosch, Flowform in assigning and awarding credit to in-house training - sizing and levelling their training against CQFW criteria and against National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The main reasons for looking at ways to accredit in-house training are that it:

- Allows employers to build more flexible learning programmes;
- Provides employees with a means of recognising their training and competencies, which can help them with their career progression and future learning.

## **36.4 The Third Sector**

In Scotland and Wales, where systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning are in place, a number of voluntary sector organisations have had learning programmes accredited within the national credit and qualifications frameworks.

The rest of this chapter focuses on providing examples of how voluntary sector organisations have recognised non-formal and/or informal learning.

### **36.4.1 Case Study: Sylfaen Cymunedol, North Wales**

Sylfaen Cymunedol is a community development project, which aims to influence change in communities. It achieves this through engaging community development activists in relevant learning and development programmes. These programmes help to identify the problems/issues inherent within the communities and, importantly, how these issues should be tackled. Often this leads to the development of new services, for example, a new purpose built nursery etc.

Initially the learning programmes provided by Sylfaen Cymunedol were not recognised. The charity started to look for ways of accrediting their training largely because they wanted their learners to gain confidence and encourage them to proceed with further learning and development. The CQFW, via the Open College Network, offered them an opportunity to do this by providing a flexible means of “accrediting learning wherever and however it took place”. They found that they could assign credit values to all of their units of learning, for example confidence building, introduction to community development, working with young people etc in a way that they could not with the traditional NVQ system.

In order to achieve credit, the learners have to complete a ‘portfolio’, which consists of a number of ‘task sheets’. For example, learners may be expected to carry out a community audit and evidence their learning by taking photographs, writing a short report etc. An Internal and External Verifier proceed to review the portfolios before credits are awarded. This assures quality and provides the learner with an opportunity to transfer their credit to other forms of learning.

#### 36.4.2 Case Study: Volunteer Development Scotland

This is a voluntary sector learning and training provider, which provides a short one-day course to volunteer organisations on developing volunteer portfolios. The portfolios can be developed to assist volunteer organisations in the training and development of volunteers. RPL is highlighted as a means of assessing experience and training to provide evidence for use in further or higher education or in employment<sup>1</sup>.

#### 36.4.3 Case Study: Progress GB

Some third sector organisations play an important role in working with disadvantaged groups. VINFL can provide for the social and economic integration of disadvantaged groups (such as immigrants, older workers or disengaged young people) by demonstrating to them and to the outside world their abilities and achievements, as demonstrated in the example given below.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2006) Scottish Contribution to UK Report on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

## Progress GB, using VINFL to help refugees, UK

'Progress GB' is a development partnership funded by the ESF EQUAL programme. Its lead partner is NIACE<sup>1</sup>, a non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners. The purpose of the Progress-GB Development Partnership is to pilot and disseminate innovative approaches that will support employers to overcome skill shortages, by promoting inclusive work practices, and to address the needs of refugee and migrant workers to develop and adapt their skills for the UK labour market through a range of lifelong learning opportunities.

People who come to the UK from other countries encounter considerable difficulties in gaining recognition for their existing skills, experience and qualifications. As part of the Progress GB project, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham has developed new models to support recognition through skills auditing, work experience, top-up training, and developing migrants' awareness of the UK labour market.

Refugees are offered an assessment by an advisor, who discusses the programme and audits candidates' language and skills levels. They are then directed to a package of products that can include a vocational orientation programme, which identifies gaps in ability and further appropriate training, a vocational language programme and general labour market orientation programmes. In some vocational areas, skills can be accredited whilst on the orientation programme. Once they are work-ready, refugees are offered a supervised work experience placement, where, in some sectors, a mentor is assigned to help them integrate into the workplace. Throughout the process, refugees are offered ongoing assistance with looking for a job or becoming self-employed, and may leave the programme at any time to take up paid employment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from 'Overcoming Barriers', a dissemination leaflet for Progress GB, available at: <http://www.equal-works.com/ProductHome.aspx?ety=2eeca14b-594c-42b0-885d-39c555eaf280>

## 36.5 Conclusions

Traditionally, there has been no legal framework for recognition and validation of non-formal /informal learning within education and training in the UK due to its voluntarist approach to education and training in general. Although some administrative measures for the recognition of such learning have been introduced across the devolved administrations, they do not constitute a legal framework.

However, all of the qualification frameworks emerging throughout the U.K are 'credit' frameworks, which will be compatible with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The frameworks in England/Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are at different stages of development. Currently, it is the Scottish and Welsh frameworks that are the most advanced in incorporating non-formal and informal learning. This is because they have adopted specific methodological approaches, quality assurance procedures etc aimed at incorporating these 'types' of learning into their national qualification frameworks.

The QCF in England and Northern Ireland does not exempt informal and non-formal learning from being included within the framework. However, it will not be known until it is launched how much non-formal or informal learning will in fact be included or whether specific methodologies will be put in place to co-ordinate a national approach to validation. At the moment methodologies such as APL and RARPA are prime examples of individual validation initiatives in England.

## 37.0 Case Study: Knowledge Centres (Videnscentre), Denmark<sup>1</sup>

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*By Anna Drozd<sup>2</sup> (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 37.1 Introduction

In 2002, the Danish government took the initiative to raise employment levels among migrants in Denmark, in particular of those with no formal education. One of the methods which was identified to have the potential to help achieve this goal was to improve the provision of competence assessment. A considerable body of research revealed that most non-Western migrants had no official documents certifying their education and skills, making it hard to compare their skills with those provided by the education system in Denmark. Moreover, a large part of the migrants had no previous work experience in Denmark, which prevented them from obtaining a recommendation from a Danish employer.

Thus in 2004, following a tendering process from the Ministry of Labour (AMS), five 'Knowledge Centres' were established as a pilot project which would last for three and a half years. The work of the centres focused on enhancing the provision of competence assessment and also on providing migrants with an official document to certify their skills and experience. Although varying across the centres, the main focus was placed on assessing competences in the workplace. One variation was that some centres involved education providers in the competence assessment.

The key stakeholders in the pilot initiative were The Ministry of Labour (AMS) in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs together with the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Employers.

### 37.2 Target group – main characteristics and rationale for intervention

It is important to clarify that the Knowledge Centres do not work directly with the final beneficiaries of the initiative (unemployed migrants). The client groups of the centres include education institutions, professionals in the field of integration, job centres, those responsible for competence assessment at workplaces (for example, as part of their

<sup>1</sup> All information in this case study is based on interviews with key stakeholders (a representative of the Knowledge Centre Mid-West and a representative of the Ministry of Labour), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Expert input provided by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities), vocational education and training (VET) centres and private companies which are subcontractors for delivering public services under contracts with the public authorities.

As regards the final beneficiaries, these are immigrants with no formal education and/or no previous work experience in Denmark, usually coming from non-Western countries<sup>1</sup>. This group does not include asylum seekers.

In 2004, immigrants and their descendants in Denmark accounted for 8.2% of the total population. A large proportion of this group originates from non-Western countries<sup>2</sup> (70.8% of the immigrant and descendant population), mainly from Turkey and Pakistan. According to projections of the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, the number of immigrants and their descendants is likely to further increase in the coming decades, especially within the 16-64 age group, (i.e the working age population). Despite this increase, the employment rate of non-Western immigrants and their descendants stood only at 47% (against 77% of Danes)<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, there is a strong gender divide in employment rates, which are usually lower for immigrant women.

Opportunities for foreign nationals to gain a foothold in the Danish labour market largely depend on their educational level (in relation to the Danish system). However, a large proportion of immigrants have not gained any professional qualifications<sup>4</sup> in their countries of origin, nor after their arrival in Denmark. Only 35% of the non-Western immigrants in the 25-64 age group have achieved a qualification in their countries of origin, and only 10% of non-Western immigrants have done so after they arrived in Denmark. This is against 66% of Danes who have achieved a professional qualification. The situation improves in the case of descendants of immigrants as 39% of them have achieved a professional qualification. However, this figure still falls short of that of the Danish population.

At the same time, in the past several years, Denmark hit low levels of unemployment and began facing acute skill shortages, especially in those parts of the services sector that cannot be outsourced.

Therefore, as mentioned above, the work of the Knowledge Centres focuses on institutions that deal with immigrants with no formal education and no work experience in Denmark, by encouraging validation and assessment of their competences in the workplace. The output

<sup>1</sup> All those that came to Denmark with previous formal education and corresponding documentation are dealt with by CIRIUS, an authority within the Danish Ministry of Education which is responsible, inter alia, for checking the compatibility of the foreign education certificates with the Danish requirements

<sup>2</sup> The Western countries comprise all EU/EEA Member States, US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland, and the Vatican State. Non-Western countries are all other countries.

<sup>3</sup> Summary of the statistical publication 'Yearbook on Foreigners in Denmark 2004' published by the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs

<sup>4</sup> Professional qualifications are understood as completed vocational training or higher education programmes.

of this process is used not only by the job centres in their assessment of further steps that need to be taken in order to integrate a given person in the labour market, but also constitute a tangible proof for individuals themselves of their skills and competences.

It must be pointed out that, according to the stakeholders interviewed, the labour market integration of these groups is a long and complex process and does not constitute one-off competence assessment exercise. This exercise is thus viewed as facilitating further steps in the assistance provided to these groups in their labour market integration. The exercise also provides a sound and systematic basis for further recommendations, such as language training or a further vocational training course.

### **37.3 Structure and role of the Knowledge Centres**

There are five Knowledge Centres, covering five regions of Denmark. Each centre is organised according to a different model, since various consortia responded to the tender and were subsequently granted a contract to run the centres. Much of the information for this case study has been taken from an interview with the Knowledge Centre Mid-West. This particular Centre is composed of a services company, a consultancy, a municipality, a language school and a HR company (recruitment). The Mid-West centre is the only Knowledge Centre run by a private company (ISS Facility Services). This company employs approx. 13,000 people and due to a large share of immigrants in its workforce (around 25%) it has considerable experience in integrating immigrants.

Other centres are run by: a vocational training centre, a private consultancy company, a language school (specialising in training immigrants) and a public employment service (at regional level). This variation was intended in order to test how the proposed methodology for working with immigrants would work in different organisational contexts.

Various stakeholders were involved in the development of the methodologies and tools for validation; as well as the members of the consortia that led Knowledge Centres, social partners, companies (HR personnel) and customers (such as job centres) took part. The results from research and institutions' experience also fed into the process of development of methodologies and tools.

Although the Knowledge Centres are organised differently, being run either by a private organisation or by an educational institution, their results and outputs are the same. First of all, they work under the same contract with the Ministry of Labour, and secondly, they remain in regular contact with each other through Steering Group meetings, that involve all consortia, the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs.

Each Knowledge Centre employs between five to eight consultants who work as a team. The main tasks of the team include:

- Preparation of the overview of the existing methods and organisations which provide competence assessment. This overview was carried out at regional level and provided information on the methods used for competence assessment and key players / institutions providing it.
- Providing assistance to jobcentres on what kind of competence assessment is suitable for the target group. Target groups were recruited through the job centres and consisted of unemployed migrants receiving unemployment assistance (non-European migrants)
- Developing an online tool to assist jobcentres<sup>1</sup> in their selection of the best competence assessment method. The online tool was developed in the first stage of the Knowledge Centres pilot project and was finalised in September 2005. It is used nationally by the job centres, solely by the job consultants. It consists of standardised job descriptions that help competence assessment (for more details see next section), a database of results of immigrants undergoing assessment and a comprehensive overview of the initiatives in the field of competence assessment, together with the list of companies that are willing to take an immigrant for an assessment period and, possibly, for further training. The tool was developed by the consortia together with the Ministry of Labour, which coordinated the development of the tool and methodology. Each Knowledge Centre selected other relevant persons (with a human resources or employment background) to participate in the process. The third party contributing to the process was an IT company which assisted in the technical development of the online tool. The tool was first used by the job consultants and the Knowledge Centres then reported on immigrants' reactions to the tool. Before its launch, the tool was tested and amended as a result of two meetings between the Ministry of Labour and the IT company.
- Providing information on validation methods and institutions via a helpdesk to customers, such as job consultants in the jobcentres or any other professionals involved in the field of integration and competence assessment.
- Increase knowledge sharing on the integration of migrants in the labour market, carried out at various levels and by various organisations through websites, newsletters and dissemination of good practice examples.

<sup>1</sup> The online tool was available for job centres only, not the Knowledge Centres other clients. This is because the job centre consultants also have access to data about immigrants. All other services provided by the Knowledge Centres are available to all their clients.

These activities are complemented by training and seminars given by the members of the centres to their customers, such as job centres and for the professionals (job consultants) who assist migrants in finding a job. The main subjects of the training sessions were guidance on how to use the online tool, disseminating good practice examples and teaching which methods are the most effective in the integration process.

The Knowledge Centres play a key role in the labour market and integration policies, since they were essentially developed as a part of these policies. Moreover, although originally a pilot project, the Knowledge Centres' results are now to be integrated in the mainstream provision of assistance to migrants with no formal education and/or no prior work experience.

### **37.4 Competence assessment methodology**

The main focus of the Knowledge Centre Mid-West was to bring competence assessment into real life conditions and assess skills and competences in the workplace, where the competences can be demonstrated and where they are normally used. The main reasons for such a choice were: the fact that the vast majority of the target group did not have any previous work experience and the view that the best way to assess a person's skills was to do that in the workplace. Moreover, since most of the immigrants did not have any previous education, assessment by educational institutions was not considered to be as relevant as an assessment by companies<sup>1</sup>.

- The unemployed immigrants are referred by consultants at the job centres for a workplace competence assessment, if the consultant decides that there is a need for such an assessment<sup>2</sup>.
- In the workplace, the right person to conduct the assessment is selected, usually according to internal company rules. Although job consultants are rarely involved in the process, it must be borne in mind that the companies maintain close relationships with the job centres and it is the job consultant that sends the requirement to the company for competence assessment.
- The assessment period takes between three and four weeks during which the beneficiary is assessed during their work.
- After the assessment period is finished, the beneficiary is issued with a 'competence card' which describes actual competences as they are observed. That competence card can be used as a recommendation when looking for another job (or being recommended by a job consultant to on-the-job training).

<sup>1</sup> Additionally, there are important financial considerations behind this choice – it is less expensive for job centres to refer a client to a workplace assessment than into an education institution.

<sup>2</sup> It may well be that competence assessment in the workplace is unsuitable and it is more effective to refer the person to the language training course or other services or forms of support.

During the assessment period the immigrants are given support by the job consultants.

The methodology which is used in assessing competence is observation. It is carried out in the workplace by a mentor. The process is facilitated by the online tool, mentioned earlier, which specifies which skills and competences are to be assessed for a particular job. The tool contains descriptions for each job and specifies the range of skills that ensure proper execution of tasks envisaged by a given job function. The development of standards was based on the existing national occupational standards. However, the process of constructing job descriptions went further by breaking down the skills and competences into functions. Once these lists of functions had been developed, companies were consulted for their feedback. Despite this consultation, however, there have been some problems with the integration of the standards developed under the Knowledge Centres pilot in the IT system of municipalities, which differs between the municipalities. The process of integrating the descriptions is part of mainstreaming the results of the Knowledge Centres' work (see last section for more details). However, as highlighted by the interviewees, the process should have involved job consultants more, as they are a group who will eventually work with the tool.

The tool functions above all to systematise the process of assessment: the process of assessment is carried out according to the same standards; and the feedback given to institutions and to the learner is standardised and provides a sound and comparable basis for undertaking further steps such as education or language training.

The assessment is carried out by mentors who usually are employees of the same company in which the learner is assessed. It can either be a person who is a HR employee, or a colleague from any other relevant unit. Colleagues who become mentors are first assessed in terms of willingness and ability to conduct a training or assessment of a learner. Then they are offered training on how to be a mentor. Such training and assessment is provided by the companies themselves. Since the assessment is carried out in the workplace, the assessment methodologies have usually been developed as a part of the company's human resource development policy.

During the three to four week assessment period, personal competences as well as professional, language, computer and basic skills; are assessed in relation to the tasks performed. The reason for prioritising these competences was that the employers often perceive immigrant workers as lacking key personal competences needed in a Danish workplace<sup>1</sup>. Due to the initial low or no level of education, the types of jobs that are

<sup>1</sup> Mortensen I.Q. (2007). A Danish model for Assessing Competences of Immigrants at the Labour Market, conference material

performed are those corresponding to unskilled labour, such as simple cleaning. In some cases, the skills acquired can correspond to qualification levels and are usually complemented by vocational training in an education institution. Whenever the qualification serves the purpose of getting a person into employment, this option is chosen. This is especially relevant to the social services sector where the demand for labour, especially at lower skill levels, is high and offers a very effective bridge into employment for immigrants.

During the assessment period the employers can be compensated with a wage subsidy for each learner. In many cases learners are offered further training in the company. Then, companies can benefit from training subsidies and the learners are paid a minimum wage for their work.

Upon completion of the assessment period, information about the progress and the assessment results are recorded in an online database (online tool). The same database generates a competence card which specifies which skills and competences a given person has. The document is a useful basis for further job search or for further steps that need to be taken in order to integrate a person into the labour market (such as language or professional training). For job consultants, it is a perfect tool when addressing further companies for training or during an application to access education (especially in the field of social service, either in education institutions or as on-the-job training). For the companies, it is a perfect recruitment tool, which has high credibility because it was assessed in and developed by the companies themselves. As such it is perceived to be more relevant to business requirements, as opposed to some municipality programmes which suffer from low levels of trust among the employers.

Competence cards are issued by the job centres nationally. Although the card is now well-known, our research has identified a strong belief that there needs to be further assistance to all job centres in relation to the use of the card. There is a need to market the card better to the job centres and to the companies, as the use of the competence assessment and the resulting competence cards are not currently obligatory. Issuing competence cards is only one of the methods of providing assistance to the job centre clients.

The development of the online tool has greatly contributed to the systematisation and professionalisation of competence assessment. Previously, competence assessment was carried out in rather an 'ad hoc' manner, with little feedback to the job consultants (at the job centres) and to the learners themselves. Moreover, immigrants had previously no documentation certifying their skills and progress made. The tool, which has taken one year to develop, has already been adjusted following the mid-term evaluation. The adjustments were mostly of a technical nature, to make the tool even more user-friendly.

The system, despite its success, (see next section) has not been without criticism. Mainly the trade unions have underlined that its methods for assessment are too subjective since

they may vary across the companies, despite the fact that they are carried out against a standardised format (the catalogue of skills and competences in the online tool). However, the competence card is felt to be at least a systematisation of the assessment process and a significant step forward in the development of competence assessment methodologies (and process) for that specific target group. Moreover, it provides a learner with standardised and comprehensive feedback, which was not available before. Since the competence card is used as a recommendation and a personal tool for job search, there are always problems with its subjectivity. However, the card presents an employer's impression on how a given person performs and thus may have credibility in the eyes of another employer.

The system is also useful for other target groups which lack professional experience. In fact, these methodologies have already been used by job centres for other groups which lack previous work experience.

The system receives considerable support from employers who first of all are keen to take on new trainees and, secondly, are satisfied with the new standardised tools that minimise their time spent on giving feedback; while at the same time allowing for comparability of the assessment results.

### **37.5 Outputs and outcomes**

To date, approximately 2,000 competence assessments have been carried out, which resulted in less than 1,000 competence cards being issued (data for the period from 2005 to August 2007)<sup>1</sup>. The number of assessments averages 100 per month. The reason for the difference between the number of assessments and the competence cards issued is mainly the fact that some competence assessments are not followed by issuing of the card, either because the beneficiary stayed on in employment or training, or they dropped out of the process.

It must be said here that at the time when the Knowledge Centres were set up, Denmark underwent a major restructuring of the public administration which affected the field of employment and welfare, whereby job centres were created in the municipalities, with the aim of providing one-stop-shop services for the unemployed<sup>2</sup>. This is believed to have impeded successful performance of the pilot action, due to changing roles and initial confusion over the responsibilities of the public authorities. However, at the same time, the final evaluation of the Knowledge Centres was very positive in terms of its effectiveness in

<sup>1</sup> The first period focused on the development of the online tool (until September 2005)

<sup>2</sup> In Denmark, the responsibility for people receiving unemployment insurance lies within the Ministry of Labour. People who are receiving welfare payments are dealt with by the municipalities. The reform did not change the responsibilities of these two bodies but integrated the provision under 'one roof'.

such areas as knowledge sharing, dissemination of good practice examples and improvement of competence assessment methodologies<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the latter is also highlighted by the stakeholders we interviewed, who claim that competence assessment became an important item on the policy agenda and is recognised as separate from competence development, which further improved the methodology for competence assessment.

#### 37.5.1 Sustainability and mainstreaming

The Knowledge Centres will remain operational until December 2007, when they will be closed and the results of their work will be made part of the mainstream provision by the job centres. At present, the Ministry of Labour is setting up a detailed plan on how the results should be anchored within the job centres and a special national service to provide support to immigrants. This service was launched in January 2007 and is aimed at providing job centres with detailed information on four areas: immigrants, equal opportunities, disability and EURES<sup>2</sup> cooperation. These four units each employ eight people and their task is to support the knowledge of job centres in these areas, through such activities as conferences, visits to job centres and by providing information via a helpdesk. Their funding was envisaged for 3 years - an evaluation in 2008 will decide on whether to continue the service. Therefore, all results of the work of the Knowledge Centres will be transferred to one of the units of the new service for immigrants. The online tool will remain operational; however, one part of the database will be shut down, namely the list of companies which are willing to take on an immigrant for assessment. This move is a result of the evaluation which showed that the database has not been used enough, due to the fact that job centres had their own established contacts with educational institutions and companies.

However, despite the fact that the methodologies developed are of use to other target groups than immigrants, the new service provision will be limited to immigrants only, mainly due to organisational and financial considerations<sup>3</sup>.

### 37.6 Conclusions

The competence cards and the competence assessment process have had a lasting impact on the final beneficiaries who feel proud of their own achievements and, in many cases, for the first time in their lives they have documentation certifying their skills and competences. Moreover, they are provided with more comprehensive feedback that

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Business Consulting A/S (2007). Brug for alles kompetencer. Slutevaluering af videnscentrene for kompetenceafklaring af flygtninge og indvandre

<sup>2</sup> European Employment Services

<sup>3</sup> This includes the structure of the public support system to immigrants and other groups, as well as the fact that there has not been any more finance allocated to mainstreaming the new methods to be used by other groups.

assists them in their job search efforts or in their further training. The progress and further career paths of those undergoing the competence assessment are constantly tracked by the Ministry of Labour. However, the sample to date is too small and the implementation period too short for longer term results to be observed. Thus it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the wider impact of the current results. The Ministry of Labour expects to have more results towards mid-2008 on the longer-term effects of the pilot action.

## 38.0 Case Study: Role of the VAE jury, France

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By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 38.1 Introduction

France is one of the EU countries at the forefront of the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning. France was in fact the first Member State to introduce legislation with respect to validation, when in 1934 a law was introduced to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience.

During the 1980s, a trend in national policy proposed to increase the number of people entering higher education (HE) and in 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to HE. The process, termed 'VAP 85' enables any person aged at least 20, who ceased their initial studies a minimum of two years ago, to apply for a place on a HE course. Any form of training, experience acquired through paid or voluntary work and knowledge or skills acquired independently of training can be taken into account in their application.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of 'VAP 85' is to enable an individual to take up studying again through exemption of the qualification normally required. It is based on a portfolio, which is assessed by a Pedagogical Commission. Today, 'VAP 85' is still the most used procedure in Higher Education.

In 1992, further legislation *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* ('VAP 92')<sup>2</sup> was introduced. 'VAP 92' enabled individuals to apply for the validation of certain parts of a qualification (but not a whole qualification) awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture (secondary and higher education). Candidates must at least pass one unit of the degree. People with five years' work experience can apply for these partial qualifications by submitting a portfolio detailing the activities undertaken and skills (competences) gained through their experience, which is then examined by an assessment panel or *jury*.

The 2002 "Social Modernisation Act", extended the existing model of validation to include all the main types of qualification (*certification*) used in France and allow complete qualifications to be awarded on the basis of knowledge gained through experience. This broadened concept of validation, referred to as *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) or Validation of Prior Experience, made access to validation of knowledge gained

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop

<sup>2</sup> Law no. 92-678 of the 20 July 1992 promoted by the Ministry of Labour, followed by decree no. 93-538 of the 27 March 1993

through experience a right for everyone with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience. Thus, informal and non-formal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally-recognised qualification.

Since its creation in 2002, there has been a considerable increase in demand for VAE from individuals with no or few qualifications, seeking to take up the offer of a 'second chance' and to progress towards a higher level of qualifications. A total of over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005. VAE is currently concentrated in certain sectors and for a small number of qualifications – over a quarter of the qualifications delivered in 2004 and 2005 related to professions in health and social care. 5600 university degrees were obtained through VAE during the period 2002 - 2006 (7882 partial degrees were delivered during the same period).<sup>1</sup>

The 2002 Social Modernisation Act again stipulates the use of a jury for the assessment stage of a VAE application, as well as how these juries should be composed. The role of the jury is to assess the candidate's application for VAE, based on their dossier of experience, and in some cases on an interview with the candidate and/or a practical assessment (either simulated or real-life). All juries should be balanced in terms of gender and a quarter of the membership should represent the relevant occupational sector.

This case study examines the role of the VAE juries in France and aims to identify good practice and lessons learned from experiences to date. It is based on a document review and two interviews with jury members from French Universities and therefore focuses in particular on the implementation of VAE in French Higher Education.

## **38.2 Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience, VAE**

The decrees following the April 2002 Social Modernisation Act outlined the basic principles of the procedure for VAE, which is made up of five main steps. We will examine each of these in turn.

### **38.2.1 Step one: Information and Guidance**

Individuals can find out about VAE from a number of sources, including the new website [www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr) and regional centres which provide advice and support to potential applicants.

Many universities have set up their own dedicated department or centre to support individuals who are interested in accessing VAE to recognise their professional experience. The staff at these centres provides individual support (mentoring) throughout the preparatory phase, such as helping the individual to compile his/her dossier or portfolio

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

and to prepare for the interview with the jury. At the two case study universities, this member of (administrative) staff also participates as a member of the VAE jury.

One of our interviewees was able to give details of the profile of the staff at their university validation centre. There are three VAE 'advisers' at the centre, all of whom have achieved a PhD in different subjects (modern literature, oceanography and sociology). However, it was suggested that this was particular to this university and it is not known if all staff at similar centres would have achieved a similar level of qualification. The interviewee told us that none of the 'advisers' were provided with training specific to the role.

### 38.2.2 Step two: Decision on the validity of the application

Individuals must complete an initial dossier which outlines their experience in relation to the qualification they wish to apply for. They must be able to give evidence of a minimum of three years' experience in relation to the qualification. The three years can be continuous or include gaps and the experience can be full-time or part-time, in France or abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Applicants can access online *référentiels de certification / d'activités* for use during the preparation of this dossier. These are reference frameworks which outline the knowledge, skills and competences the individual should possess in order to be awarded the relevant qualification.<sup>2</sup> For vocational education, there are *référentiels métiers* as well as *référentiels de certification (ou de compétences)* (which are used in this sector to construct qualifications and define the content of the training).

The individual should then submit the initial dossier to the certification body for the relevant qualification, which decides within two months on the *recevabilité* or validity of the application, i.e. whether the individual can proceed further with the VAE process. For universities, this step would normally be completed by the administrative department or centre with responsibility for VAE.

In Higher Education, as regards to the complexity and commitment involved in producing the VAE portfolio, the validity decision cannot be only based on the three years formal requirement. That is why most universities also inform the candidate if their chance of achieving the qualification is high or not.

### 38.2.3 Step three: Preparation of the candidate portfolio

If the candidate's initial application is approved, they then proceed to prepare their *dossier* or portfolio of experience. Again, portfolios must give evidence of at least three years of

<sup>1</sup> Certain Ministries apply more precise frameworks to the relationship between the certificate and the individual's experience.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from [www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr)

relevant experience (professional, unpaid or voluntary). Our interviewees told us that the portfolios submitted at their institutions are generally composed of a document detailing the candidate's background, the reason for their application etc., together with evidence of their experience, e.g. job descriptions, training certificates, minutes from meetings, signed references from voluntary associations. However, it is not compulsory to provide formal documentation. The portfolios vary in size – 20-30 pages was suggested to be the average, although our interviewees mentioned that some can reach at least 200 pages.

At this stage, candidates may choose to receive support or 'mentoring' – this is strongly recommended on the government website for VAE<sup>1</sup> and most universities do ensure that candidates receive support from their counsellor (*accompagnateur*).<sup>2</sup> The support is provided to help the candidate to assemble their portfolio and to prepare for the interview with the jury and/or practical assessment. At the case study universities, the administrative department with responsibility for VAE provides this support/'mentoring'. In other cases, candidates must enquire with the relevant (regional) organisation responsible for validation or certification – some provide the support themselves, others designate official (public or private) providers to carry out this task.

<sup>1</sup> The website [www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr) outlines the individual stages of a VAE procedure and strongly recommends that individuals seek support / mentoring (*accompagnement*).

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

#### 38.2.4 Step four: Interview

An interview or 'dialogue' with the jury takes place, either at the request of the jury or the candidate (except in Higher Education, where interviews are compulsory).

Assessment takes place at accredited centres, where the jury evaluates the individual's skills in relation to those required to obtain the qualification (as outlined in the *référentiel de certification / d'activités*). The individual's portfolio gives evidence of their experience and the interview serves to supplement the portfolio, thus enabling the candidate to give further details and the jury members to clarify any questions they might have. This may include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a practical test. These practical observations are organised by the relevant organisation responsible for validation or certification. Where an interview takes place, this can serve as a verification of the individual's professional competences, in place of the practical observation. In higher education, the institution determines whether such a practical observation is a necessary element of the VAE procedure.

We provide further details on this stage in more detail below.

#### 38.2.5 Step five: Deliberation and final decision

The jury then proceeds to deliberate and decides on the outcome of the validation request, based on the documents supplied and their own observations. The jury's final decision can result in:

- Full validation of the qualification
- Partial validation of the qualification<sup>1</sup>
- A refusal to award the qualification.

Our interviews also revealed that candidates may be awarded a 'conditional' validation, meaning that they are to be awarded the qualification, on condition that they complete, for example, a certain education or training course. At one university, it was noted that the jury would prefer to pursue this 'conditional' validation approach rather than a partial validation, in order to support the candidate to obtain a full qualification.

VAE would thus be classed as a 'portfolio method' according to the typology of validation methodologies given in the European Inventory of 2005.

It is important to note that while there are general procedures for VAE, which apply to all educational sectors, Higher Education institutions are able to determine their own VAE

<sup>1</sup> We were informed that according to the legislation, candidates should apply for a full qualification and it is the decision for the jury to award a partial certificate. However, we were also told that in practice, some candidates clarify to the jury that their application is for a partial validation only and the jury thus makes a judgement according to the candidate request.

procedures, in line with the national guidelines. The interviews we conducted with representatives from two universities show that this has led to a degree of variation in practice.

### **38.3 VAE – The Role of the Jury**

Our research has enabled us to carry out a detailed examination of the five steps outlined above, in particular in relation to VAE in practice at two French universities.

#### **38.3.1 Composition**

A jury must be constituted and chaired in accordance with the general regulations and those for each type of qualification. In general, one quarter of the membership must be qualified representatives of the relevant occupational sector. Half of these must be employer representatives, half employee representatives and there must be an equal balance between men and women. No further regulations are given regarding the remaining members of the jury, aside from the fact that staff from the company where the candidate is employed may not be part of the jury, nor may advisors who have helped the candidate put together his/her portfolio (except in Higher Education).

Within Higher Education, the general conditions for validation are identical to those applied for other types of educational qualification, but the composition and role of the jury is different. The president or director of the higher education institution nominates the president and members of the jury. The jury must be made up of a majority of teachers/academics and must include at least one member from a company or external organisation (excluding the candidate's employer organisation).

### 38.3.2 Roles and responsibilities

Juries are required to attribute "value" to an individual's experience, which may vary considerably in nature, depending on the context in which it was gained. Further, the 2002 Social Modernisation Act extended this initial remit, by giving the jury what Michel Feutrie (2006) terms "*le rôle de prescripteur*"<sup>1</sup> (a 'prescriptive' role). He refers to the additional responsibility of the jury to 'prescribe' the necessary steps a candidate who has received only 'partial validation' should take in order to obtain a full qualification, which might be a training course, an individual project or further experience. Thus, he says that the role of the jury goes beyond the award of a qualification, to supporting the individual to achieve their personal and professional aspirations.

### 38.3.3 The VAE jury in practice

Although the 2002 Social Modernisation Act and subsequent decrees provide a legal framework for regulating procedures, each jury determines its own proceedings and the manner of validation, as the jury's sovereignty is recognised in this domain.<sup>2</sup>

To find out how the guidelines are implemented in practice, we interviewed two academic members of staff from two different French universities for this case study. They explained how VAE was applied in their institutions. Stéphane Bellini, one of the interviewees, also supplied a research paper he had written based on his observations of the jury procedure.<sup>3</sup>

The composition of the juries varied a little between the two universities. In line with the regulations relating to Higher Education, the president or director of each institution nominates the president and members of the jury. At one institution, the jury is made up of four individuals: the jury president (Dean of the Faculty), two or three academics involved in the delivery of the qualification in question, a member of administrative staff from the university VAE department and a 'professional' representative. The 'professional' in this case can also be lecturer at the university, with external professional experience.

At the second university, there is a different jury for each subject. A jury is made up of two permanent members (president and vice-president of the jury), two academic members and two professionals. Here, the professionals chosen are individuals with an understanding of the qualification in question, such as former students. The professional members are required to have a qualification higher or equal to the qualification which the candidate has applied for. All six members give their time on a voluntary basis.

<sup>1</sup> Feutrie, M., 2006, La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience à l'Université. Available at: <http://www.eucen.org/documentation/InterestingDocs/TextMFtoCYD2006FR.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Bellini, S., The Experience of Validation, 2006 (English version not published). A similar report was presented at a congress in Reims, France in November 2006, entitled « Valider l'expérience du travail. Exercice d'anthropologie appliqué à un jury de VAE », Actes du XVIIe congrès de l'AGRHI, Reims, novembre 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

In contrast to higher education, for school-level qualifications, existing juries (for the award of qualifications through 'normal' procedures) have been used for VAE.<sup>1</sup>

At the second university, the interviewee noted that it was very rare for all six of the jury members to be present at a candidate interview (there is no minimum number of members which must be present). He explained that this is due to reasons such as: for some jury members it is seen as an additional burden on top of their normal workload, the interviews are not always held at a convenient date/time (applications for VAE can be made at any point in the academic year); and there is no payment for jury members at this particular university. He noted that in particular the professional members (who receive no payment for their time, nor any expenses) often do not attend the interview. However, even if members do not participate on the day, he confirmed that they contribute in some way to the assessment – e.g. through sending comments by e-mail. The first interviewee reported that for the juries he had taken part in, all members had been present but that within the university, this was not always the case.

At the first university, all jury members do now receive an incentive payment. Payments or *primes* were initially only given to the professional representative, until a change in policy two years ago. The payment is currently around 40 euros per candidate interviewed (this is only for the academic and professional jury members – the administrator from the validation centre does not receive a payment for taking part) and is conditional on participation in the candidate interview. Academics who take on the support/mentoring role for candidates also receive around 40 euros for this work and can also receive an additional payment for participation in the jury. It is paid by the university department for continuing training.

Under the national HE 'VAE implementation plan', which was supported by ESF funding, training was provided for stakeholders involved in the VAE procedures in French HE.<sup>2</sup> However, our interviewees stated that neither university provided any training for jury members. At the first university, jury members would participate in a discussion with the VAE administrator but no formal training was provided at either institution. It has also been noted in another report that in many cases jury members, who are generally more used to formal examination procedures, have not received detailed training on how to implement validation assessment methodologies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Feutrie, M., 2006, La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience à l'Université. Available at: <http://www.eucen.org/documentation/InterestingDocs/TextMFtoCYD2006FR.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

The jury's role can be divided into three key steps:

1. Examination of dossier, prior to the candidate interview;
2. Candidate interview;
3. Discussion after the interview, leading to a decision.

We will now consider these steps in turn.

**Examination of the dossier, prior to the candidate interview:** As explained above, candidates prepare *dossiers* or portfolios to give evidence of their experience in relation to the qualification in question. Interviewees noted that these portfolios can reach up to hundreds of pages, since there is no limit imposed on their length. At both universities, the jury members received the candidates' dossiers in advance of the interview. They were thus able to carry out their own, private assessment of the content and to formulate initial judgements, as well as questions they might want to ask at the interview.

**Candidate interview:** The candidate interviews at both universities were short – between 15 and 30 minutes at the first and around 30 minutes at the second (although at many other universities, interviews last longer than one hour<sup>1</sup>). One interviewee suggested that some candidate interviews allowed a process of 'sampling' to take place – questioning to test certain areas of knowledge/competences.

**Discussion after the interview, leading to a decision:** At the two universities, this discussion takes place immediately after the interview. At both, it was confirmed that, as Bellini found in his research, decision-making is always consensual and no 'vote' is required.<sup>2</sup> The decision results from an exchange of impressions and arguments based on the examination of the individual dossier and the interview. Bellini also notes that all juries are able to make quick decisions - in some 30 minutes, the decision is made. These 30 minutes can include previous discussion on the dossier, questioning the candidate and decision-making itself.

According to the legislation, the decision of the jury is absolute. Our interviewees however revealed a difference in procedures relating to the right to appeal the final decision of the jury. At the first university, the jury decision is considered absolute and there is no possibility for appeal – either by the candidate or a jury member. At the second however, the candidate may make an appeal, although no formal procedure has been established for this. The interviewee noted that several candidates had made an appeal (either to the Head of the Faculty or the University) and in each case their dossier had been re-

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>2</sup> Bellini, S., The Experience of Validation

examined, with varying consequences (e.g. confirmation of the decision, request for additional documentation in order to justify an amendment of the decision).

#### 38.3.4 Quality and Consistency

The literature notes that a significant amount of work has been carried out to develop *référentiels* or reference frameworks in order to provide VAE juries with a reliable tool to carry out an evaluation of an individual's competences in relation to the qualification in question.<sup>1</sup> The use of standard reference frameworks should enable an element of consistency to be maintained across the individual VAE assessments. Furthermore, in most universities, an assessment grid is established and given to the jury members.<sup>2</sup>

Our first interviewee confirmed that quality assurance of the VAE assessments at the university was based on the use of the *référentiel* for the qualification in question. He noted that the introduction of a more competence-based approach enabled consistency to be maintained in the assessment of the candidates but also mentioned that his own appraisal of candidates was based on a 'global' understanding of their experiences and competences.

The second interviewee explained that the role of the permanent jury members (the President and Vice-President) was to ensure equality of treatment for all candidates and consistency in the assessments. He mentioned that national *référentiels* are not available for all higher education qualifications (mainly for general qualifications, less so for more specific subjects) and added that not all university *référentiels* are yet structured according to competences (some are structured according to subjects). Both interviewees agreed that a VAE assessment was much easier to carry out on the basis of a competence-based *referential*.

A number of reports have shown that the high demand for VAE in France has not always been met by appropriate allocation of resources (both human and financial). Indeed, Benhamou, in 2005, warned that VAE should not become a '*victim of its own success*'.<sup>3</sup> Resource constraints do appear to have had an impact on the VAE procedures in place at each of our case study universities. Both interviewees indicated that although the length of the candidate interviews was sufficient to make a judgement on the candidate, longer interviews might be beneficial. However, it was noted that due to resource constraints, it would be difficult to make the interviews any longer. One suggested that the option to call a second interview might be useful in some cases, in order to clarify points where jury

<sup>1</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education

<sup>3</sup> Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

members would have preferred more detail. The interviewee however gave a number of reasons why second interviews were not held such as time/resources constraints and other practical factors (e.g. the candidate may have travelled a long way to get to the interview).

When asked if they felt the jury assessment process in VAE was valid and reliable, the interviewees gave mixed responses. The first noted that, after jury members had become accustomed to the procedure, it was a reliable and valid method of assessment. The second suggested that, as a measure of 'technical' competences, the jury procedure works well, since these are easy to identify. But in order to assess 'social and cognitive skills', the interviewee felt that the jury procedure is more subjective. He explained that judgements of the candidate's 'social and cognitive skills' may be based on the jury members' perceptions, rather than a definitive framework of reference. He added that jury members tend to perceive the ability to apply oneself to some form of formal learning as a demonstration of these social and cognitive skills and noted that in his experience, very few VAE candidates with no formal qualifications are successful in their VAE application, (whereas those with some previous education are more likely to succeed).

Nevertheless, Bellini reports that one characteristic common to all the juries he studied is that the decision-making process was always consensual. No votes were required and decisions were prompt – suggesting that the procedure itself allows all members of the jury to conduct an assessment and reach the same conclusion regarding an individual's competences in relation to the desired qualification. Bellini considers that a validation 'standard' is developed during the jury procedure, without ever being explicitly defined.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, many universities allow interviews to take over an hour. Many also establish an assessment grid which is given to the jury members, therefore helping to promote consistency in judgements and assessments.

This overview however raises some concerns regarding the quality and reliability of the existing jury procedure in French VAE. At the two Universities considered for this case study, it appears that quality assurance procedures could be improved in order to ensure the consistency of decisions – for example currently some jury members are not provided with training and *referentiels* based on competences are not yet available for all qualifications. A greater standardisation of the procedures for VAE, together with the allocation of adequate resources to meet the level of demand could ensure greater reliability of these assessments. The work of the French National VAE group, where persons in charge of VAE meet, should help to overcome these problems, as the group enables comparisons to be made, best practices to be exchanged and procedures to be harmonised.

<sup>1</sup> Bellini, S., The Experience of Validation

## 38.4 Outputs and Impact – Good practice and lessons learned

For individual VAE candidates, both interviewees agreed on the benefits of undergoing VAE. They talked about the positive impact of gaining recognition for the individual's knowledge, skills and competences which have been gained through informal or non-formal learning. Following successful VAE, an individual can benefit from career progression or a career change. The second interviewee gave examples of individuals who had achieved a promotion, or found new employment following redundancy, thanks to VAE. It was also noted that for many candidates, there are psychological benefits – they have more confidence at the end of the process.

As noted in the introduction, between 2002 and 2005, over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through VAE. By 2004, 16,860 individuals had taken part in a VAE procedure at a French university, 59% at Bachelor level and 41% at Masters level. 43% of the jury decisions resulted in the award of a qualification in full. Feutrie suggests these figures demonstrate that the anticipated reticence on the part of academics is not as significant as originally feared.<sup>1</sup>

He also considers that VAE has helped to change attitudes and ways of working within Higher Education. He notes that the examination of candidate's portfolios and the interviews with the candidates can often be a surprising learning experience for the academics who take part in them.<sup>2</sup> Our interviewees too noted the impact VAE had had on the attitudes and beliefs of the jury members. The first noted that before VAE, people did not believe that a *diplôme* could be acquired without studying at university. Now they can see that the same knowledge and skills can be developed through experience. VAE has thus helped to break down barriers formed by attitudes and misconceptions. The second interviewee also mentioned that jury members gain indirect advantages – the chance to reflect on the education provided at the university and to reflect on whether the training provided really helps students to develop the competences required for the qualification awarded.

However, it was clear that both interviewees were aware of the disadvantages to being a jury member. Taking part in a jury requires a time commitment, involves a lot of preparation (reading, often lengthy, dossiers) and at one university there is no payment. Lessons which have been learned to date thus relate mainly to improvements in the procedure for the jury members and these are detailed in the next paragraphs.

<sup>1</sup> Feutrie, M., 2006, La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience à l'Université. Available at: <http://www.eucen.org/documentation/InterestingDocs/TextMFtoCYD2006FR.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Several reports have noted the difficulties experienced to date in recruiting jury members.<sup>1</sup> Our interviewees indicated that their universities had so far not had any problems with recruitment (although as we have seen, at the second university, the problem was more with regard to attendance to interviews) but did suggest that this might change in the future, after initial 'curiosity' and goodwill (it was suggested that participation is seen as a 'public service') run out. Therefore the introduction of a payment for expenses and a payment or recognition of the time and effort made by jury members might help to avoid recruitment/attendance problems in the future.

In line with our interviewees, Feutrie (2006) notes that the introduction of VAE requires a change in the understanding of the evaluation process. He sees it as a 'redistribution of power', where the candidate, rather than the jury, is able to determine what will serve as the basis of the evaluation. Yet as we have seen, jury members are generally more used to formal examination procedures, and in many cases have not received detailed training on how to implement such assessment methodologies.<sup>2</sup> It is to be recommended, therefore, that more detailed guidance and / or where possible (short) training sessions might be made mandatory for jury members, before they may take part in any assessments.

Other possible amendments to improve the existing procedure were suggested during the interviews, although on the whole, it was felt that the existing format was satisfactory. The suggestions included:

- To recommend a minimum length of one hour for the candidate interview
- To provide support support / 'mentoring' to the candidate when putting together their dossier from an academic, as well as an administrative member of staff
- To introduce a more defined framework / *référential* for the assessment of social and cognitive skills
- For candidate interviews to be carried out by jury 'representatives' rather than the full jury (to allow longer interviews to take place and relieve the burden on individual members)
- For the jury to take on more responsibilities in supporting candidates who achieve 'partial' validation to go work towards a full qualification.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the pressure on the juries of the high demand for VAE is noted in Benhamou, Prof. A-C., 2005, 'La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes', Rapport de Mission sur l'application de La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (Loi 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Feutrie, M., 2006, La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience à l'Université. Available at: <http://www.eucen.org/documentation/InterestingDocs/TextMFtoCYD2006FR.pdf>

## 38.5 Sustainability and mainstreaming

VAE, as a legal right in France (applicable to foreign citizens as well as French nationals) is clearly a sustainable validation initiative. However, as identified above, the procedures in place for VAE jury assessments could be refined in line with good practice and lessons learned through experience to date. Some steps are now being taken to do so at both institutional and national level.

For example, on an institutional level, we learned of plans at one university to introduce a guidance note on the role of the jury member, based on experience to date. On a national level, the *Plan VAE*, introduced in September 2006, identified the difficulties in bringing together jury members (due to lack of expenses for transport or accommodation) as an obstacle to effective implementation of VAE and recommended the payment of expenses for jury members. A decree was signed, after consultation with the social partners, to state that the expenses would be paid out of the funds which are available for professional training.<sup>1</sup>

## 38.6 Conclusions

In France, VAE has become part of the process of lifelong learning and is an example of a successful validation initiative which has benefited large numbers of individuals and changed attitudes and practices in education, training and employment. Many lessons can be learned from the VAE experience to date, both internal lessons which should continue to be monitored and be acted on, and external lessons which should be shared with the wider community.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from [http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr/actualite-presse/dossiers-presse/validation-acquis-experience-cinq-mesures-pragmatiques-pour-simplifier-procedure-3407.html?var\\_recherche=vae](http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr/actualite-presse/dossiers-presse/validation-acquis-experience-cinq-mesures-pragmatiques-pour-simplifier-procedure-3407.html?var_recherche=vae)

## 39.0 Case Study: VINFL in Higher Education

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By Jo Hawley (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 39.1 Introduction

In the 2005 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning, it was recommended that the next update should include more detail on higher education institutions (HEIs) which have been active in developing policies for validation. Thus, this case study will examine the validation and assessment methodologies used in a variety of HEIs focusing on Belgian, Norwegian and Estonian universities as examples. It is based on a document review and an interview with Aili Saluveer (Senior Specialist for APEL, University of Tartu).

The case study will serve as a discussion paper on validation in higher education (HE) and will aim to:

- Draw lessons from these countries on the basis of research work that has been carried out on validation in the higher education sector.
- Discuss the types of validation methodologies chosen by different HE institutions, reasons for the selection and the barriers to development of validation in the higher education sphere.

### 39.2 European Policy and Validation in HE

The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 put in motion a series of reforms to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents.<sup>1</sup> Every second year Education Ministers meet to measure progress and set priorities for action. In 2005, they met in Bergen and released a Communiqué which charged the Bologna Follow-Up Group with continuing and widening the Bologna Stocktaking process. It was noted that progress would be sought in four particular areas, one of which was *"creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning"*.

The 2007 Bologna Stocktaking exercise<sup>2</sup> observed that HEIs have begun to recognise prior learning (including non-formal and informal learning) for access to higher education

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2007, Report from a working group appointed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group to the Ministerial Conference in London, May 2007

programmes and qualifications. However, the report also notes that there is more work to be done in this area. Just over one third of the countries (17 out of 48<sup>1</sup>) included in the survey achieved the highest score for the new indicator<sup>2</sup> on Recognition of Prior Learning, which the report suggests shows that procedures for validation are at an early stage of development in the majority of countries. In fact, there was no common understanding of 'recognition of prior learning' - in some cases it was taken to mean only recognising qualifications achieved in other institutions. Moreover, there were very few concrete examples of practice in the national reports.

Our findings from the 2007 update of the European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning show that developments have taken place in HE at both national and institutional levels. We will now examine the use of validation in HE in the three cases, in order to illustrate the progress made and lessons learned.

### **39.3 Validation in HE in Belgium, Estonia and Norway**

#### **39.3.1 Belgium**

In Belgium it is important to distinguish between the legislation in place in the Flemish-speaking and French-speaking communities. In the Flemish-speaking community of Flanders, the 2004 decree on flexible learning created a legal framework for the validation of prior learning and/or professional experience for access to higher education programmes and for decreasing study duration. In the French-speaking community of Wallonia, the use of validation results in the application to HE (*universités* and *hautes écoles*) was to be put into operation during 2007. This case study will therefore focus on VINFL in Flanders, rather than Wallonia.

The (Flemish) decree on flexible learning (2004) created a legal framework for the validation of prior learning and/or professional experience for:

- Access to higher education programmes
- Decreasing study duration.

The decree meant that the pursuit of studies was no longer determined on the basis of passing examinations but on the acquisition of 'proofs of competence' for the separate course components.

<sup>1</sup> Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French), Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), UK (Scotland)

<sup>2</sup> Indicator 11, Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2007, Report from a working group appointed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group to the Ministerial Conference in London, May 2007, p. 36. Definition of the highest score: There are procedures/national guidelines or policy for assessment of prior learning as a basis for 1) access to higher education programmes, and 2) allocation of credits towards a qualification and/or exemption from some programme requirements

All higher education 'associations'<sup>1</sup> were obliged to set up an agency for the validation of prior learning. The methodology applied for the validation of prior learning would be as follows:

- 1 Applicants present a portfolio which details their prior learning experience
- 2 The association's 'validation agency' assesses the application, taking into account the learning outcomes of the programme applied for
- 3 A Proof of Competence (POC) certificate is issued

The law determines that validation assessors in higher education must be evaluation experts and are not permitted to combine the assessment activity with the actual guidance and support of the applicant. The decree law does not state the number of assessors to be involved in a procedure. Students are entitled to request support during their application and for feedback at the end of the procedure.

Each association is responsible for quality assurance regarding EVC with respect to the following criteria: transparency, reliability and regularity of the procedures and methodology adopted.<sup>2</sup>

The legislation also determines the arrangements for payment of the costs of VINFL. Institutions do not receive additional funding to implement validation – they may ask for a basic fee to cover administrative costs and for an additional amount which is related to the number of competences to be identified during the assessment phase.

Since the higher education associations install their own validation agencies and procedures, it has been found that there is currently a certain level of variation in the processes in place.

A study conducted of the two largest higher education associations in Belgium (association KULeuven and association UGent)<sup>3</sup> regarding their experience in implementing EVC found that in general, the number of EVC student applications remained restricted, both at university level and among the higher education institutions.

<sup>1</sup> One of the results of the earlier Decree on the structure of higher education (2003) was the official recognition of cooperation between a university and one or more 'hogescholen', which is known as 'association'. The aim of these associations is to become cooperating entities on education and research, and the development of fine arts, as well as to harmonise fields of study and create bridges between bachelor's and master's studies.

<sup>2</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

<sup>3</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

### 39.3.2 Estonia

In Estonia, validation is facilitated only to students who move to different study programmes inside the same institution and/or between institutions. It is not possible to apply validation in relation to admissions to university – candidates are still required by law to have completed secondary level formal education (in Estonia or equivalent foreign qualifications) in order to apply.

The implementation of a system for Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL), including the possibility to validate both informal learning and work experience, was regulated nationally by the Universities Act and Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act in 2003. The Universities' Act allowed for 50% of the HE curriculum to be obtained through APEL. All HEIs had to develop an internal order for APEL and apply it from September 2004.

In 2006, amendments were made to the Universities Act and the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act. The Higher Education Standard<sup>1</sup> defined a requirement to introduce the common principles of recognition of informal and non-formal learning. According to the amendment which came into force on 1 September 2007, there should be no predetermined restrictions related to the volume of studies for the application of APEL (except final examination and/or final thesis), providing the results of the applicant's earlier BA and MA studies are taken into account, along with the candidate's professional experience and providing the procedure is in line with the principles set out in the Higher Education Standard, and the procedure prescribed by the council of the institution of higher education<sup>2</sup>.

Although the above-mentioned regulations oblige HEIs to accredit prior and experiential learning, there is not yet a common APEL regulation which applies to all educational providers in Estonia (the system is currently under development). We will therefore examine the University of Tartu as an example of the application of APEL in an Estonian university.

At the University of Tartu, APEL has been brought under central control, in order to ensure a uniform approach. The box below outlines the procedure which is currently in place at the University of Tartu.

#### Validation of informal and non-formal learning in the University of Tartu, Estonia

The University of Tartu is the first in Estonia to have developed a system and procedures for the

<sup>1</sup> The Higher Education Standard requires Universities to update their regulations and ensure that they are uniform

<sup>2</sup> Preparation of the 2008 Joint Interim Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Member States' contribution. Estonia. June, 2007.

## Validation of informal and non-formal learning in the University of Tartu, Estonia

accreditation of prior studies and work experience. This system is now in the implementation stage.

The APEL procedure is as follows:

Depending on the volume of the accredited subjects or work experience, the application is reviewed either by the lecturer of the given subject or the APEL Committee (academic staff only) appointed by the Dean of the relevant Faculty. A particular subject will be assessed by the lecturer, whereas a larger group of subjects (from 5 credits, or 7.5 ECTS) will be assessed by the committee.

Students complete a form to describe their prior and / or experiential learning and how this relates to the course they are applying for.

If necessary, the assessor may demand additional documents, the compilation of a portfolio, an examination or an informal interview.

Assessments are carried out against the learning outcomes for the qualification in question, where these have been defined (not all curricula are currently defined in terms of learning outcomes).

The student is given a written response within one month from the date of submission of the application. 'Credits' are awarded for the elements of the qualification that the individual is determined to have met through prior and experiential learning. These are national credits but can also be 'converted' into ECTS.

The decisions on accreditation of prior learning and work experience may be contested according to the procedures provided by the Regulations of Studies.

Across Estonia, the submission of an application for APEL incurs a basic fee and an additional fee for every credit point – this is paid by the candidate, unless they meet certain conditions, such as those described below for the University of Tartu (in which case it is free). HEIs do not receive additional funding from the State to support this cost. At the University of Tartu, applications are in most cases (approximately 75%) free of charge. The University of Tartu regulations state that applications should be free in the following cases:

- if the candidate seeks assessment of subjects passed at the University of Tartu;
- if the candidate has received prior approval from their Faculty or College at another higher education institution;
- if a relevant agreement between higher education institutions so provides;
- if the candidate applies for an assessment of equivalence of prior learning in relation to admission requirements.

In Estonia, most HEIs have now worked out their internal regulations for implementing APEL (validation). Already in 2003, the Transfine Report<sup>1</sup> found that most HEIs in Estonia do recognise prior and experiential learning to some extent.

We were able to obtain data relating to take-up of VINFL in terms of individuals at the University of Tartu, where there were around 2010 applications for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in the academic year 2005-2006 (2120 applications for 2006/2007), although few of these were for accreditation of informal learning (thus most related to (formal and non-formal) education and training the individuals had already undertaken, which resulted in the award of a certificate). No data has been collected regarding the profile of the students, for example the gender balance.

### 39.3.3 Norway

In Norway, since 1992 adults aged 23 and over can be admitted to higher education on the basis of five years of education and/or work experience and prescribed minimum levels in six core subjects from upper secondary school. Legislation in 2001 further permitted applicants without sufficient formal entrance qualifications to be admitted to HE on the basis of age (25 years or more), and a combination of formal, informal and non-formal learning.<sup>2</sup>

Most recently, the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges in 2005 regulated the use of VINFL for both admissions and for exemption from an examination or test when it has been shown that a corresponding examination or test has been taken at the same or another institution, on the basis of another suitable examination or test or on the basis of prior learning (formal and non-formal).

Applicants' qualifications are assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. The institutions are free to decide what constitutes the necessary qualifications for admittance and the procedures are decided locally. As a result, there are again variations with regard to practice between institutions.

Informal and non-formal learning is assessed mostly through self-declarations and portfolios - interviews and tests are seldom used. Each HE institution is responsible for its own quality assurance while the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) oversees quality assurance on a national level.

Validation is free for the individual applicant - costs must be covered by the budget of the university or university college.

<sup>1</sup> Valk, A., Saluveer, A., Kesli, U., Karo, K., Haidak, T., Kivimäe, A., Anton, E., Transfine, Transfer between Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education, Phase 2, Country Studies: Estonia, December 2002 – February 2003

<sup>2</sup> 2007 National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Norway

The Norwegian sub-project of the European REFINE project studied the assessment of a number of candidates with non-formal and informal learning who applied for exemption in higher education. The report shows that the six institutions selected for the study lacked procedures for the assessment of exemption candidates and consequently dealt with the candidates in an 'ad hoc manner'. However, although the project revealed that exemption is not a priority in Norwegian higher education and that existing procedures are inadequate, it also found that all the institutions involved were positive about the right to exemption.<sup>1</sup>

The number of applicants 25 years and older seeking recognition of their formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission to a HE study programme was 6,000 in 2001 (the first year this was possible). The number of applicants decreased in the following years, to reach 2,700 in 2006.<sup>2</sup> (It was expected that the number of applicants would be high when the opportunity was first made available and that this would decrease somewhat over time.) The majority of the applicants were women (70% of students admitted on the basis of non-formal and informal learning).<sup>3</sup> Approximately half of the applicants were for health and social studies and one fifth were for educational studies, mostly bachelor studies at university colleges.<sup>4</sup>

Adult students admitted on the basis of recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning constitute approximately 5 % of all new HE students annually, relatively more in health and social studies (12 %) and in educational studies (10 %). The number of these new students annually has decreased somewhat, from 2,100 to 1,300 in the period 2001-2006. However, these figures show that it is still an important scheme for adults lacking formal study to gain access to higher education.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, exemption appears to be less common - there were only 123 applications for exemption in higher education during the period 2001-2004.<sup>6</sup>

#### **39.4 Validation in Practice – Barriers to take-up and Lessons Learned**

As we have seen, in all three countries, HEIs are given a degree of autonomy to determine their own procedures for validation of informal and non-formal learning. This may lead to problems in terms of take-up and quality and consistency of the procedures in place. It

<sup>1</sup> Haugoy, G., Moe, F., 2005, REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education, Final report from the Norwegian sub-project, Vox and the University of Bergen, January 2005

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Nilsen Mohn, T. , 2006, The Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning; benefits for individuals, enterprises and society, A presentation given to the Sixth ERDI expert seminar, 12 May 2006

<sup>4</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Brandt, E. (2005): *Avkorting av studier på grunnlag av realkompetanse*. Oslo: NIFU STEP

may also lead to low levels of confidence in the systems for validation, both among providers and users.

In Belgium for example, one of the challenges identified is the need to harmonise the different methods and standards used by different associations. At the present large inter-institutional differences between, but also within institutions, can be observed.<sup>1</sup> This brings another problem - students have the impression that they can 'shop around' between the various associations.<sup>2</sup>

The Transfine report on the use of APEL in Estonia suggested that subjectivity in decision-making caused a number of problems when APEL was first introduced. The report proposed that generally accepted norms and definite rules of procedure were necessary to overcome this problem. Today, the definition of curricula in terms of learning outcomes is in development and will be adopted in 2009. For qualifications where learning outcomes have not been defined, assessment is more difficult and there remains the question of how quality and consistency are assured. Quality assurance is recognised as an important issue in Estonia and is also under development.

Validation inevitably involves a cost (academic staff time, support and administration etc) and some universities may be resistant to taking on this additional cost burden. In Estonia, a great deal of discussion to date has revolved around the question of payment for the APEL procedure.

In Norway, it has been found that the centrally located university colleges, which have too many applicants, find it hard to provide enough resources to deal with these application schemes<sup>3</sup> and in Belgium, students expressed criticism of the costs involved in submitting an application for VINFL.

Where validation is employed as a means of widening access and encouraging new target groups to enter higher education, it is clear that the imposition of a cost for individual applicants must be clearly thought out. However, it is suggested that applying a cost for the applicants might be a way of ensuring applications are 'taken seriously' and based on a well thought-out description of the individual's prior learning and experience in relation to the qualification sought.

<sup>1</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of inormal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>3</sup> Findings of a survey by NIFU STEP, the Norwegian research institute for studies in innovation, research, and education.

In Belgium, although a survey of students that had undertaken the validation procedure reported positive experiences, some were disillusioned because of the heavy workload involved. The time commitment was also an issue for staff involved in administering the process.

The lack of awareness of the opportunities presented by APEL is suggested as a barrier to take-up in Estonia. This has also been highlighted as a problem in Belgium - although information on VINFL is made available on HE associations' websites and also on the website of the Flemish department of Education, the low rate of take-up to date is attributed in part to the fact that students were unfamiliar with EVC and procedure, and that information and publicity about EVC was not yet widely distributed within the organisations.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, attitudinal barriers are also evident. In Estonia for example, in the sphere of higher education, it is suggested that awareness of APEL is also low among 'academics'. They are not yet familiar with the concept of validation and in some cases may be resistant to its application, due to their traditional perception of the value of formal qualifications. In Norway however, experience has shown that the introduction of VINFL can bring about a change in attitudes. Initially, there was scepticism among Norwegian HEIs towards VINFL but experience has now led to a positive attitude among most institutions.<sup>2</sup>

#### 39.4.1 Impact

We have categorised the impact of validation in higher education according to the impact on individuals, as well as the impact on institutions.

For individuals:

- Validation opens up learning opportunities to new target groups – it provides a 'second chance' for learners from under-represented groups.
- Individuals benefit from the possibility to shorten the duration of formal studies. This may also lead to a reduction in cost.
- Increased mobility – validation helps to bring down barriers, both in education / training and the labour market.
- Successful completion of a validation procedure can bring increased self-esteem and confidence.

The example below illustrates the positive response to the introduction of VINFL in Norway.

<sup>1</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

<sup>2</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

## Benefits of validation – Norway

During the national Validation Project in Norway between 1999 and 2002, sixteen state university colleges and one university tested a variety of different entrance requirements, allowing admission for adults who lacked the general academic exams normally required for admission to higher education. The trials received a favourable evaluation, showing that in most subjects adult students admitted on the basis of non-formal and informal competencies progressed as fast as younger students admitted on the basis of a general upper secondary education. Apart from mathematics and the natural sciences, they also received final results which were on a par with the traditional students' results. The teachers also appreciated that work experience was brought into the classroom by the adult learners, and stated that they added positively to the learning environment at the institutions.<sup>1</sup>

NIFU STEP<sup>2</sup> has surveyed the effects of the legal right to seek admission to HE in Norway on the basis of non-formal and informal learning. Before the national Validation Project was implemented, there was scepticism among higher education institutions towards validation but experience has led to a positive attitude to the reform in most institutions. Small university colleges particularly value students admitted in this way, who are found to be motivated and hard working.

For universities:

- Increased student satisfaction – tailored learning paths can be provided;
- Increased diversity of the student population – students with prior learning / experience can bring a valuable contribution to the learning environment;
- Improved rates of completion;
- Improved adaptability in relation to the needs of the labour market – courses can be tailored appropriately and graduates thus have the right skills for employers;
- Changes in attitudes towards learning – increased emphasis on competences and learning outcomes, rather than duration of study;
- Where validation includes the involvement of other stakeholders (e.g professional members of interview juries in France) or stimulates a process of sharing experiences and lessons learned among the HE community, it can help to promote cooperation among institutions and with external partners.

### 39.5 Sustainability and mainstreaming

The findings of the survey *Bologna with Student eyes 2007*<sup>3</sup> indicate that the situation regarding the availability of VINFL is diverse. It found that "In the large majority of the

<sup>1</sup> E. Brandt: Høgskolenes erfaringer med realkompetansestudenter fra forsøksordningene i 1999 og 2000, NIFU Skriftserie 11/2002, Oslo:NIFU. In Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian research institute for studies in innovation, research, and education.

<sup>3</sup> National Unions of Students in Europe, Bologna with Students Eyes 2007, London

*countries surveyed, there are no national policies designed for all institutions. Even when there are provisions for RPL at the national level, national bodies are absent or almost irrelevant. Higher education institutions are considered the main holders of responsibility for the promotion of validation, spreading information and carrying the necessary procedures. However, in the absence of a solid implementation of these mechanisms at national level, institutions develop their own initiatives and policies, operating without any given guidelines.(...) Moreover, RPL is far from being a well-known mechanism among the wider public for assessing knowledge, skills and competences."*

The survey findings thus appear to be mirrored to some extent in the countries we have examined for this case study. As we have seen, the lack of national level mechanisms can lead to problems as a result of the diversity in provision, which may raise issues in terms of the sustainability of VINFL. Diversity in provision may represent a barrier to take-up and could lead to a lack of confidence in the system among stakeholders and beneficiaries. However, in each of our case study countries, actions are now being taken to learn from experiences to date and to further develop and sustain the initial activities relating to VINFL, as outlined below.

In **Belgium**, the 2006 Decree on the establishment of measures for restructuring and flexibility in higher education simplified and improved the procedures for the recognition of prior learning. However, there remain several issues to be addressed. A critical issue for many institutions is that not all curricula have been fully developed in terms of competences. For the associations, the time investment of staff is high and no additional resources have been made available by the Department of Education so the extra work has to be taken up by existing staff. It is felt that EVC is politically promoted on the one hand but not financially supported on the other – which affects its acceptance at institutional level.<sup>1</sup>

The Flemish government has responsibility for the five-yearly evaluation of how the associations.<sup>2</sup> It will be important that these evaluations are acted on to ensure that validation in HE can be further improved on in Belgium in the future.

In **Estonia**, the development of an effective national APEL system has become a priority for the Ministry of Education and Research. HEIs and the Ministry of Education are working together to discuss the future of validation in the country, to share their experiences and good practice, as well as collecting data relating to the VINFL procedures currently in place. The issue of quality assurance is also being prioritised. At the

<sup>1</sup> de Craene, B., An Exploratory Study of the Formal Recognition of Prior Learning Experiences in the Context of Flemish Higher Education, Sense Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

University of Tartu, for example, there is a procedure for quality assurance which is regularly monitored and there is also a Committee to oversee this issue.

The Estonian National Qualifications Framework has not yet been finalised (it is due to be adopted in 2009), which presents an obstacle to consistency in the application of validation, since there are no national level descriptors. The definition of curricula in terms of learning outcomes is currently being developed and will be adopted in 2009.

In terms of information and guidance, there is a plan to develop more integrated guidance and counselling services (which include APEL counselling), to make better links between career counselling and other counselling services and involve labour market counselling services in giving initial information and orientation on APEL issues. Cooperation with the National Resource Centre for Guidance is also planned.

In collaboration with the Ministry, the University of Tartu has launched a project financed by the European Social Fund (LÜKKA<sup>1</sup>) for the development of a national APEL system. The project aims to develop APEL tools and practices, promote APEL networking in Estonia, provide advanced training to APEL assessors and set up and implement a system of quality standards for APEL. Thus, in the coming years, progress in many aspects of APEL may gain pace in Estonia.

In **Norway**, it is suggested that if the criteria for qualifications are altered to learning outcomes, the recognition process would be easier to conduct. It is recognised that increased cooperation among institutions is necessary, and institutions are in contact in order to learn from each other and develop more coherent practices. Vox, the Institute for Adult Learning, has been a leading and coordinating actor in facilitating learning between Higher Education Institutions. However, it is recognised that more work needs to be done.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.ut.ee/lykka](http://www.ut.ee/lykka)

<sup>2</sup> New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

## 39.6 Conclusion

The 2007 Bologna Stocktaking report stated that validation is "*an area where there is a need to raise awareness of the issues and provide support for future development.*" Our case study seems to confirm this statement. In the three countries we have looked at, although there is policy or legislation in place relating to VINFL, institutions are generally left to devise and implement their own procedures, leading to a number of problems and barriers, together with an overall lack of cohesion. It thus seems that cooperation between institutions and other stakeholders should be increased in the future. The experiences to date can serve to provide valuable lessons which must now be acted upon and shared.

## 40.0 Case Study: Investing in People, Italy

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By Marie Davidson (Davidson Research)

### 40.1 Introduction

Between the years 2000 and 2004, approximately 4000 people lost their jobs in the Italian province of Macerata when a number of private companies chose to relocate to countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and China, where the costs of production are thought to be lower. A large proportion of these job losses affected individuals that were already at considerable disadvantage in the labour market. They were often aged over 45 years and/or were disabled and most commonly had a low level of educational attainment.<sup>1</sup> Their prospects for re-employment were limited and the regional employment services were struggling to find them new positions<sup>2</sup>.

During this time of rising unemployment, a Dutch organisation involved in a project funded by the ESF EQUAL<sup>3</sup> programme advised the province of Macerata of their 'EVC model', which is their model for Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning' (VINFL). Although this was not seen to be a complete solution to the problem of rising unemployment, it did seem to be an appropriate means of tackling some of the problems relating to skills because the process identifies skills achieved through *all* types of learning i.e. formal, non-formal and informal, which may be unconscious to the individual but relevant to the labour market. This information could then be used to find new positions for the unemployed.

In addition, it was thought that if the model was applied in companies routinely, it could also act to safeguard the jobs of employees. This is because it allows the management to become more aware of the potential of their human resources, especially those resources that they may have previously undervalued, which is often thought to be the over 45s and/or the disabled.

The 'Investing in People' project therefore emerged to apply the Dutch EVC model to three companies based in Macerata. It aimed to test how effective the process could be in helping to safeguard the jobs of the disabled and those aged over 45 years in these companies but with the aim of mainstreaming the project to benefit a wider target group

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the need to focus on the disabled in Macerata was already known through a first round Equal programme entitled *Diversita e sviluppo* ([http://giornale.regione.marche.it/archivio/num0405/speciale1\\_en/artcom07.htm](http://giornale.regione.marche.it/archivio/num0405/speciale1_en/artcom07.htm))

<sup>2</sup> [www.equalmacerata.it](http://www.equalmacerata.it)

<sup>3</sup> Equal is a European Social Fund (ESF) Community Initiative, providing funds to projects which test and promote new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market

and the local economy more generally. For example, it was thought that the regional employment services would also benefit from using the model, to help find jobs for the unemployed<sup>1</sup>.

## 40.2 The 'EVC' / 'VPL' Method

The Investing in People project consists of one key activity. Namely, to 'test' the Dutch validation methodology in the province of Macerata, piloting it primarily in three companies: *Fileni di Cingoli*<sup>2</sup> (a company working in the food industry), *Lube di Treia* (a company operating in the furniture industry) and *Falc di Civitanova Marches* (working in the shoe making industry). These companies were chosen because they fitted the 'Investing in People' criteria - they were thought to be 'solid' i.e. not at risk of closure, large (over 100 employees), well organised and receptive to the concept of validation. However, in the case of *Falc di Civitanova*, the company announced its relocation to China part-way through the project and although this was disappointing, it proved to be a 'case in point' for the project.

The 'testing' of the method involves a number of key actors<sup>3</sup>:

- The **Process Supervisor or 'Tutor'**: This is a company employee who is able to support the beneficiaries through the process. For example, in completing the portfolios and facilitating the relationship between the employee and the company management. The Tutor carries out this responsibility in addition to their normal role and with no extra expense to the company.
- The **Internal Assessor**: This is a company employee that has experience of the competencies that need to be assessed. He/she is normally 'Head of Department' and hence works closely with both employees and management. The IA receives a small amount of training on the validation process in order to carry out their role. However, it should be noted that this role is incorporated into their current position and is not a paid role in itself.
- The **External Assessor**: This is somebody who is thought to have sufficient experience to assess and evaluate competencies and plan future training within the relevant industry sectors. It is however a role that is difficult to fill in Italy because there are currently no External Assessors employed within the VET system. As such, the

<sup>1</sup> [www.equalmacerata.it](http://www.equalmacerata.it)

<sup>2</sup> This company was particularly receptive to validation because they employ a very diverse workforce, many of whom are not Italian and it is in their interest to be able to understand different skills and experiences across national boundaries. They are also an organisation experienced in managing diversity and were hence very receptive to work focusing on disability and niche target groups such as the over 45s.

<sup>3</sup> [www.equalmacerata.it](http://www.equalmacerata.it)

project uses 'technical experts' (either working or recently retired) that have been recommended via word of mouth or through trade unions, technical schools, trade associations etc. Once appropriate External Assessors are identified, they receive a small amount of training in order to make them clear about the validation process. In terms of funding, they are paid for by the employer.<sup>1</sup>

- The **employees**: They are considered to be 'active actors' and are involved in completing the portfolio, assessment, developing personal development plans etc. In this case *all* disabled employees and/or over 45 years were involved in the process, which simplified the selection process in this instance.

The method itself consists of a number of activities and processes, which include<sup>2</sup>:

- **Commitment building** i.e. making the company aware of the VPL procedures and processes, how the process will benefit them, the cost of the process etc. This process is undertaken by the Investing in People Project Managers.
- **Understanding the company** i.e. how it works internally, the HR system, company business plans etc. The 'Process Supervisor' and the company management undertake this process.
- **Creating standard professional profiles** i.e. defining the workers' activity within the company compared to a standard professional profile. The Investing in People Project Managers had to create these with the help of the Process Supervisor, using the ISFOL professional needs database and profiles from sector industry associations as a template. Currently, the ISFOL profiles are in draft form and are incomplete, hence there are no national or regional standard professional profiles in operation in Italy<sup>3</sup>.
- **Establishing competency indicators** i.e. defining the knowledge and ability that a person should have in order to carry out a particular job within that company. As with the standard professional profiles, these were written by Investing in People Project Managers with continuous collaboration with the company.
- **Identifying beneficiaries**, which in this case were over 45 years and/or disabled. *All* employees fitting these criteria were chosen since this target group was thought to be particularly vulnerable in the labour market.

<sup>1</sup> It should however be noted that although ordinarily the External Assessor would be expected to be paid for by the employer, that in this case the three companies involved in the piloting of the project were reimbursed by Investing in People.

<sup>2</sup> [www.equalmacerata.it](http://www.equalmacerata.it)

<sup>3</sup> An Italian Regional Experience: The VPL in the Province of Macerata (an Investing in People presentation)

- **Completing the portfolio.** Employees complete the portfolio with the help of their tutor (the Process Supervisor). They identify all of their training and work experience and include evidence of their competencies. This 'evidence' can take a number of forms. For example, a declaration from a previous employer, certification of prior vocational training, pictures of themselves working voluntarily e.g. on an ambulance, videos etc. Employees also complete a questionnaire on their behavioural competencies at this time. This is a self-evaluation questionnaire that assesses such characteristics as motivation, leadership skills, determination etc using a French software package called 'performance'. The findings are only shared with the employees' tutor and not the management.<sup>1</sup>
  - ▶ The portfolio is entitled "*Individual Dossier Skills and Training Booklet*". It commences by informing the employee of the validation process and the purpose of validation. It then proceeds to document their formal educational qualifications (achieved both inside and outside of the workplace) and their non-formal/informal experience (achieved through the employees' work activities/experiences, any voluntary sector experience they may have and any knowledge or experiences they may have acquired through their hobbies/ life).
- **Assessment.** All of the stakeholders in the process i.e. the HR department or management, the beneficiaries, the tutor and the internal and external assessors then assess the portfolio, which the beneficiary has completed. Anything that cannot be validated or adequately evidenced in the portfolio is assessed in an interview or through examination.
- **Creating a personal development plan.** On the basis of the assessment stage, the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the beneficiary all work together to produce a 'Personal Development Plan'. This plan defines a career strategy for the worker based on his/her competencies and the companies' own requirements.
  - ▶ The Personal Development Plan, which is also known as the 'Individual Development Plan' consists of an assessment table identifying whether the employee seems 'qualified', 'unqualified', 'partially qualified' or 'unsuitable' in each of his/her job areas. It proceeds to offer a summary of the employee and provides a list of the skills that are 'possessed', 'need improvement' or 'need to be developed'. Its conclusion is a 'training forecast' which has been collectively drawn up by the HR department or

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the project tutor also completes the questionnaire on behalf of the employee and the results are then compared. This exercise is thought to be valuable but it is again not shared with the company management.

management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the workers and which specifies the training that each employee needs<sup>1</sup>.

- **Tailor-made vocational training for beneficiaries.** The personal development plan is used to provide the beneficiary with tailor-made training to allow the beneficiary to compensate for any gaps in their skills.
- **Second Assessment.** Once the training is complete, the worker is assessed again by the same people in the first round assessment to confirm that he/she has now acquired the necessary skills.
- **Validating/certification of competencies.** The project is trying to have the competencies assessed at a regional level in the hope that the portfolio and assessment form will be recognised by regional authorities, other companies and the VET system as 'credit'. It is doing this by raising awareness of the project. For example, through the mainstreaming group, which has a regional representative on board responsible for developing the new regional qualification system.

It is important to note that *all* of the above activities were carried out with considerable support from the Dutch partner, who was contacted regularly by the *Investing in People* project at all stages of the project, on at least a fortnightly basis. Their support was offered regularly via e-mail and telephone communication as well as through a number of project visits between Holland and Italy.

### 40.3 Applying the Method

Overall, it is felt that the EVC method is transferable and that the method would work to validate the learning outcomes of any employed or unemployed person, with experience of informal, non-formal and formal learning across any industry sector. It has currently been shown to work in the three pilot companies (*Falc*, *Fileni* and *Lube*) and the project is currently being 'rolled out' to ten other companies in Macerata, the local employment services and other projects in regions outside of Macerata. That said, a number of issues did arise, which should be noted if we are to learn more about applying models of validation in different contexts.

#### 40.3.1 Absence of a National Qualifications Framework

In Italy, there is currently no national or regional qualification framework in place to accredit formal, non-formal or informal learning collectively. This somewhat hinders the method since there is no national or regional recognition of non-formal and informal

<sup>1</sup> Investing in People IT-G2-MAR-013 Individual Development Plan

learning. However, work is in progress to establish a qualification framework compatible with the European Qualification Framework and hence there should be some 'top down' support for validation in the near future, which will aid some of the 'bottom up' initiatives that have evolved over recent years. The work of *Investing in People* has taken this into account and it is thought that all of the VET carried out through this project can, in the future, fit with a credit system based on learning outcomes. The lesson however is that models of validation will be easier to apply in countries where the development of a qualifications system based on learning outcomes and the acquisition of credit is already in operation.

#### 40.3.2 Absence of specific Quality Assurance procedures

The collaborative work of the HR department or company management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the workers together ensure some degree of quality assurance, especially considering that there is also a set method/procedures in place (as detailed above). However, there are no specific quality assurance procedures in place thus far, although this is an *Investing in People* priority. For example, the project team is currently establishing a list of External Assessors, which will be used to quality assure part of the process.

#### 40.3.3 Difficulties in Identifying External Assessors

In Italy, the VET system is relatively unstructured - there are few links between schools and businesses and there are no vocational training centres as such. As a result, it is difficult to find External Assessors and the project had to involve *any* actors with technical/professional experience that were seen to be sufficiently experienced to assess the workers. Often these people came from Trade Unions or industry/sector organisations. This did however prove to be difficult and should be taken into account as a barrier to applying the method in countries where the role of External Assessor is not already established.

#### 40.3.4 Lack of widely recognised Occupational/Professional Profiles

Currently Italy does not have complete specifications for job roles within companies and therefore *Investing in People* needed to ascertain professional standards for each of the job roles being considered in their project. This naturally makes the application of the model more time consuming than for countries where occupational standards are more developed.

#### 40.3.5 Difficulties in Completing the Portfolio

Both the Dutch partner and *Investing in People* experienced problems with beneficiaries struggling to complete the portfolio. This is mainly due to the fact that a considerable amount of evidence is required to support the beneficiaries' claims and this can be difficult

to source. As a result, there is considerable emphasis on the role of the 'personal tutor' to facilitate this process. Also, some active involvement was required by *Investing in People* staff initially. It should be noted that the issue is in the practicalities of completing the portfolio and not in misunderstanding the benefits of completing the portfolio, which employees tend to understand and be supportive of.

#### 40.3.6 Adapting 'tools' to meet Different Needs

It can be necessary to adapt the VPL 'tools' e.g. the personal development plan and the portfolio to meet the different needs in certain countries, regions and organisations. For example, in Italy there is a greater tendency for its citizens to take part in voluntary services and hence the portfolio included more in this area. Care also has to be taken to ensure good translation of overseas documents.

### 40.4 Outputs, Outcomes and Impact

The *Investing in People* project was initially set up to validate the skills and experience of 30 employees across the three companies and, by December 2007, it will have achieved this. The majority of these employees were over 45 years of age, with 15/20% of beneficiaries being disabled. The over 45s had a low level of educational attainment i.e. they had finished school at the age of 14 years, whilst the disabled people could in fact have been well educated but disadvantaged due to their disability. All of the staff could be described as 'production line' or 'manual' staff.

It is thought that both the employees and employers have benefited from the project in a number of ways. The key benefit for the employer has been the introduction of a system of training and development in their organisation without the financial costs normally associated with this (all costs accrued through the validation process were reimbursed by the *Investing in People* project). Furthermore, they have also gained insight into the skills inherent within their organisation and an understanding of where the skill gaps lie, which has led to better-targeted training.

With respect to the employees, they have been empowered by the knowledge that they have learned certain skills through a number of different life situations, both in work and outside of work and they should be able to use this information to progress their career. Importantly, they have accessed further training with the company without having to repeat anything that they already know about. This bespoke training has been the key output of this project.

Currently, feedback questionnaires are being collected from beneficiaries and as such the extent of the benefits of the project will not be realised until January 2008. However, there is one case that is particularly well known to *Investing in People*:

*“We realised after validating a disabled lady’s skills that she had the knowledge and experience to actually become an in-house trainer. She was competent in all aspects of her job and did not need any further training. We therefore realised that she could pass on her knowledge and experience in a new training role....Without the validation process, this would never have been known”*

There are now thought to be another ten companies interested in having their employees’ skills and experiences validated and it is thought that the model will be applied to a further 100/150 people in the near future. This will not however be funded by Investing in People, it will have to be funded by the employers themselves. ‘Investing in People’ may however work with the companies to access other sources of funding that is available through industry bodies etc., although such funding is not guaranteed.

## **40.5 Sustainability and Mainstreaming**

Mainstreaming *Investing in People* is a critical part of the project and is the key activity in operation now, as part of Action 3 of the EQUAL programme. Although the project focused on testing the Dutch model of validation in a very narrow context i.e. the over 45s and the disabled within three companies, it was always felt that the method could be applied to a number of contexts. Currently it is known that the method will be used in projects targeting immigrants as well as broader target groups in different industry sectors and in different Italian regions, including Abruzzi, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardia and Umbria.<sup>1</sup> Once other projects/organisations start to use the method, the extent to which it is transferable will be realised and more will be known about how it needs to be adapted in certain contexts.

Currently, the Investing in People project is in the process of undertaking the following mainstreaming actions:

- Training for regional employment services, disabled services, over 45’s associations, trade unions and employment associations. This will ensure that the relevant agencies are made aware of the benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The employment services are already heavily involved and will prove instrumental in disseminating the project to a broader range of businesses.
- Training for HR Managers to raise awareness of validation and ensure more companies become aware of the benefits of validating non-formal and informal learning. These companies are actively contacted as well as being invited to

<sup>1</sup> An Italian Regional Experience: The VPL in the Province of Macerata (an Investing in People presentation)

participate if they visit the Investing in People website.<sup>1</sup> There are currently ten more interested companies.

- Working with the project partners to mainstream the project. These include Eurocentro Srl, the National Association for the Disabled (ANMIC), the “*Macerata Confindustria*”, Marchigiana Federation Union of Italian Cooperatives (UNCI) and the University of Macerata.<sup>2</sup>
- The En-Power project is an EQUAL-funded transnational cooperation project, which involves five projects from four different European countries (Italy, France, the Netherlands and Slovenia). This partnership is currently working on a booklet reporting on ‘tools to valorise human resources’. This will include the identification of best practice in validation of prior learning, which should support any mainstreaming initiatives<sup>3</sup>.

Currently the project in Italy resembles a ‘bottom-up’ approach and lacks top-down structures. It is hoped that the horizontal and vertical mainstreaming activities currently on-going will influence the regional and national agenda and help to make the project sustainable in the long term. This is yet to be realised and it is not known whether, without funding, employers will buy into the process in the future.

<sup>1</sup> [www.equalmacerata.it](http://www.equalmacerata.it)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

## **40.6 Conclusion**

The Investing in People project has had a number of successes. Following its work on testing the Dutch EVC model it can be concluded that the model itself is robust and flexible enough to be applied to a variety of contexts. For example, it can be used in different countries, with different target groups, in different industry sectors etc and is thought to be fully transferable. However, the impact of the project on a regional or national level is yet to be realised. The absence of top-down structures presents the project with a number of challenges and the long-term success of the current, on-going mainstreaming activities remains to be seen.

## 41.0 Case Study: *Child Line (Vaikų linija)*, Lithuania

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By Rasa Juciute<sup>1</sup> (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 41.1 Voluntary work in Lithuania

According to the latest EU survey<sup>2</sup>, active participation in voluntary work in Lithuania is among the lowest in the EU, with only 11% of the population participating in voluntary activities (the lowest percentage is in Bulgaria – 10%). The EU25 average is 34% and in countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland the level is far above the EU average with 60%, 55%, 53%, 52% and 50% respectively.

Among the main obstacles preventing an increase in participation in voluntary work in Lithuania (as well as in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe) is the lack of cooperation infrastructure between the public and third sectors, the unclear legal regulation of voluntary work and especially the lack of trust in NGOs, voluntary organisations, charities and the third sector in general by the public bodies. This lack of trust can partly be explained by the absence of volunteering traditions in Lithuania and also by the unfavourable historic experience, when non-governmental organisations were treated as either a threat to the then political system and therefore prohibited or subordinated to enforce that system.

Thus, compared to the countries where validation initiatives to identify, assess and recognise the knowledge, experience and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning are used more widely, Lithuania's third sector is still only at the initial stage, with scattered and single pilot initiatives. All of these initiatives are so far limited to internal use and are aimed at contributing to personal development and the development of the organisation in which the person is employed, rather than to facilitate the mobility of workers between organisations of the same kind. Facilitating mobility within the third sector, attracting more people to voluntary work and raising the profile of the third sector still remains potential for the future.

### 41.2 *Child Line* - Background

*Child Line* is an example of a bottom-up initiative within the third sector, which has been developed in response to an identified need. The initiative demonstrates how bottom-up initiatives can be initially limited in terms of transferability. It also shows the limitations

<sup>1</sup> Expert input provided by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

<sup>2</sup> Eurobarometer. *European Social Reality*. Special Report for the European Commission. February 2007. Retrieved September 12, 2007, from [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_273\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf).

which arise from a lack of public sector involvement and/or links to formal qualifications or standards frameworks. However, it also shows how bottom-up initiatives, delivered 'on the ground' are centred on the needs of the individuals and the organisation in question.

*Child Line (Vaikų linija)*<sup>1</sup> is a national non-governmental and non-profit organisation delivering a free counselling and psychological support service for children and teenagers in Lithuania by telephone, post, and e-mail. *Child Line* has three main offices which are located in the three largest cities of Lithuania: Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda, as well as three regional offices where counselling and psychological support is delivered via internet only – in Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Kuršėnai. In addition to its main activity of providing psychological support, *Child Line* also aims to influence decision-making and the state policy on children's key problems by organising nation-wide campaigns, conferences, events and seminars and via stakeholder participation.

The initial roots of the organisation can be found within the *Youth Line Youth Psychological Aid Centre (YPAC)*<sup>2</sup>. This was the first Lithuanian voluntary telephone psychological aid service, established in Vilnius in 1991, just after the country's independence from the Soviet Union. An independent operation of *Child Line* started in Vilnius in September 1997, offering anonymous and confidential counselling and psychological support via telephone to children and adolescents within the Vilnius region. In December 1999 the Educational Psychological Agency in Klaipėda (the third largest city in Lithuania) joined *Child Line* and established its office in Klaipėda. An office in Kaunas (the second largest city in Lithuania) was established in January 2000.

At first, *Child Line* offered its services only by phone. Later the services were expanded by offering three forms of nationally accessible free help – support by telephone via a joint (since May 2004) telephone number (from public and home, as well as mobile phones) and assistance by post and the internet since April 2004.

*Child Line* delivers psychological support using specially trained consultants. In 2007, of the total number of 78 consultants across the country (41 in Vilnius, 31 in Kaunas and 8 in Klaipėda) 70 worked on a voluntary basis<sup>3</sup>. Klaipėda *Child Line* is located within the Educational Psychological Agency and the eight consultants working there are professional psychologists employed by the Agency.

About 60% of all volunteers are university students with an average age of between 19 and 30. Most are studying psychology and social work, but there are several students of economics, medicine, law and natural sciences. There is a mix of first year students as

<sup>1</sup> Official website: <http://www.vaikuliniija.lt/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Jaunimo Linija Jaunimo psichologinės paramos centras* - JPPC

<sup>3</sup> Child Line Annual Activity Report 2006. Retrieved 1 October, 2007 from <http://www.vaikuliniija.lt/files/2006%20m%20%20vaiku%20linijos%20ataskaita.pdf>.

well as postgraduates. The remaining volunteers consist of employed young people (about 30%) and middle-aged non-working mothers (10%). 90% of all volunteers are female, which may be because work with children is more attractive to women than men, or because men feel stronger financial pressures and therefore have less intentions and time (if at all) for voluntary work.

In 2006, *Child Line* answered 87, 079 calls from a total number of nearly four million attempts to call the organisation, with an average of 240 calls a day. (This large number of unanswered calls is usual for psychological support phone services for children, as many of them are making only short 'check' calls without intending to talk. On the other hand, there is a lack of capacity within the organisation to answer all of the 'real' calls.) In 2006 *Child Line* received 1,381 emails, with an average of 115 emails a month.

Special funding to cover call expenses is provided by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania. Other financial resources are received mainly through sponsorship of separate initiatives, for example the "Stop Bullying" campaign for schools, and is given on an ad hoc basis by the private sector, municipalities, other public bodies and international entities operating in Lithuania (e.g. diplomatic missions resident in Lithuania, Nordic Council of Ministers, British Council etc) as well as from individual private donations.

Volunteer work within the organisation is the main enabler to deliver its services. Depending on the qualification level and work experience of a volunteer, his / her job includes:

- direct provision of counselling and psychological support by phone, post or internet to children and teenagers calling *Child Line*;
- sharing working experience with new volunteers (trainees) by participating in their initial training and contributing to it;
- providing supervision and regular feedback to the volunteers with less work experience or mentoring and supervising group seminars for trainees or consultant-volunteers;
- and contributing to the regular updating and development of the education and training programme used within the organisation.

### **41.3 Use of validation by Psychological Telephone Help Service Agencies**

Assessment of competences, knowledge and skills acquired within informal and non-formal learning settings is carried out in one or another way by most of the 20 member agencies of the Association of Psychological Telephone Help Service Agencies in Lithuania. Agencies that rely on volunteering work in order to deliver their services are particularly active in the assessment of informal and non-formal learning. This is due to the

nature of the work involved. Volunteers usually come from a variety of different backgrounds and have different personal and educational experiences. They are not required to have any specific / formal qualification in order to start work within an organisation - instead initially they are required to have "suitable" personal features and competences that correspond to the service field. In the case of *Child Line* these are for example a wish to help others, sympathy, intuition on how to make initial contact with a child and how to communicate with them, to be non-judgemental and tolerant to different lifestyles and behaviours, etc. Career progression is also usually related to the length of work experience within the organisation, rather than the possession of formal education certificates.

Therefore an initial assessment of the individual's competences acquired in different settings (for example, family, community life, individual experience etc.) and through non-formal learning is very important in order to determine an individual's suitability for the roles involved. Other methodologies are developed with the aim to facilitate career progression of the volunteers that are interested in and are suitable for further development.

#### **41.4 Use of validation by *Child Line***

*Child Line* is constantly looking for new volunteers and the agencies in Vilnius and Kaunas place considerable importance on the selection and further development of the volunteer consultants. Validation methodologies have been designed to assist the recruitment process and to allow further regular assessment of the competences the volunteers acquire through work experience within the organisation.

##### **41.4.1 A multi-level approach**

Vilnius *Child Line* uses a so-called 'multi-level approach' in order to identify, assess and validate volunteers' competences, knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning as they work within the organisation. This approach was developed in-house, mainly due to the lack of knowledge and knowledgeable leadership. No standards have yet been developed for the voluntary sector, either at national or sectoral level.

The stages of the multi-level approach are:

- Pre-start stage – identifies a volunteer's suitability for the work the *Child Line* carries out,
- Initial stage – the assessment is carried out during and at the end of the preparatory training (followed by the Volunteer Consultant Certificate that is so far officially recognised only by *Child Line*) as well as after the volunteer starts to provide independent but supervised consultations to the *Child Line* callers;

- Continuing stage - an assessment is carried out regularly during the contract period (currently between 300-350 hours). A volunteer has an obligation to work for *Child Line* after successfully completing the eight months of preparatory training in order to monitor the quality of the services provided by a volunteer and to provide support if it is needed;
- Advanced stage – facilitates the individual’s career within the organisation after the obligatory contract period (if a volunteer wishes to do so) and contributes to the development of the organisation itself;
- Thank You Certificate – granted by the *Child Line* after finishing work within the organisation. Officially it is only recognised within the branches of *Child Line*, but unofficially it gives an advantage when seeking employment in other organisations of a similar kind (although this is still a relatively limited context).

## 41.5 Validation in use at the Vilnius and Kaunas *Child Lines*

As we have seen, *Child Line* has developed a validation system that assists in evaluating initial personal suitability and further “growth” (career development) for volunteers within the organisation. This validation system covers several competence levels. Although the identification, assessment and recognition of different competence levels is mainly linked to the volunteers’ work experience within the organisation, the process also takes into account other settings where particular personal features especially desired by the organisation can be developed, e.g. community work, other voluntary and family activities, personal interests etc. This is mainly done by a colleague with longer work experience (mentor) via observation and helps to decide whether a person is suitable for a further career within the organisation, if he or she wishes to do so.

### 41.5.1 Selection of volunteers

The selection procedure of potential volunteers is especially oriented towards their personal learning within non-formal and informal settings. The procedure is based on internally-developed standards and aims to identify their personal competences such as work motivation and its adequacy (e.g. wish to help others or solve their own problems etc), communication skills, self-reflection, empathy, tolerance, acceptance of different life styles and behaviour, emotional balance and sense of social boundaries etc. The procedure was developed over time and allows identification of the above personal features that are required by the work.

Initially, the selection process involved a written test. Later, after sharing experiences with other organisations of a similar kind, both national, e.g. *Youth Line*, and international, e.g. Swedish and Welsh *Child Lines*, the written test was replaced by a process of observation during a structured individual interview and evaluation of a candidate’s responses to particular situations. This change was made in order to improve the assessment of the

candidate's communication skills, emotional intelligence and the adequacy of reaction, all of which are very important for the work carried out by *Child Line*.

Successful candidates are enrolled on the initial *Child Line* training course. A further progress assessment is carried out during and at the end of this preparatory training by a training course mentor. At the end of the training course a certificate stating the subjects that a person has studied during the course is granted by *Child Line*, allowing the individual to commence work within the organisation.

The 100-hour training course lasts approximately eight months. This course aims to develop basic consulting skills with children and teenagers by telephone, mail and internet. The training is specific and corresponds to the needs of the organisation, for example how to behave in specific consulting situations with an aggressive child, when a child is not motivated to receive help, how to talk to abused children or children who are going through bereavement, etc. Following the initial training, the volunteers receive a 'volunteer consultant' certificate that allows them to commence work in the organisation.

The main competences which the preparatory training aims to develop in an individual are:

- ability to contract the initial contact,
- skills of active listening and questioning,
- empathetic attitude,
- setting and keeping the boundaries of consultation,
- objectiveness,
- conversation structuring and purposive directing
- skills to conclude the conversation appropriately.

These are assessed by a mentor observing the trainees during their practical sessions, using an evaluation sheet with grades from 1 "not capable" to 5 "comfortable". However, the certificate provided at the end of the preparatory training only states the time period training sessions were attended and the subjects studied and does not refer to the level of attainment or skills and competences developed. This is partly because there are as yet no common standards and procedures on how to do this.

#### 41.5.2 Ongoing Assessment and Career Development

Approximately the first ten hours of initial consultation after completion of the preparatory training course are supervised and observed by a colleague with at least four months work experience, where feedback is provided immediately. Besides the competences listed above, additional skills are evaluated such as:

- the ability to extract the main aspects of the conversation

- the ability to talk directly about the problems of the person calling the *Child Line*,
- to recognise critical situations,
- estimation of life-threatening risk and
- ability to describe the conversation.

After this, systematic supervision is no longer carried out but regular feedback is provided through:

- ad hoc observations by more experienced colleagues (by those with at least three to four months of practical work experience);
- monthly meetings / special qualificatory seminars (where e.g. a volunteer presents a specific situation from his/her working practice and discusses it with other colleagues / a more experienced member of staff);
- individual meetings with a supervisor (usually qualified and well-experienced psychologists) to discuss work issues and satisfaction and personal emotional state etc.;
- theory sessions every other month and the chance to share experiences with colleagues from other national organisations and international partners at a large two- to three-day annual event.

A new method was introduced recently in order to assess individual competences in providing support via the internet. Responses provided by the volunteers by email are reviewed on a regular basis and feedback provided. The main responsibility for the assessment and learning lies with internal experts and well-experienced voluntary staff and are based on internally agreed standards on internet consultation.

More advanced methods are in place to facilitate further career development within the organisation for those volunteers who wish and are suitable and available to take part in further development after completion of the obligatory contract period. An individual learning and assessment pathway can lead to the position of:

- Junior supervisor – a volunteer consultant who is learning to provide supervision, i.e. learning how to facilitate practical sessions for the trainees of the preparatory course by observation of work of more experienced supervisors and facilitating them with their supervision;
- Supervisor – a person who facilitates practical sessions for the trainees during their preparatory course, provides expert assistance for the volunteer-consultants as well as facilitating regular meetings with them, participates in the selection procedure of new

volunteers and after gaining considerable work experience supervises junior supervisors.

- Junior training mentor – a *Child Line* supervisor who takes part in the delivery of the preparatory training for future consultants and who is learning to facilitate group sessions by observing the work of a more experienced colleague and by facilitating them independently but with the supervision of a mentor.
- Training mentor – a supervisor qualified for facilitating a group session (theory and practical) for the members of a preparatory training course as well as volunteer-consultants (a case analysis session and other qualificatory seminars). They also participate in the development of the training material and can supervise junior training mentors.

### 41.5.3 Methodologies

The initial volunteer selection procedure in particular takes into account a wide set of competences that have been acquired through community, voluntary and family activities etc. Later, assessment mainly refers to the competences acquired through the work experience and learning within the organisation.

Due to difficulties in portability, the methodologies were usually developed in-house, with some external contributions from (e.g. sharing experiences, as in the case of the change in selection process used) other agencies of a similar kind. The *Child Line* Kaunas office is the only one which worked in partnership with other agencies of a similar kind. The responsibility for development of the methodologies is mainly assigned to in-house experts. As these experts work closely with other volunteers of the organisation and because they in most cases continue to provide counselling and psychological support services, direct and regular input is provided from the whole organisation. Many of the now senior experts within the organisation have working experience and have retained close links with the people working at the *Youth Line* (which was a mother organisation for *Child Line*) and therefore some sharing of experiences in developing methodologies is (also) ongoing between the agencies.

All assessment that is available after completing the preparatory training and gaining substantial work experience during the obligatory contractual hours, is of free choice of the volunteer. Its primary aim is to facilitate the individuals' career within the organisation if s/he wishes and is suitable to do so. The assessment is delivered informally (i.e. via mentoring and help from more experienced colleagues) rather than during formal procedures. For the same reason, more experienced colleagues, rather than external experts, are the main assessors. This is due to the lack of specially trained assessors and agreed methodologies. Financial constraints are also encountered. The validation process facilitates the identification of individuals' experiences, knowledge, skills and competences which can be used later, both in their work and for knowledge-sharing with less

experienced volunteers. As the organisation remains relatively small and individual career progression is linked to “growing” within the organisation, the portfolio method, observation and simulation, together with evidences extracted from work, are the main methodologies used by the *Child Line*.

## 41.6 Outputs and Outcomes

It is clear from the description of the main roles within the organisation that many skills and competences can be developed through volunteering for *Child Line*. The methods developed in-house for identifying and evaluating individual skills, knowledge and competences gained thorough *Child Line* work experience are already in place and give a possibility for their accurate assessment. However, methods of validation and wider recognition still need further development.

Currently there are limitations to the benefits individuals gain from the validation processes used by *Child Line*. The certificate provided at the end of the preparatory training states only the time period training sessions were attended and the subjects studied. A similar description is contained in the ‘thank you’ certificate that is granted when a person finishes his / her work for *Child Line* (i.e. the time period the person was working in the organisation and the training courses he or she has attended). The certificates do not clarify the skills and competences an individual has developed, nor the level of these skills, except (on the occasions) when requested by a volunteer. This is mainly due to the lack of agreed standards on how to describe them. Moreover, for the same reason the certificates are only formally recognised among the branches of *Child Line*, but not among other organisations providing similar services, for example *Youth Line*. Informally they are however taken into consideration and give great advantage. All in all, they are still limited and do not exploit the full potential of a description of the competences a volunteer has gained through the working experience. Such a description could contribute to or facilitate his / her later employability in this or other sector.

Taking into account the identification, assessment and validation of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning are still very rare in Lithuania but most employers do recognise the positive impact that this validation could bring. For example, if a person applies for a job, simply stating the formal certificates and diplomas they have attained is not considered to be enough, as they do not necessarily show individual competences and especially how a person can apply them in practice. Instead some kind of a statement provided either by a previous employer or independent assessor would considerably add credibility, compared to the present process when a person is asked to do that her/himself.

The positive outcomes of the validation process for the *Child Line* volunteers could therefore be further enhanced by developing the tools used for the validation process. According to the volunteers themselves, this could even more contribute to their self-confidence, increased motivation, attract more people to volunteering and especially show the value of knowledge, competences and skills that the practical work can give. The latter is especially relevant for the *Child Line* volunteers as the majority of them are students that find great competence development benefits of their work in *Child Line* in addition to their formal studies, in particular for students studying psychology and social work. However, the majority of the higher schools and other education and training providers in Lithuania are not willing to appreciate and recognise this by developing their own procedures / methodologies for recognising / validating non-formal and informal learning. This can be explained by the inflexibility and unwillingness of the providers of formal education (and especially higher education providers) to lose their monopolistic status.

For *Child Line*, there are significant benefits to the use of the assessment processes. The use of the procedures for recruitment and further development of the volunteers ensures that the organisation is able to match 'the right person to the right job' and to optimise the use of the skills and competences available within its workforce. The use of a formal method to recognise the skills and competences developed through volunteering, together with the opportunities to develop further throughout the volunteers' 'career' with *Child Line* means that the organisation may benefit from increased appeal to potential volunteers.

#### **41.7 Sustainability and Mainstreaming**

Although these volunteering organisations carry out validation activities in their every-day practice, none use the terminology "identification, assessment and validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal educational settings". Moreover, so far, every organisation within the Association of Psychological Telephone Help Service Agencies in Lithuania uses its own methodologies and methods, which tend to be developed 'in-house'. The methodologies are sometimes developed by consulting with other organisations of a similar kind (either national or international) or otherwise simply by relying on the professionalism and experience of the people within the organisation. The Association of Lithuanian Psychological Telephone Help Service Agencies is providing essential stakeholder representation at the higher decision-making / policy levels, but there are no initiatives yet to develop validation methodologies that might be relevant for the sector as a whole.

It can therefore be suggested that *Child Line* and other organisations within the field of psychological telephone help services, could benefit greatly from sharing their learning and experiences, in order to further develop their validation methodologies, both for the benefit of the organisations and the individuals. It may also be useful to explore in the future, how

their validation procedures can be linked up with nationally-recognised qualification standards and certificates. So far, lack of occupational standards, especially for the occupations more often found in the third sector, is one of the main barriers for greater take-up of validation in general. In addition, lack of attention and especially trust in the third sector (i.e. non-governmental organisations) by public bodies is quite typical to many new Member States; therefore quite a lot of their energy and efforts are usually used to 'prove' themselves to the national authorities instead of developing their services, improving their delivery and encouraging more people to participate in voluntary work.

## 41.8 Conclusion

*Child Line*, together with the other Lithuanian Psychological Telephone Help Service Agencies represents a strong example of how assessment can be used within the voluntary sector, to the benefit of both individual volunteers, to the organisations they work for and, of course, to the ultimate beneficiaries of the services they provide. *Child Line* has begun to develop and improve its methodologies for validation of skills and competences in order to assess both the recruitment of volunteers and their further professional development. The methodologies take into account both skills and competences through volunteer work for the organisation and through other life-wide experiences and are based on the portfolio method, observation and simulation and evidences extracted from work. However, the lack of official or at least widely recognised standards for use within the methodologies limits their impact and transferability.

Some effort has been made to share experiences and learn from other organisations working in a similar field. For example, the initial method of assessment for recruiting volunteers (a written assessment) was changed to an observation method, following sharing experiences with other organisations of a similar kind. Such sharing of experiences and learning from others is highly valuable in order to ensure the most appropriate methodologies are used and, in the long-term, to facilitate increased transparency and consistency within the sector. *Child Line* thus represents a bottom-up initiative, developed in response to an identified need. It demonstrates the challenges faced by third sector organisations but at the same time, demonstrates their strengths in working with, and for the individual beneficiaries of validation.

## 42.0 Case Study – Validation in the Processing Industry, Netherlands

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*By Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)*

### 42.1 Introduction

#### 42.1.1 The Dutch processing industry

The Dutch processing industry is a wide-ranging industry comprising for example the food, textile and chemical industries.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that – using the broad definition of the processing industry - currently a total of 7,750 processing companies are active in the Netherlands with approximately 462,000 employees<sup>2</sup>. The majority work in large companies with 100 employees or more. The chemical and food industries are the largest employers, while the water and electricity sectors are the smallest<sup>3</sup>.

Although employment in the processing industry is showing a decline due to reorganisations, company closures and movement to lower-cost countries, the employment prospects in the long term remain positive. This is mostly due to the fact that in the coming five years many employees will take (early) retirement, causing a high replacement demand, whilst the number of school leavers with qualifications suitable for the processing industry remains low<sup>4</sup>. The employment prospects for higher skilled labour are particularly promising, while the employment prospects for lower skilled labour are less encouraging. As a consequence, job seekers with an upper secondary vocational qualification at MBO level 3<sup>5</sup> (senior operator) or MBO level 4 (all-round operator) will find it easier in the Dutch processing industry to find employment than job seekers with an upper secondary vocational qualification at MBO level 1 (assistant operator) or MBO level 2 (operator)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Kenniscentrum VAPRO, Arbeidsmarkt- en onderwijs informatie 2006-2007

<sup>2</sup> NIPO, 2004, Marktmonitor procesindustrie

<sup>3</sup> Kenniscentrum VAPRO, Arbeidsmarkt- en onderwijs informatie 2006-2007 -

<sup>4</sup> Kenniscentrum VAPRO, Arbeidsmarkt- en onderwijs informatie 2006-2007

<sup>5</sup> Dutch upper secondary vocation education (MBO, ISCED level 3) comprises of four levels: MBO1, MBO2, MBO3 and MBO4 of which level 4 is the highest.

<sup>6</sup> Kenniscentrum VAPRO, Arbeidsmarkt- en onderwijs informatie 2006-2007

## 42.2 The use of validation within the industry

The VAPRO-OVP group is a service-delivery knowledge centre which has been created by a consortium of social partners (AWVN<sup>1</sup>, VNCI<sup>2</sup>, FNV<sup>3</sup> and CNV<sup>4</sup>). It offers services to enterprises related to the processing industry, environment technical industry and other related sectors in the fields of human resource management, education and subsidies. One of its services concerns the validation of informal and non-formal learning (EVC - *Erkenning Verworven Competenties*) in the Dutch processing industry<sup>5</sup>. Besides validation, the group also undertakes services in human resource development; organises the education of workers through ESF 3 and undertakes legal tasks in Dutch vocational education.

Since 1998, several companies within the processing industry have been using validation tools developed by VAPRO-OVP. Skills typically assessed in the processing industry through validation are operating techniques including maintenance, logistics, etc.

The table below offers a very rough overview of *approximately* how many employees in the processing industry have been engaged in validation, either undertaken directly by VAPRO-OVP or in partnership with VAPRO-OVP. The table shows clearly how the number of employees involved in validation has increased considerably over the period 2001-2007 from only 1 validation in 2001 to approximately 455 validations in 2007. It is important to note here that before 2006 VAPRO-OVP undertook the validations while from 2006 onwards, a considerable part of the validations have been undertaken by a regional education centre offering vocational education (ROC) in partnership with VAPRO-OVP (thus including a VAPRO-OVP assessor) and applying the VAPRO-OVP method.

<sup>1</sup> Federation for employers

<sup>2</sup> Association of Dutch chemical industry

<sup>3</sup> Trade union

<sup>4</sup> Trade union

<sup>5</sup> In the Netherlands, the term EVC-(Erkenning van verworven competenties, acknowledgement of given competences) is used for all validation methods of non-formal and informal learning

## Number of companies and employees in the process industry involved in validation, 2001-2007

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Nr. of employees involved in validation	1	8	131	218	229	402*	455**	<b>1444</b>

Source: VAPRO-OVP, 2007; \* of which approximately 300 validations have been undertaken by an ROC, in partnership with VAPRO-OVP; \*\* of which approximately 400 validations have been undertaken by an ROC in partnership with VAPRO-OVP.

Employers in the processing industry use validation as a performance appraisal tool and to motivate their workers to up-skill. Validation helps them to categorise available competences: many of their employees acquire skills on-the-job which are not officially recognised and thus "invisible".

Workers in the processing industry can typically work on four different levels of upper secondary vocational level (MBO-level 1; MBO level 2; MBO level 3; MBO level 4). Many workers do not up-skill to a higher skills level because they feel unable to perform at those levels; they lack confidence. However, through validation of their competences they realise they often already have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to perform at higher competence levels. It is estimated that after validation of their competences, approximately 80%-90% of the participants continue with formal education to fill the identified missing gaps in their knowledge, necessary to up-skill to a higher level.

Since January 2007, employers who fund a validation procedure for their employees can receive a tax reduction (*wet vermindering afdracht*) of €300 for each employee undergoing validation. In the near future, employees who fund their own validation procedure can also receive a tax reduction (as long as the expense is above a threshold of €500)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, many Dutch validation procedures receive funding through ESF<sup>2</sup>.

### 42.3 The VAPRO-OVP validation procedure<sup>3</sup>

The implementation of validation is carried out according to a standard VAPRO-OVP procedure which consists of several steps (see below for further details regarding the individual steps). The end result is always a validation-report with information on how the

<sup>1</sup> Kenniscentrum EVC, *EVC procedures fiscaal aftrekbaar*. Retrieved November 2007: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/fe948f7676cdc67fa067f7f4cdd19f41.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/fe948f7676cdc67fa067f7f4cdd19f41.php)

<sup>2</sup> Interview VAPRO-OVP, 2007

<sup>3</sup> EVC-procedure gericht op het eindtermgerichte kwalificatiestructuur 2007, VAPRO-OVP. Retrieved October 2007: <http://www.vapro-ovp.com/documenten/EVC%20eindtermengericht%202007.pdf>

competences of the candidate relate to the necessary competences of a specific professional role. This is often combined with guidance in relation to further education or training to gain complete accreditation<sup>1</sup>.

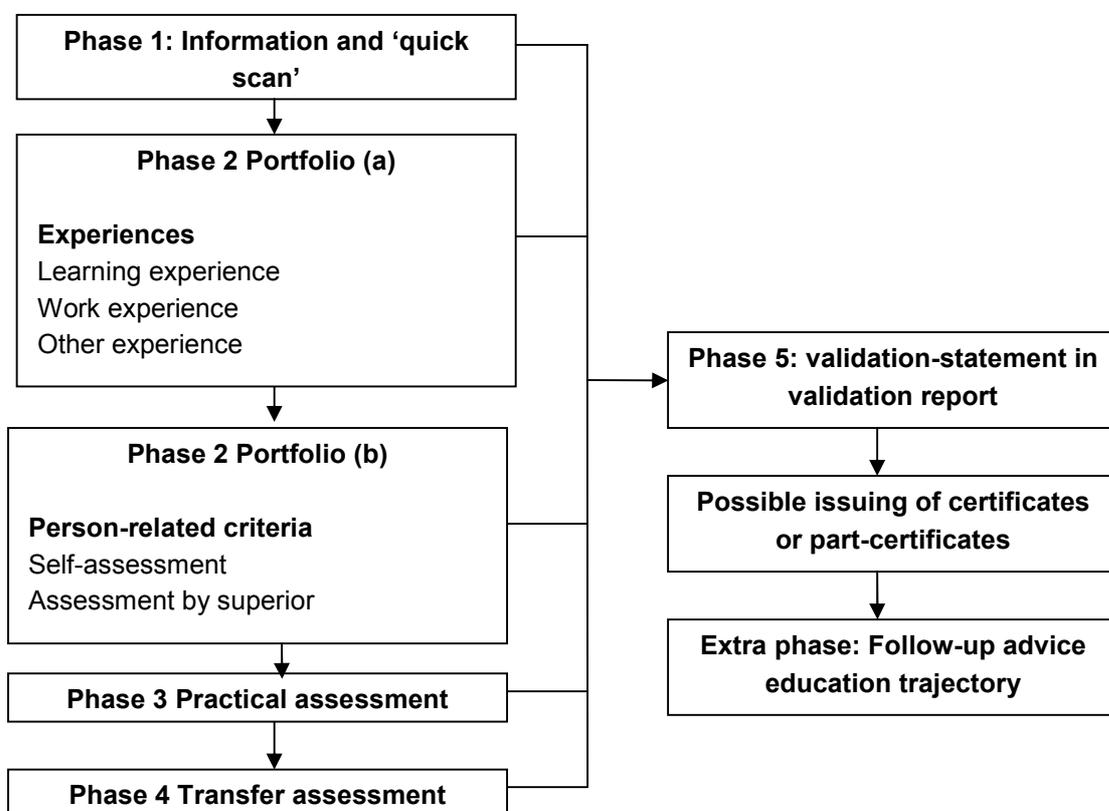
The following key actors are involved in the procedure and are almost always in direct employment of the VAPRO-OVP group (except for the internal assessor who can be employed by the employer)<sup>2</sup>:

- **Validation-procedure supervisor** The validation-procedure supervisor is involved throughout the validation-procedure of a certain participant. The supervisor is responsible for organising all the appointments which make up the procedure and ensuring that all the necessary steps are undertaken.
- **Portfolio supervisor** The validation-procedure supervisor and portfolio supervisor are often the same person. The portfolio supervisor supports the candidate with filling in the portfolio and judges the experiences of the candidate by comparing them with the professional competence based standard.
- **Internal assessor** The internal assessor carries out the internal (practical) assessment. In most cases, this assessment is carried out by two internal assessors. It is a requirement that one of these assessors is employed by the company in which the validation-procedure is undertaken and VAPRO-OVP certified. If this is not possible, then two assessors are from VAPRO-OVP and an internal employee is assigned to act as an internal specialist. In all cases, at least one of the assessors needs to be VAPRO-OVP certified. The certified assessor must follow an internal assessors training and the certificate is valid for three years, after which – according to a set procedure - certification can be repeated.
- **External assessor** The external assessor (of VAPRO-OVP) is, together with the internal assessor (of the company), responsible for the external (also referred to as transfer assessment) assessment.

<sup>1</sup> VAPRO-OVP, 2007, *bijlage over EVC bij Jaarverslag Exameninstelling VAPRO schooljaar 2006/2007*

<sup>2</sup> VAPRO-OVP, 2007, *Handboek EVC-procedure versie maart 2007*

The diagram below offers an overview of the procedure<sup>1</sup>.



As a first step, the candidate is informed about the specifics of the validation-procedure and is asked to fill in a **quick scan** form to gain a broad understanding of her/his own skill levels. The candidate must fill in a few questions about his/her field of work. This quick scan is undertaken and assessed by the validation-procedure supervisor.

Secondly, when the quick scan shows that the candidate has the required knowledge and skills levels to undertake the validation-procedure, the candidate is asked to create a **portfolio**. In this portfolio, the candidate needs to collect evidence (certificates received, description of work experience, etc.) of his/her experiences;

- learning experience in regular education, training and other courses;
- work experience in current function and previous functions at the current employer and previous employers; and

<sup>1</sup> Based on VAPRO-OVP, 2007, *EVC-procedure gericht op het competentiegerichte kwalificatiedossier*

- other relevant experiences gained outside the workplace, through volunteer work or other.

Besides the collection of evidence, the candidate must also undertake a self-assessment by filling in a list with personal criteria. The supervisor of the candidate must also fill in this list. The candidate receives assistance from the portfolio supervisor and human resources of the involved company to complete this task. The portfolio supervisor makes a judgement of what existing experience the candidate possesses to get his/her competences validated and compares the self-assessment with the assessment made by the supervisor.

Third, after completion of the portfolio, the competences of the candidate are further assessed at the workplace by one or two internal assessors through a **practical assessment**. Typically, one assessor is a representative of the employer and one assessor is an accredited VAPRO-OVP assessor. The assessment typically lasts 1.5 hours and usually takes place in the morning at the workplace. The practical assessment is based on a work-place analysis. On the basis of this analysis, certain judgement criteria are established and these are translated into company-specific and workplace-specific questions which the candidate needs to answer. On the basis of the candidate's answers and observations of the candidate's practical skills by the assessors a comparison is made of the competences of the candidate with the judgement criteria.

Fourth, after the practical assessment, in the afternoon, a **transfer assessment** in the form of an interview is organised in the presence of an external assessor (of VAPRO-OVP) and an internal assessor (in most cases the representative of the employer). The goal of this interview is to see if the candidate has a sufficient knowledge of general theoretical concepts to ensure that his/her competences are transferable outside the company. The candidate must answer questions on how certain work procedures can be translated into other situations, outside his/her typical workplace.

In the last phase a complete assessment is undertaken by the portfolio supervisor and the assessors on the basis of the results of the two assessments and the portfolio. Their judgement is written up in a validation-report. This validation-report includes advice for the exam commission of the involved education institute (mostly a regional education centre offering vocational education-ROC) on whether to issue a part-certificate or a certificate. The exam commission of the relevant education institute (consisting typically of four members: an education manager, a secretary and two members of which one should be an external expert) then decides whether the advice is followed up with the issuing of nationally recognized education certificate or part-certificates. If the candidate does not agree with the decision, s(he) can request an appeal via the appeal commission.

In the last phase (which falls outside of the scope of the validation-procedure) the candidate and the validation-procedure supervisor can hold a **conversation**, sometimes in the presence of human resources and/or a representative of the education institute (regional education institute- ROC) to discuss their judgement and advice. On the basis of the advice, a suitable educational pathway can be decided on for the candidate to fill any knowledge gaps to acquire a full qualification. It was mentioned by one employer interviewed that he found this phase particularly valuable since it offers the ideal opportunity to draw up a personalised education plan for the employees involved<sup>1</sup>.

#### **42.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure<sup>2</sup>**

The VAPRO-OVP EVC procedure is set up so as to ensure a fair and objective view of the competences of the involved candidates. Objectivity is safeguarded in a number of ways. All candidates are evaluated according to the same procedure with set standards and different handbooks have been developed by VAPRO-OVP for all involved with a detailed explanation of the procedure and specific roles. In addition, every six weeks the assessors meet to discuss the validation procedure to overcome any problems and to improve the procedure and standards further<sup>3</sup>.

Quality is safeguarded by the fact that at least one of the involved assessors needs to be VAPRO-OVP certified. The certified assessor must follow an internal assessors training and the certificate is valid for three years, after which – according to a set procedure - certification can be repeated. Newly certified assessors always shadow experienced certified assessors first, before they become active themselves<sup>4</sup>.

During the assessment there is always one assessor from the candidate's employer company involved. This ensures that the EVC-procedure is relevant for the company and for the involved candidate. The company-specific assessor is involved in all validation procedures of employees from this specific company to assure uniformity and coherence. It also enhances communication between the assessors and the involved candidate.

Another strong point - emphasised in an interview with an employer - is the fact that the judgement criteria for the practical assessment are tailor-made for the involved company without losing national relevance. A national competence standard for each profession is translated by VAPRO-OVP into company-specific judgement criteria. This method maintains a national professional standard for comparison while at the same time assuring

<sup>1</sup> Interview Kemira, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Interview VAPRO-OVP, 2007, Interview Kemira, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Hobéon Certificering BV, November 2007, Beoordeling EVC-aanpak VAPRO-OVP BV

<sup>4</sup> ibid

that the involved candidate is not confronted with uncommon terminology or irrelevant knowledge or procedures for their specific situation.

#### **42.5 Anticipated changes in VAPRO-OVP validation procedure<sup>1</sup>**

With the wider introduction of competence-based education in the Dutch formal education system, the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure is currently being adapted and will become more competence-based. At the moment, the new competence-based procedure is being tested in four pilots and will soon be rolled out. With the introduction of this new procedure, practical expertise will be put more at the forefront than theoretical knowledge and candidates will gain recognition for certain competences, instead of receiving partial qualifications (still under negotiation). The validation-report will offer a summary of the candidate's competences (as well as the competences the candidate does not have). This summary can then be translated in a personal study plan, after which the candidate can obtain missing competences by following certain learning arrangements and through this obtain a qualification<sup>2</sup>.

A positive effect of the introduction of competence-based learning and validation – according to an interviewed employer - is the fact that more attention is put on other competences, such as social skills, instead of only focusing on specific theory necessary to undertake certain tasks. However, an interviewee of VAPRO-OVP mentions that this might lead to too little attention on specific theoretical knowledge of processes, which form an essential part of the processing industry<sup>3</sup>.

#### **42.6 Outputs and outcomes / Impact**

In general it is felt that the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure leads to increased motivation among employees to obtain a certain qualification level and to remain with their current employer. In addition, for employers the gain is a more thorough understanding of existing competences of their employees.

The gains can be categorised in the following way<sup>4</sup>:

- the employer gains a more thorough understanding of the skills level of employees;
- the employer avoids offering training and education to employees, which could cover the specific expertise and skills (s)he already possesses;

<sup>1</sup> Interview VAPRO-OVP, 2007

<sup>2</sup> The formal education system exists out of 5 blocks, each consisting of 4 learning arrangements.

<sup>3</sup> Interview VAPRO-OVP, 2007; Interview Kamira, 2007

<sup>4</sup> VAPRO-OVP, 2007, *bijlage over EVC bij Jaarverslag Exameninstelling VAPRO schooljaar 2006/2007*

- the employer can categorise which skills their employees do not possess with respect to, for example, new technologies and adjust their training and education offer.
- the employees can gain recognition of the skills they have and can get a formal qualification for a higher skills level;
- the employee becomes more motivated as they receive recognition of their skills and as a result typically feels more satisfied at work.

## **42.7 Sustainability and mainstreaming**

Within the processing industry, the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure is the only validation procedure used and there are no demands from companies within the industry for an alternative procedure. One national standard procedure is preferred.

There are only very limited plans to integrate the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure with other validation procedures used in other sectors. The main idea is that the practical and transfer assessments are so sector-specific that integration is not desirable. However, certain other elements like the quick scan and the portfolio can be easily integrated into other procedures.

Recently, VAPRO-OVP has been successfully evaluated to become an official validation provider under Dutch law. They will soon be registered as a recognized Dutch validation provider and their validation provision will be published nationally<sup>1</sup>. In the future, further emphasis will be put on safeguarding this quality label. For example, VAPRO-OVP is currently planning to start a research project to track candidates during their further education in order to track results and to safeguard and improve quality. In addition, attention will be paid to implementing and improving the new validation procedure based on competence based learning.

<sup>1</sup> Hobéon Certificering BV, November 2007, Beoordeling EVC-aanpak VAPRO-OVP BV

## 42.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure seems to be well developed and offers an objective view of the candidate's skills level. The assessment has been thoroughly set up and its quality is safeguarded through the development of handbooks, accreditation of the assessors, the set up of a national professional standard to compare existing competences of candidates with the national norm and the recently received national recognition as a validation provider under Dutch law.

The shift to a new procedure based on competence-based learning will put more focus on core competences instead of only focusing on theoretical expertise. This shift will offer new challenges in the future and it will be important to pilot and monitor the new processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose and of a similar quality and reliability of those currently in use. In particular, close attention must be paid to ensure the theoretical expertise of processing maintains its importance within the system.

## 43.0 Conclusions

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By Manuel Souto Otero, Jo Hawley and Anne-Mari Nevala<sup>1</sup> (ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd)

### 43.1 National Motivations for endorsing validation of informal and non-formal learning

Progress in terms of policy and practice varies across the 32 countries covered by the Inventory, yet it is clear that there has been a significant increase in activity in validation in the last two years. In 2005, a variety of reasons were identified which brought the issue of validation on to political and organisational agendas, which have been confirmed during this update, at the same time as new reasons for involvement have increased in importance, as outlined below:

- **Economic factors:** *the needs of the knowledge economy/ also reflected in enterprises.* New pressures from global competition and internal re-structuring in national economies have accumulated over the last few decades. Europe's labour markets have had to become more flexible, and have provided a greater profile to innovation, with ensuing challenges for human capital development. Validation can, for instance, be used to address needs in different sectors of the economy, e.g. in relation to skills shortages or in order to comply with regulations regarding professional qualifications. Increasingly, stakeholders in the private sector – the social partners as well as individual companies – have come to recognise the benefits of validation (Jackson et. al. 2007<sup>2</sup>; Dyson and Keating 2005<sup>3</sup>). Today, VINFL is increasingly used to facilitate staff development and to ensure the most effective allocation of resources within the business. As more companies begin to use validation, take-up continues to rise as the concept gains 'credibility' and procedures become more reliable, as well as transferable - both across and within sectors.

- **Social factors:** *Providing opportunities for disadvantaged or excluded people.* Validation can help the socially excluded in particular to re-integrate into the labour market and society as a whole. VINFL continues to be recognised in some countries as a tool to support disadvantaged groups, such as refugees, the unemployed and older workers (Kok 2003<sup>4</sup>; Council of the European Union 2004<sup>1</sup>; European Commission 2007<sup>2</sup>). In certain

<sup>1</sup> Expert input provided by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, Ch., R. Hawthorn, L. Haughton, L. Henderson and J. Sadler (2007) "Career Development at work –a review of career guidance to support people in employment" CEDEFOP, Thessaloniki. [http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/upload/etvnews/news/2352-att1-1-report\\_on\\_career\\_development.pdf](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/upload/etvnews/news/2352-att1-1-report_on_career_development.pdf) checked on the 10-11-2007.

<sup>3</sup> Dyson, C. and Keating, J. (2005). The Recognition of Prior Learning: Practices in the workplace, Report to the International Labour Office. ILO, Geneva.

<sup>4</sup> Kok, W. (2003) "Jobs, jobs, jobs. Creating more employment in Europe". Report of the Employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok. November 2003.

countries, priority target groups have been identified and in some cases, (funding for) VINFL initiatives (has) have been restricted to these groups. Validation is also seen to support the promotion of equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups as it helps to establish equality in the education and training system and the labour market. Some countries see validation as a way of facilitating access for learners with a low level of formal education, particularly in the higher education sector.

- **Education system factors:** *Improving access to and efficiency in the formal education system.* Providing direct ways to gain formal qualifications or 'door openers' to education courses and avoid repetition and inefficiencies within the education system is another key reason for validation of informal and non-formal learning (Feutrie 2005<sup>3</sup>). The 2007 Inventory shows that a number of countries have introduced VINFL as a means of facilitating mobility and of providing individuals with a 'second chance' to reach their full learning potential. In higher education, although progress has perhaps generally been slow, a number of countries have made significant advances, in particular with regards the use of validation to facilitate entry to courses.

Economic and social factors have traditionally been seen as the most important drivers for validation, whereas the relevance of systemic factors has increased in more recent times. Economic factors have often been taken as the primary driver for validation. Thus, validation would be mainly a result of the "new vocationalism"<sup>4</sup>, which would conceive education as an engine for economic regeneration and advocated strong links between education and the world of work. This led to an emphasis on the vocational relevance of education, which in turn was an important factor in leading to the emergence of competence-based qualifications policy in some of the pioneering countries in this area, such as the UK (Williams and Raggatt 1998<sup>5</sup>). From this perspective, it would be easy to attribute the emergence of the notion of competence as part of an economically driven trend towards greater penetration of education by economic imperatives. Yet, as Williams and Raggatt (1998) highlight, the emergent thinking about work-based learning, competence-based education and validation in the country they study -the UK during the 1960s and 1970s- was, by contrast to the above interpretation, chiefly influenced by the

<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union (2004) "Joint Employment Report 2003/04" Brussels, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2007) "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan on Adult Learning –It is always a good time to learn" COM 2007/0558 Final.

<sup>3</sup> Feutrie, M. (2005) Validation of nonn-formal and informal learning. EUCEN Bergen Conference. 28-30 April 2005. [http://www.eucen.org/PolicyStatementPaper05/Background\\_APEL\\_MFeutrie.pdf](http://www.eucen.org/PolicyStatementPaper05/Background_APEL_MFeutrie.pdf) accessed on the 11-11-2007.

<sup>4</sup> See Grubb (2004) for a fuller discussion of the term. Grubb, N. (2004) 'The Anglo-American approach to vocationalism: the economic role of education in England' SKOPE Working Papers number 52. Oxford and Warwick.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, S. and Raggatt, P. (1998) 'Contextualising Public Policy in Vocational Education and Training: the origins of competence-based vocational qualifications in the UK' *Journal of Education and Work*, vol. 11(3):275-292.

radical critique of the formal education system in liberal democracies which had been led by Illich (1971<sup>1</sup>) and Freire (1972<sup>2</sup>) amongst others. They depicted the educational system as serving Western capitalism through the propagation of practices which reproduced economic and labour market inequalities. "Progressive" educationalists became interested in the notions of work-based learning, experiential learning and the accreditation of prior learning rather than teaching and course inputs since these put the individual and what they knew –regardless of where they had acquired that knowledge- at their core, replacing the educational bureaucracies of the "establishment" that only reproduced inequality. The social aspect of validation, therefore, has been a key concern from the inception of discussions about this topic.

In our 2007 review, a number of other motivating factors for the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning than economic, social and systemic, can be identified. The most prominent of these factors are<sup>3</sup>:

- **Demographic factors:** *Increasing ageing of the population and migration levels.*  
This is linked to the above-mentioned factor regarding disadvantaged groups. Indeed, demographic factors are accentuating the number of people at risk of exclusion who can benefit from validation. The ageing of the population may, for instance, also result in large numbers of people who are not at risk of exclusion but want to stay in the labour market, although in different positions to those that they used to hold. Given changes in personal preferences as employees get older, they may want to move to another position in the enterprise or to another part of the labour market. Validation can help these groups by improving access to and mobility within the labour market, thus helping to combat unemployment which is linked to demographic change.
- **Technological factors:** *The development of new technologies accentuates the appreciation of technical skills gained through informal and non-formal means.*  
There is a need to enable individuals to use new technologies in the workplace and to facilitate the recognition of competences in professions where the use of new technologies is predominant. In sectors which are dependent on the use of new technologies, formal education / training may not be well suited to keep up with the pace of technological change and emerging needs for skills development. Validation is developed in this context as an alternative option to ensure individuals are able to gain recognition for their technical competences and to identify skills gaps and training needs in the workplace.
- **EU policy developments:** *Contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy and other key EU policy goals.*

<sup>1</sup> Illich, I. (1971) *Deschooling Society*. London, Calder and Boyars.

<sup>2</sup> Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, Sheed and Wood.

<sup>3</sup> These are explored in more detail within the three sectoral compendia (public, private and third sectors).

In 2001 EU Members committed to making Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world by 2010” (the so-called Lisbon Agenda). The contribution from education to the delivery of this strategy, summarised in the "Education 2010 work programme", has given high prominence to validation activity.

A number of policy developments, such as the development of the European (EQF) and National (NQF) Qualifications Frameworks (Bjornavold and Coles 2007<sup>1</sup>) or the impetus for promoting mobility of learners and workers (OECD 2007<sup>2</sup>), have validation as a pivotal related element. In fact, the European Parliament (June 2007) made a particular reference to the link between the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning and recommended that the EQF should be seen as an instrument for linking between formal, non-formal and informal learning<sup>3</sup>. The emphasis of the European Parliament can thus be seen as indication of the increasing importance attributed to validation all over Europe (Bjornavold 2000, Colardyn and Bjornavold 2005). But it can also be seen as an indication that the EQF is seen as an instrument for promoting a more comprehensive approach to validation in Europe (Bjornavold 2007<sup>4</sup>).

Thus validation of informal and non-formal learning is clearly an increasingly important area of activity for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders, and an area in which exchange of experiences and policy-learning to achieve common goals as part of the Open Method of Coordination<sup>5</sup> is in high demand. This has come from EU-funded projects and pilot validation initiatives (e.g. through the EQUAL ESF community initiative<sup>6</sup> and the Leonardo da Vinci programme<sup>7</sup>), and the established platforms to facilitate exchange of information (e.g. Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes, the European Inventory, CEDEFOP Virtual Community). These initiatives have provided an impetus to developments in national validation practices; leading to sharing experience with other (EU) countries.

<sup>1</sup> Bjornavold, J. and M. Coles (2007) Governing education and training: the case of national qualifications frameworks. Cedefop, Thessaloniki.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2007) Education and Training Policy, Qualifications Systems – Bridges to Lifelong Learning. OECD, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Several references to validation is introduced to the EQF recommendation by the European Parliament. A new recital 5 is introduced, stating that *'The validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council Conclusions on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 28 May 2004.* On a more general level, a new recital 10 states that *'This Recommendation should contribute to the modernisation of the education and training systems, to the linkage between education, training and employment and to the building of bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.*

<sup>4</sup> Bjornavold, J. (2007), The Potential Impact of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) on systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning, European centre for the development of vocational training (Cedefop)

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et\\_2010\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html)

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of contributions from Equal Development Partnerships in Europe to this topic see Portuguese Equal Support Unit (2005) Validating non-formal and informal workplace learning: helping to empower and motivate. [http://www.equal.pt/Documentos/Validation\\_PB.doc](http://www.equal.pt/Documentos/Validation_PB.doc) checked on the 09-09-2007.

<sup>7</sup> Further details in this respect can be found in the Virtual Community on Validation of non-formal and informal learning.

- **Increased awareness / acceptance of validation among stakeholders:** *Greater awareness has led to greater use and involvement of stakeholders.*

Our research has identified a great number of validation initiatives across the 32 countries. There is also now an emerging literature on how VINFL can improve education systems and policies. It appears that a number of private and third sector stakeholders have become involved in the development of (public) validation initiatives, in order to ensure that their 'voice is heard' and that their views and needs are taken into account (see sectoral compendia in this report). This increased awareness of the importance and value of validation has to a certain degree led to greater take-up of concrete validation practices.

- **Increased use of qualification frameworks** (e.g. contributing to achieving greater focus on learning outcomes, regardless of where skills have been created)

It has been suggested (Bjornavold 2007) that the development of the EQF, followed by the introduction of NQFs in a number of European countries, has prompted a shift towards the introduction of learning outcomes across Europe. This may prove to be very important for the promotion of validation of non formal learning, since a learning outcomes approach focuses more on the results and outcomes of a learning process, rather than the particularities of the process itself. The new frameworks are thus often linked to lifelong learning strategies and are intended to also capture informal learning, or experience, that the learner wishes to have recognised (Colardyn and Bjornavold 2005<sup>1</sup>).

The 2007 inventory illustrates how there is an increasing focus across the 32 countries on the assessment of competences and the achievement of learning outcomes for the award of qualifications or for the admission to courses, rather than on inputs or processes of study. In this context, validation is used to create tailored education and training pathways, to avoid the repetition of learning which has already been achieved. Yet, as Stephen Adam noted in 2004 "*The introduction of learning outcomes is, and has always been, subject to much disagreement and has raised much passion in educationalists*".<sup>2</sup> Thus, while the introduction of learning outcomes is a complex, challenging and often lengthy process, which can provoke resistance from certain stakeholders, it can in the long-run help to facilitate the introduction of VINFL.

In the 2005 Inventory, it was suggested that the reasons countries pursue validation of informal and non-formal learning can, to a large extent, be integrated into one 'meta-reason', which is the need to facilitate Lifelong Learning (LLL). This is confirmed by the national chapters of the 2007 Inventory, where validation is often seen as an intrinsic part

<sup>1</sup> Colardyn, D., and Bjornavold, J., 2005, *The learning continuity; national policies in validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxemburg; office for official publications of the European Communities (Cedefop Panorama series).

<sup>2</sup> Adam, S., Using Learning Outcomes: A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels, University of Westminster, June 2004

of national LLL strategies. We will now move on to explore and compare national situations in terms of validation across the countries covered by the 2007 Inventory.

## **43.2 Acceptance and take-up of validation of informal and non-formal learning**

The national chapters of this 2007 Inventory update confirm that wide-reaching developments have taken place throughout Europe in policies, methodologies and legislative frameworks concerning validation since the last Inventory of 2005. Developments have taken place across all of the study countries to either strengthen existing systems for validation or to introduce new legal and policy frameworks supporting new validation initiatives.

As in 2005, the take-up and acceptance of methods to validate non-formal and informal learning varies greatly across countries and sectors. Likewise, the availability of information on take-up and methodologies varies (across countries and sectors). In general, quantitative data on the dissemination and outputs of validation is limited, although it is important to recognise that in a number of countries, VINFL initiatives are still at an early stage of implementation and thus have not yet developed to the point whereby the collection of statistics is relevant or feasible. These initiatives, however, coexist with established initiatives for which data is collected. Overall, there appears to be at this stage a greater amount of data relating to public sector initiatives, which is perhaps due to an increased focus on 'monitoring and evaluation' of public funds. (See below for further detail of the quantitative data collected through the 2007 update of the European Inventory).

The sectoral compendia of the Inventory give an overview of quantitative data which has been obtained for each sector (public, private and third). Initiatives range in size from those supporting very small numbers of learners (e.g. a dozen or less individuals achieving qualifications as part of a pilot project) to very large-scale impacts (over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through the French system of VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Experience) between 2002 and 2005). The public sector is indeed often where the initiatives are larger in scale, although there are exceptions – in Finland, for instance, over 80,000 Recreational Study Books have been distributed so far to recognise young people's participation in voluntary activities<sup>1</sup>.

The 2005 Inventory divided countries into three broad clusters: those with high, medium and low degrees of development of VINFL (for a related discussion see Bjornavold 2007<sup>2</sup>). In 2007, it is possible to make the same distinction between the 32 countries covered by

<sup>1</sup> See Nuorten Akatemia ([www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)).

<sup>2</sup> Bjornavold, J. (2007) Valuing learning: European experiences in validating non-formal and informal learning. Conference of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU. Lisbon 25-26 November 2007.

the updated Inventory. Below we further develop how these three categories of countries can be defined and we provide illustrative examples for each category:

- **Countries with a high degree of development**

The first group of countries have established arrangements for validation of informal and non-formal learning and have moved from the introduction of validation policies to the implementation of validation practices. In a number of countries, these schemes and methodologies are applicable to most or all parts of the education system<sup>1</sup>. Most have legal structures in place to support validation methods, together with a strong policy framework. All different sectors – public, private and the third sector – have developed and applied methods to validate competences acquired outside the formal education system. The high degree of acceptance of validation methods is also illustrated by relatively high levels of take-up. Bjornavold (2007)<sup>2</sup> identifies a number of different approaches which have helped to support the introduction and take-up of validation in these countries, as demonstrated below:

- the **integration of validation into national qualifications systems** – meaning that (all or some) qualifications can be awarded on the basis of different (formal, informal and non-formal) learning experiences. The best examples of this are France and Denmark (see below);
- the introduction of a **learning outcomes or competences based approach** into the national education and training system – which makes it easier to assess learning which has taken place outside of formal education and training. A good example of this is the competence-based vocational education and training system in Finland (see below);
- the introduction of **registers of qualifications** – this can facilitate the integration of validation into qualification systems, as is the case in France (through the establishment of the CNCP – see below);
- the use of a **formative approach** to encourage the introduction of validation has had some success in the Netherlands and Sweden.

Although the countries included in this category have taken different approaches to the introduction of validation, Bjornavold notes that they have in common that all have achieved a broad consensus that validation of non-formal and informal learning can add value to existing education, training and learning processes.

Practical examples of countries in this category and a brief description of the validation initiatives in place in them can be found in the following Table.

<sup>1</sup> From compulsory schooling to higher education.

<sup>2</sup> Bjornavold, J., Is validation of non-formal and informal learning possible? European experiences and solutions (2007), presented at a Conference of the Portuguese presidency of the EU: Valuing Learning: European experiences in validating non-formal and informal learning, Lisbon, 25-26 November 2007

**Table 43.1 Example countries with a high degree of development**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
Denmark	<p>The Danish 2004 policy <i>Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System</i>, which follows up on the 2002 <i>Better Education Action Plan</i>, gives validation a high priority and very specific focus to this area. The policy paper proposes that recognition of informal and non-formal learning be taken into account throughout the entire education system, and that initiatives be taken in adult education and continuing training to improve opportunities for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning stretch from general upper secondary to vocational, adult education and tertiary education.</p> <p>Validation is most prominent in the field of adult vocational education and training. A legislative amendment in 2007 gave each individual the right to have their prior learning experiences validated in relation to adult education and continuing training. The new policy centres on the needs of the individual and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible.</p> <p>In 2004, 54,445 Individual Competence Clarifications (ICA) were recorded. This figure fell to 49,995 in 2005 and rose again to 51,411 in 2006<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>In the private sector, there has been a long tradition of validation, with examples of usage dating back to the 1990s. Much of this experience has been related to the recognition of work experience but recently this has extended and unions now support individuals in applying to have their prior learning recognised.</p> <p>There are also a large number of interesting initiatives in validation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector in Denmark. Among the NGOs who have initiated development projects are: NetOp (Netværk for Oplysning) in cooperation with LOF (Liberal Oplysnings Forbund), both adult education associations, and DUF (Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd), which is the Danish Youth Council. In Denmark, the activities in liberal adult education organisations enable individuals to develop competences, although these competences are not formally recognised as education. This makes liberal adult education well prepared to take on the task of developing a wide range of competences.</p>
Finland	<p>Finland has had a comprehensive structure to validate informal and non-formal learning in the context of adult education and training since the mid-1990s, when a competence-based qualification system for initial, further and specialist VET was first established. Competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the skills and knowledge have been acquired; recognition of prior learning is at the very core of this procedure.</p> <p>In addition to the competence-based qualification system, a number of different laws were passed in the nineties, all providing individuals with a possibility to access formal studies at different levels - on the basis of their prior experience - even if they do not meet the formal entry criteria.</p> <p>A legal framework is in place for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in</p>

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2007) *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Denmark*. OECD, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2007) *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Denmark*. OECD, Paris. Ministry of Education: UNI-C's registers in Statistics Denmark.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p>higher education institutions.</p> <p>The number of individuals accessing competence-based qualifications is growing and between 1997 and 2006, reached just under 365,000 individuals. Of this total, some 199,000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82,000 were partly qualified.</p> <p>Social partners and individual companies play an integral role in the competence-based qualification scheme. Thus, the involvement of the private sector in the validation of informal and non-formal learning is very strong and stretches from national to local level.</p> <p>The third sector has also been relatively active in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. A particularly successful initiative is the Recreational Activity Study Book, which was developed by the Youth Academy in 1996. Over 80,000 Study Books have been distributed so far<sup>1</sup>.</p>
France	<p>France was the first Member State to introduce legislation with respect to validation, when in 1934 a law was passed to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience.</p> <p>Today, the concept of <i>Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience</i> (VAE), which was introduced in the 2002 Social Modernisation Act, is the main system in France for validation of informal and non-formal learning. All citizens with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience have a right to pursue a VAE (validation) procedure of their skills and competences.</p> <p>Non-formal and informal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally-recognised qualification which are recorded in the national vocational certifications directory (RNCP), overseen and documented by the <i>Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle</i> (National Vocational Certification Commission) VAE can be used as a basis to award full qualifications, or alternatively as units ("parts") of a full diploma.</p> <p>A total of over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005, most of them immediately after the new law was enacted. This drop can be explained by a presumed accumulation of demands for validation, later adjusted to a state of normality<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>The social partners play an important role in the implementation of the new framework for VAE established by the 2002 Law on Social Modernisation and at company level, many firms have facilitated their employees' access to validation of experience-based skills, either through an individual initiative or on a collective basis.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>There are also some examples of good practice in the assessment of voluntary experiences in France, such as the notebook to record voluntary skills, which has been supported by the National Union for University Clubs (UNCU) since 1998.</p>
Ireland	<p>Ireland was one of the first EU states to implement national legislation relating to the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning. The 1999 <i>Qualifications (Education</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> See Nuorten Akatemia ([www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [http://pdf.mutual-learning-employment.net/pdf/FR07/discussion\\_paper\\_FR07.pdf](http://pdf.mutual-learning-employment.net/pdf/FR07/discussion_paper_FR07.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See UNICE, CEEP and UEAPME (2005) Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report. Brussels.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p><i>and Training) Act</i> gave individuals the right to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the purpose of gaining an award or qualification in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or in accessing education and training programmes. Nevertheless, the progress towards developing a national system has been fairly slow<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>Today, the priority for the different stakeholders involved in validation is to promote and encourage the initiative. There are currently a number of barriers to increased use of validation including: a general lack understanding of the concept of RPL, limited funding and the significant investment required. There is no national funding for RPL, with the exception of some research funding for HEIs. Moreover, the RPL process is resource-intensive. These factors may act as a barrier to increased uptake of RPL.</p>
Netherlands	<p>Attention to validation of non-formal and informal learning increased in the Netherlands during the 1990s and led to a non-regulated approach by the Dutch government in order to stimulate experimental pilots.</p> <p>The experimentation with EVC (<i>Erkenning Verworven Competenties</i>- Recognition of Acquired Skills) has led to a great number and very diverse set of initiatives across the country. This diversity has led to confusion among users concerning the differences in quality of all these EVC procedures. As a result, in 2006, the Dutch government, social partners and other stakeholders established a “quality code” in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>However, the use of EVC is not yet commonplace in the Netherlands and it is not yet introduced on a very large scale<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>It is estimated that by 2002, approximately 6,000 people within 500 organisations had followed an EVC procedure<sup>3</sup>. The Netherlands EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of EVC among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures<sup>4</sup>.</p>
Sweden	<p>The validation of informal and non-formal learning is considered to be a key issue in Sweden with respect to the overall lifelong learning strategy. However, no national regulation currently exists with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p>In the 2003 Bill on Validation (<i>Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande</i>) the government stated that it was too early to regulate validation. The government felt that more time should be given to pilot projects to gather more experiences, and to further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing acts. Thus, the responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level. Due to the much decentralised nature of validation and varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, the</p>

<sup>1</sup> Coughlan, D (2007) Accreditation of prior learning: an Irish perspective; in Coughlan, D. and G. Scalon (2007) *Ireland. VPL Country report 2007*. Managing European Diversity in Lifelong Learning (VPL2) EU Leonardo Project. <http://www.vpl4.eu/cms/content/downloads/Country%20report%20IE%20National%20review%20Ireland.pdf> checked on 29-10-2007.

<sup>2</sup> 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission, Contribution of the Netherlands. April 2007

<sup>3</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007. [http://www.vpl4.eu/cms/content/downloads/national%20review%20NL%20VPL2%20\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.vpl4.eu/cms/content/downloads/national%20review%20NL%20VPL2%20_2_.pdf) checked on 30-06-2007.

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by Mr. R. Duvekot, Director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands through telephone communication.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p>National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 not only to enhance regional cooperation, but also to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>In 2000, approximately 2,300 people had their competence, knowledge and skills validated and in 2005 this number increased to approximately 8,000 people within municipal adult education<sup>2</sup>.</p>

Source: ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.

- **Countries with a medium degree of development**

The second group of countries have either recently set up a legal or policy framework for validation and are currently in the process of starting to implement it, or have had experience of piloting a variety of different methodologies on the basis of which they are currently developing a national approach. The degree of acceptance may also vary from sector to sector but overall the take-up of validation methods remain lower than in countries with a high degree of development. In many of these countries it could, however, be expected that validation of informal and non-formal learning will play a greater role in the coming years.

In Italy, for example, there is a consensus among stakeholders regarding the value of informal and non-formal learning and the need to develop better methods to capture and recognise this learning. A number of political and legislative initiatives have been taken in the last few years, creating the framework for the introduction of validation in the future (see below). In other countries within this category, there may be systems in place to validate informal and non-formal learning in relation to specific (particularly vocational) sectors or qualifications, such as NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) in Slovenia. Often, focus on the implementation of validation initiatives has been stimulated by the increased attention at European level on the developments relating to National Qualifications Frameworks, in line with the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework.

<sup>1</sup> *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> CEDEFOP (2004) *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*. CEDEFOP, Thessaloniki. [http://www.refernet.de/documents/a13\\_refernet\\_thematic-overview\\_schweden.pdf](http://www.refernet.de/documents/a13_refernet_thematic-overview_schweden.pdf) checked on 28-05-2007.

The Table below outlines the situation of a number of countries in this category and provides a brief description of the validation initiatives they have in place.

**Table 43.2 Example countries with a medium degree of development**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
Czech Republic	<p>Since 2005, legislation has been put in place step-by-step in order to create a framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic.</p> <p>The New School Act, which took effect on 1 January 2005 enables individuals (above 15 years of age) to acquire a partial qualification by passing a single examination as a part of the respective final examination, regardless of how they acquired the relevant knowledge and skills.</p> <p>The new Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results, which came into force in August 2007, foresees a possibility for adults to acquire partial vocational qualifications, through an examination to compare their prior learning achievements (his or her knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of how they were attained) with qualification and assessment standards of respective partial vocational qualifications.</p> <p>However, it is not possible to gain full qualifications through these procedures of validation and a comprehensive national system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning does not yet exist in the Czech Republic.</p> <p>The lack - until recently - of a generally valid legal regulation fostering the recognition of non-formal education has resulted in the development of a number of specific sub-regulations within decrees issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other ministries (agriculture, industry and trade, health, the interior, and defence) which govern various specific types of CVET or qualification testing. These partial regulations concern, for example, the recognition of the professional competence of individuals working in electrical engineering, crews of ships, railways and railway transport operators, healthcare workers, etc.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>In the private sector, various specific sectors have developed elaborate systems of assessment, training and certification of qualifications. These sectors mostly concern sectors with professions covered by specific laws and regulations and sectors where international qualifications and certificates play an important role.</p> <p>Activities in the third sector with respect to recognising non-formal and</p>

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, (2006) *Vocational education and training in the Czech Republic. Thematic overview.* [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf) checked on 03-03-2007.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	informal learning have been very scarce to date.
Italy	<p>The establishment of a validation system for informal and non-formal learning has become a strong and widely-shared priority in Italy in recent years and all social and political stakeholders are in agreement that there is a need for a formal system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.</p> <p>One of the barriers identified to the introduction of a system of validation is the lack of national standards regarding qualifications and competences. Currently, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is under development, which is intended to be over-arching and to enable validation of informal and non-formal learning at all different levels. The objective of this system is to obtain transparency in the training and education system, to better assess the individual's experiences.</p> <p>Currently, tests of different validation methodologies are being carried out through regional initiatives. For example, the "<i>Libretto Formativo del Cittadino</i>" (Citizen's Training Portfolio), an official document which records the skills acquired through training programmes organised by certified agencies and those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, was approved and adopted by National Decree in 2005. This has been promoted on a regional level and it is currently being tested in eleven Regions over the period 2006-2007.</p> <p>There is interest in and awareness of the importance of validation in both the third and private sectors and a number of projects have been developed, often with the support of EU funding (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci, EQUAL).</p> <p>The challenge remaining is to formalise the validation system – to capitalise on the support from relevant stakeholders and collect good practice and lessons learned from the projects and experiences so far.</p>
Luxembourg	<p>The National Action Plan for employment adopted in 1998 saw the creation of a '<i>bilan de compétences</i>' or individual skills audit, i.e. a tool to help people evaluate their own skills and competences, and hence match these to appropriate jobs or training programmes. The National Action Plan for employment of 2002 saw the creation of a similar tool for assessing vocational skills, the '<i>bilan d'insertion professionnelle</i>' (BIP), specifically for job-seekers<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>The <i>bilan de compétences</i> and the <i>bilan d'insertion professionnelle</i> are</p>

<sup>1</sup> See the Plan d'action national en faveur de l'emploi 2002.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p>only available for the unemployed</p> <p>Validation of non-formal and informal learning is also gradually being introduced as a way of accessing formal learning. The legislation creating the University of Luxembourg in 2003 includes an article allowing a prospective student to request a <i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i>, which is effectively a validation of non-formal and informal learning of the candidate, as a substitute to certification or other proof of having undertaken the formal education required for entry to the university<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>Furthermore, the <i>Règlement grand-ducal</i> (17 June 2000, revised 18 May 2007) regarding the organisation of adult learning allows, in certain cases, the admission to courses for candidates who do not meet the regular requirements, providing that they have relevant previous professional experience, which can be validated<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>A major bill has now been submitted to the Luxembourg Parliament, proposing reforms of the formal state professional training system. When approved (approval is likely to take place in 2008), the legislation will build on existing provision to create a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning which is similar to the French model.</p> <p>In the private sector, the <i>Chambre des employés privés</i> has set in place provision for validation of skills and competences for candidates to its adult education evening courses in continuing professional training.</p> <p>Some third sector organisations have also developed their own initiative for the validation of skills and experiences gained through voluntary activities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth. The period 2006-2007 was the pilot phase for this initiative, which is known as the <i>attestation de compétences</i>.</p>
Romania	<p>In Romania, there has been significant progress in legislation and policy relating to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning and the country has an established system to recognise prior learning in the adult education sector.</p> <p>For example, Order No. 3329/81/2005, issued by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity in 2005, establishes the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the national occupational standards, carried out in centres of</p>

<sup>1</sup> See the loi du 12 aout 2003 - Université de Luxembourg.

<sup>2</sup> See the Règlement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes.

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p>validation. If the individual is successful at demonstrating skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, he/she receives an official certificate. The certificates are issued by the National Adult Training Board (hereafter NATB).</p> <p>A number of major companies (e.g. McDonalds Romania) have been significantly engaged in both the development and piloting of this system. In addition, individual companies which have developed their own validation systems, such as Radiocom<sup>1</sup>, have also been identified.</p> <p>In addition, the Culture Vocational Training Centre (a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Cults) has been authorised from 2007 as an assessment centre for informal and non-formal learning for three qualifications.</p> <p>Thus, there is a growing consensus regarding the need to develop a global approach to validation of both informal and non-formal learning and a number of (EU) Phare projects have helped to support the development of a framework to support a system of VINFL, such as the development of a transparent national qualifications system. In the near future, further policies and measures are necessary to break down the existing divisions between formal initial and continuing (vocational) education and training and non-formal and informal learning, including the introduction of a common National Qualification Framework (NQF).</p>
Slovenia	<p>Procedures for setting standards and for the assessment of prior learning have been in place since 2000, when a new National Vocational Qualification Act was passed. The Act enables the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school - it makes it possible for individuals to obtain a vocational qualification in ways other than through formal education.</p> <p>National Vocational Qualifications and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on professional standards, made on the assessed needs of the economy for new knowledge and competences. This strengthens the link between education and the labour market and improves the relevance of programmes.</p> <p>Within the private sector, examples can be identified of validation initiatives implemented by both the social partners (Chambers) and individual companies (e.g. Krka, a pharmaceutical company). In contrast, there is little evidence of third sector involvement in the development validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovenia.</p>

<sup>1</sup> The national radiocommunications company

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
	<p>The positive impact of the 2000 National Vocational Qualification Act is recognised among stakeholders. Moreover, the benefits of non-formal forms of learning are recognised in the national strategy for lifelong learning. As a new member of the European Union, Slovenia aims to fully implement the Lisbon strategy and in the framework of the European Social Fund, it will continue to develop the certification of non-formal and informal knowledge as a strategic tool for improved employability and better adaptability to labour market trends.</p>

Source: ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd

- **Countries with a low degree of development**

The third group of countries show a relatively low degree of acceptance of methods to validate informal and non-formal learning. In these countries the benefits of having a scheme to identify, assess and recognise learning gained outside formal education may now be acknowledged by the stakeholders involved but as yet there is little in terms of policy or practice which actually facilitates the validation of informal and non-formal learning. In some cases, there may still be resistance from stakeholders to the introduction of VINFL due to the continuing strong position of formal education and training. Notably, the countries often have little experience with regards the introduction of learning outcomes.

Often, developments are driven forward either by the European agenda, EU-funded projects or the private / third sectors and validation remains a limited priority. Different sectors – public, private and the third sector – may be at different stages of development.

Examples of countries which could be included in this category are given in the table below.

**Table 43.3 Example countries with a low degree of development**

Country	Overview of Validation Initiatives
Croatia	<p>The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is only beginning to surface. However, some developments have been made in recent years, mostly driven by the process of European integration and initiatives from the private and the third sector.</p> <p>One of the chief institutions envisaged to be responsible for monitoring, analysis and evaluation in the field of non-formal education - the Agency for Adult Education - was established recently.</p> <p>The Agency for Vocational Education and Training has begun a process of developing new qualifications which is taking into account non-formal and informal learning. In addition, work has started on defining the Croatian Qualifications Framework, which is understood in Croatia as an important prerequisite for validation of non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>Currently, learners can store evidence of their prior learning in their individual record of achievement of qualifications and work experience, which is kept in a booklet called <i>radna knjižica</i>. Every working individual with a labour contract (not people working on short-term contracts) in Croatia possesses one. However, while there is no formal requirement that only accredited programmes can be entered into the <i>radna knjižica</i>, in practice the local government offices which do enter items into the <i>knjižica</i> normally accept only certified education programmes.</p> <p>The newly adopted Act on Volunteering creates a good starting point for developing validation initiatives related to volunteer experience, since it establishes an obligation on the part of the volunteer employer to issue a written confirmation of volunteer work experience. This provision is the result of initiatives from the third sector, especially the network of volunteer centres in Croatia which exist in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek.</p>
Latvia	<p>There remains an absence of a legislative base and a national concept in Latvia as regards informal and non-formal education and learning.</p> <p>On the other hand, by the end of the 1990s, within the framework of the concept of lifelong learning, more attention has been paid to informal and non-formal learning. As regards the question of validation (it is necessary to note that in Latvia the term “validation” or its equivalents have not been used until recently) Latvia remains at the stage of experimentation and uncertainty.</p> <p>Several specific validation initiatives have been implemented in practice for a while already, such as the development of a teachers’ qualification and a certification of knowledge of the state language. These are mainly based on or have a very strong integral part of assessment and validation of knowledge</p>

Country	Overview of Validation Initiatives
	<p>acquired through non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p>In the private sector, there is clearly an awareness of the importance of enabling employees to develop their skills and competences but it remains to be seen how actors from the sector will respond to this by developing initiatives for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.</p> <p>There is currently a lack of evidence of initiatives to promote the validation of informal and non-formal learning developed by actors from the third sector in Latvia.</p> <p>The operational strategy of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2007 – 2009 was issued in July 2007. One of the sub-priorities of this strategy is dealing with the supply, accessibility and quality of Lifelong Learning in the country. The document also stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications.</p> <p>The inclusion of Latvia into the common European area could promote the understanding of the wide range of problems connected with validation, and prompt possible solutions to them.</p>
Malta	<p>The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) was launched in 2005. This organisation is tasked with implementing a new national qualification framework for Malta, which will be compatible with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The European agenda has been a key driver for Malta in establishing this new system.</p> <p>The new qualification framework will form one single structure encompassing formal, non-formal and informal learning. This framework has not yet been launched but the necessary structures and legislation are in place to allow the new system to be implemented. Importantly, an Implementation Plan for the new framework has been put into place and work on incorporating non-formal and informal learning is expected to start towards the end of 2007.</p> <p>Although there is currently no national approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning in place, some examples of validation in practice can be found in key organisations. For example, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) assesses and profiles non-formal and informal learning outcomes by means of trade tests and other newly developed tools. The registered unemployed and others in employment are tested for possible further training and employment possibilities. Also, the Armed Forces Malta has a system for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning, adopted from the British Army. The army performs trade and other tests for training, re-training and lifelong learning. They collaborate with Educational Institutions in Malta to issue certificates and are looking at ways to further develop this system.</p>

Country	Overview of Validation Initiatives
Slovak Republic	<p>The Slovak Republic currently does not have legislation in place to support validation of non-formal or informal learning and currently there is no National Qualification Framework capable of recognising formal, non-formal or informal learning collectively.</p> <p>However, a Lifelong Learning Strategy (published in 2007) has been developed, which addresses these issues. This means that legislation to support validation should be in place by the end of 2007. Work on developing quality assurance, authorising organisations to validate non-formal and informal learning etc should commence by 2008 and a national qualification system compatible with the European Qualification Framework should be in place by 2009. The Slovak Republic has therefore documented its commitment to these aspects of European LLL policy and is in the very earliest stages of implementation.</p> <p>However, a few validation initiatives do already exist. For example, individuals wishing to establish a small business in the handicraft industry or selected crafts, can fulfil the special qualification requirements (in part) by proof of professional experience. Work experience can also be used in the teaching profession as a substitute for certain levels of qualifications (thereby enabling the individual to access higher teaching positions and a higher salary scale). In addition, a number of projects relating to validation have been implemented with support from EU funding in the Slovak Republic and the country is one of the members of the Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Credit Transfer”,</p>

Source: ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.

The examples given in the tables above suggest that in countries where there is a higher degree of acceptance, the public sector takes the lead on validation initiatives. In countries where there is a lower degree of acceptance, private or third sectors are actually taking the lead in this area – (see also ECOTEC 2005<sup>1</sup>). There are however blurring boundaries between the activities of the different sectors. Social partners or third sector umbrella bodies may for example liaise with the public sector in order to ensure that national initiatives are designed to meet their sectors' needs as well as those of formal education providers. We explore the role of key stakeholders involved in the development of VINFL initiatives in further detail below.

<sup>1</sup> ECOTEC (2005) European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Final report to the European Commission. ECOTEC, Birmingham.

### 43.3 Level of take-up

The table below combines data collected from across the country chapters of the 2007 Inventory, to give an idea of the scale of the initiatives identified in each country. As such, the table does not present a complete picture – it only contains the data currently available for those initiatives identified in the research. The table serves to demonstrate the scarcity of reliable and comparable data at present and cannot be considered a reliable tool for a comparison of the level of progress in each country.

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
Austria	<p>5,300 people admitted to apprenticeship exams on basis of informal/non-formal learning in 2003 (via the <i>Lehrabschlussprüfung</i>).</p> <p>14% of vocational qualifications awarded on the basis of informal / non-formal learning in 2002 (via the <i>Lehrabschlussprüfung</i>).</p> <p>In 2007, 700 <i>Berufsreifepprüfung</i><sup>1</sup> graduates were enrolled at an Austrian higher learning institution</p>	1400 participants received a competence statement during the pilot phase led by the Arbeiterkammer Tirol	
Belgium			<p><b>40 beneficiaries</b> took part in the 'C Sticks' pilot project and developed their own digital portfolio on a USB drive.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Learning and Skills certificates for socio-</p>

<sup>1</sup> The *Berufsreifepprüfung* (BRP) was introduced in autumn 1997. It provides higher education entrance qualifications for graduates of 3-4 year school-based VET programmes (including those in the health sector) and apprenticeships. Recognition of prior learning is an important element of the BRP. This includes exemption from individual elements (e.g. languages, or relevant technical area) upon proof of relevant competences.

<sup>2</sup> Youth Action for Peace, 2007, YAP Mag, Vol. 3 June 2007, available at [http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!\\_june2007.pdf](http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!_june2007.pdf) and Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
			cultural adult education were issued for 429 of 3,800 registered activities in 2005
Czech Republic			<b>12,128</b> holders of the European Computer Skills Card are registered in the Czech Republic and 8,913 ECDL certificates of different levels were awarded on the basis of tests results
Denmark	Between 2004 and 2006, nearly <b>129,000</b> Individual Competence Clarifications (ICA) were recorded.	15 individuals involved in the AKS <sup>1</sup> project  85% of individuals involved in the <b>Jernvilje project</b> re-entered the labour market	
Finland	Between 1997 and 2006, just under <b>365,000</b> individuals participated in the system of competence-based examinations of which 199,000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82,000 were partly qualified  <b>144,000</b> people have obtained the Computer Driving License  The share of (HE) students who had their competencies validated – mainly competencies gained at workplace – during an application process to the special study programmes was 7 per cent in 2001/2002	Around <b>400 Koskisen Oy</b> employees have undergone a validation procedure in order to obtain a qualification during the past 10 years	Over 80,000 Recreational Activity Study Books have been distributed so far.

<sup>1</sup> Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
France	<p>Over <b>50,000</b> qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005.</p> <p>More than <b>70,000</b> skills audits (<i>bilans de competences</i>) have now been carried out.</p>	<p>Between 2002 and 2005, the social partners financed <b>111,200</b> validation actions</p> <p><b>750</b> Danone employees have been involved in a programme offering the chance to validate skills gained at work through 38 state-recognised qualifications.</p> <p><b>25</b> Freescale Semiconductor employees pursued a qualification through VINFL</p>	
Germany	<p>More than 25,000 <i>ProfilPASSes</i> and <i>ProfilPASSes</i> for young people have been awarded and 1700 advisers have been qualified by the initiative.</p>		<p>By July 2006 200,000 young people had a <i>Qualipass</i>.</p>
Greece		<p><b>20</b> individuals involved in the AKS project</p>	
Ireland		<p><b>Six</b> construction company employees achieved FETAC awards on the basis of validation during a pilot project led by the Construction Industry Federation</p>	<p><b>6 learners</b> achieved FETAC minor awards at level 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications during a <i>Comhairle</i> pilot project</p>
Italy		<p>The Investing in People validated the skills of 30 employees across three companies</p>	
Latvia	<p>Over <b>32,000</b> language certificates (based on an</p>		

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
	examination of skills, regardless of how they were acquired) were issued between 2001 and 2003		
Netherlands	It is estimated that by 2002, approximately <b>6,000</b> persons within 500 organisations had followed an EVC (validation) procedure <sup>1</sup> . The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of validation among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures <sup>2</sup> .	Kenteq <sup>3</sup> has financed almost <b>2000</b> validation candidates  Between 2004 and 2006, <b>FCB</b> <sup>4</sup> organised and financed <b>186</b> EVC-procedures in the child care sector  <b>28</b> Heinz employees have undergone an EVC procedure	
Norway	Around <b>14,000</b> candidates per year obtained a crafts qualification through validation in the late 1990s  Between 2000 and 2005 approximately <b>60,000</b> persons went through a recognition (validation) procedure in relation to upper secondary level  At HE level, the number of applicants 25 years and older seeking recognition of their formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission to a study programme was 6,000 in 2001 (the first year this was	<b>100</b> individuals involved in the AKS project	

<sup>1</sup> Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

<sup>2</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> A centre of expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market

<sup>4</sup> FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvoorwaarden" (Service in labour market issues)

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
	<p>possible). The number of applicants decreased in the following years, to 2,700 in 2006.</p> <p>Adult students admitted on the basis of recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning constitute approximately <b>5 %</b> of all new HE students annually, relatively more in health and social studies (12 %) and in educational studies (10 %).</p>		
Portugal	Hundreds of thousands of workers have obtained a certification through the SNCP validation system		
Romania	Between 2003 and June 2007 the National Adult Training Board issued <b>6,050</b> certificates in 38 assessment centres <sup>1</sup> .	Radiocom has issued <b>240</b> competency certificates	
Slovenia	By 2007, <b>15,271</b> NVQ certificates had been awarded, <sup>2</sup>	More than <b>350</b> Krka workers have attained a certificate	
Sweden	In 2000, approximately <b>2300</b> persons had their competence, knowledge and skills validated and in 2005 this number increased to approximately <b>8000</b> persons within municipal adult education	<b>5</b> individuals involved in the AKS project	

<sup>1</sup> NATB website

<sup>2</sup> Data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

Country	Level of take-up, public sector	Level of take-up, private sector	Level of take-up, third sector
UK	The European Commission published in 2000 that in the UK some <b>28,000</b> students had benefited from methods to recognise prior learning – it has been presumed that this figure relates to the vocational qualifications	20 individuals involved in the AKS project	

#### 43.4 Key stakeholders in validation of informal and non-formal learning

As Freebody and Freiburg (2001<sup>1</sup>) have argued, one way to start trying to understand what happens in assessment –including validation- processes is to consider the coordinated interactional rights and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders. The 2005 Inventory grouped key stakeholders in the development of validation initiatives under the categories given below. This section gives an overview of the extent to which the roles of these stakeholders have changed in the period since the 2005 Inventory was produced and introduces the new stakeholders which have emerged. A more detailed examination of the role of stakeholders within each sector can be found in the three sectoral compendia.

The 2005 inventory observed that **public sector organisations** are paramount in developing validation methodologies and setting the frameworks for their use. This remains the case and national Ministries, regional authorities, governmental and public bodies continue to play a key steering role in the development of policy and practice in this area. It is worthwhile to note that the involvement of several ministries representing different economic sectors may lead to a dispersed national framework for validation. There are some signs of this in the Czech Republic, yet in France, where there are also various ministries involved, this has proved less problematic. If there is no Ministry acting as a 'doorkeeper' to formal education (such as in Norway), the allocation of a co-ordination role to one Ministry seems to be important.

As noted in the public sector compendium provided in this report, a number of countries have established **national or regional bodies** with the responsibility **to oversee the development of validation initiatives** and often also with a view to involve more public stakeholders during the implementation of national validation frameworks.

<sup>1</sup> Freebody, P. and Freiburg, J. (2001) 'Rediscovering practical reading activities in homes and schools' *Journal of Research in Reading*, vol.24(3):223-234.

The purpose of such bodies and centres might be to address an issue of variation in the existing provision of validation within a country by sharing good practice and lessons learnt and encouraging increased collaboration, or to support stakeholders in implementation. For example, the EVC Knowledge Centre in the Netherlands aims to collect and share knowledge and good practices on validation of prior learning and stimulate the use of validation practices. In Denmark, the National Knowledge Centre of Competence Assessment will have as its primary tasks to gather, develop and spread knowledge on assessment of competences for the benefit of a number of stakeholders.

In addition to national and regional public sector organisations, it is also important to acknowledge the key role played by the **European bodies** in the support of validation initiatives. The 2007 Inventory has found that in a number of countries and across the sectors, EU support has been an integral part of the development of validation practices. This support has taken several forms: the European *policy* agenda has provided a significant impetus; European *funding* programmes have provided essential support for new projects and finally, European-level *information and guidance*, together with platforms to facilitate the *exchange of information* among Member States, have enabled good practice and lessons learned to be shared. **Other international organisations** such as the OECD or the ILO are also increasingly active in this field, which calls for strong coordination between the activities of international stakeholders to avoid overlaps in their activity.

In many European countries, **social partners** (trade unions and employer representatives) continue to be involved to some degree in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In a higher number of countries than in 2005, their role today is integral to the delivery of validation initiatives. They may participate in development of national initiatives, in order to make sure that the 'voice' of the private sector is heard and that the needs of the sector are taken into account. They may support the provision of funding for validation initiatives, for example through Collective Labour Agreements. A number of social partners are also involved in the delivery of their own validation initiatives.

The national chapters of the 2007 Inventory show that in the **third sector, umbrella organisations or fora** can play an important role in the development of validation initiatives. Like social partners, they may participate in the development of national validation initiatives by representing a sub-sector or group of organisations with a common message. They can also ensure consistency and transferability in the development of VINFL initiatives by supporting the sharing of learning and good practice among their member organisations.

In 2005 it was observed that **individual private sector and third sector organisations** were "*the last set of stakeholders present in most countries*". They were reported to have

a small degree of involvement at national level and to be more “*users and developers*” of validation methodologies rather than those involved in regulation. This is still very much the case in 2007, except for large companies, which have been reported relatively often as developers of validation initiatives.

It is also important to add to this list of stakeholders **individual education providers** which can be found in all sectors (public, private and third). Many providers are affected by the introduction of (national) validation initiatives, which they need to implement, and must therefore adapt their ways of working and ensure their staff are aware of and able to deliver validation processes. A number of providers are involved in delivering validation initiatives, or in developing their own initiatives through a bottom-up approach. The fact that vocational education and training frequently has used a competence based approach in setting standards may have contributed to the (so far) dominance of VET providers in this field (Bjornavold 2007). This is slowly changing as more higher education institutions (providing general as well as vocational education) use validation to decide on access to studies, exemption from courses or (less often) awarding of full qualifications.

In addition to or operating within some of these stakeholders, validation experts play a key role in the continuous development of validation practices. These are counsellors, assessors and external observers, which are characterised by the following attributes (see Coles and Bjornavold 2007<sup>1</sup>):

### **Counsellors**

- a thorough knowledge of the education system (orientation)
- a thorough knowledge of the validation process (information)
- an understanding of the labour market
- a background in Human Sciences (e.g. psychology, sociology,...)
- an access to specific, detailed and up to date information (toolbox)
- a list of contacts (experts) to answer specific technical questions (social partners and other sector experts)

<sup>1</sup> Coles, M. and J. Bjornavold (2007) European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Discussion note for the Peer Learning Activity, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes. Paris, July 2007.

### **Assessors:**

- acknowledged as professionals in their sector (credibility)
- familiar with the validation process (reliability)
- have no 'personal' interest in the validation outcome (to guarantee impartiality & avoid conflicts of interest)
- able to inspire trust and to create a proper psychological setting for the candidates
- committed to provide continuous feedback on the match between learning outcomes and validation standards/references (via support systems)
- be given initial and continuing training about validation and about quality assurance (mechanisms, tools,...).

### **External Observers:**

- not necessarily experts in the given profession/activity
- quality assurance minded/trained
- presence may not necessarily be systematic
- assimilated to a sort of external auditor
- a representative of the Ministry of Education

## **43.5 Validation approaches**

The 2005 European Inventory gave an overview of the different approaches to validation which had been found across the study countries and defined a typology of methods (see also Colardyn and Bjornavold 2004<sup>1</sup>; 2005<sup>2</sup> for slightly different typologies). In 2007, initiatives have been classed in the Inventory according to the same typology as in ECOTEC's 2005 Inventory. This has permitted observations to be made regarding the trends in the use of these methods and their strengths and weaknesses. The typology of approaches given in the 2005 Inventory is as follows:

- **Tests and examinations:** the identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system.
- **Declarative methods:** based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed by a third party, in order to verify the self-assessment.

<sup>1</sup> Colardyn, D. and J. Bjornavold (2004) Validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning: policy and practices in EU Member States. *European Journal of Education*, vol. 39(1), pp. 70-88.

<sup>2</sup> Colardyn, D. and Bjornavold (2005) The learning Continuity. European inventory on validating non-formal and informal learning. CEDEFOP Panorama Series 117. Thessaloniki.

- **Portfolio method:** using a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways.
- **Observation:** extracting evidence of competence from an individual while they are performing everyday tasks at work.
- **Simulation and evidences extracted from work:** Simulation is where an individual is placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario in order to have their competencies assessed. For a process of evidences extracted from work, a candidate collects physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes. This may relate to work situations, voluntary activities, family or other settings. This evidence then forms the basis of a validation of competences by a third party.

It is important to highlight that the boundaries between the different approaches is not always clear-cut. Thus, some validation initiatives may make use of more than one of these approaches, for example, combining them to achieve, for instance, greater validity or reliability of results. Yet, we consider that the distinction between these methods is analytically helpful. It is also important to highlight that these categories are relatively broad, and further distinctions can be drawn within some of them. Such is the case, in particular, of portfolio methods (see Zeichner and Wray 2000<sup>1</sup>). The three compendia which form part of this 2007 Inventory document the use of these methods in the public, private and third sectors, which makes it possible to now identify some patterns across the sectors, as well as to illustrate how the strengths of the methods can be exploited and their weaknesses overcome.

In the **public sector** it is possible to identify examples of initiatives within each of the categories of methods. It is important to note that in a number of countries, validation methods are not 'prescribed' at national level. Instead, guidelines are given regarding the *principles* that a validation procedure should be based on and sectors / providers choose the actual procedures they wish to implement.

*Test and examinations* are used to facilitate access to formal education, to award exemptions or, less often, full qualifications. Tests and examinations represent in the views of most stakeholders a reliable and objective assessment of an individual's knowledge or competences and therefore find their strength in ensuring fairness, reliability and transparency. This is in spite of evidence of the existence of undoubted limitations in these

<sup>1</sup> Zeichner, K. and S. Wray (2000) 'The Teaching Portfolio as a vehicle for student teacher development: What we Know and What We Need to Know'. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.*

approaches to assess individuals' knowledge and competences (Price 2005<sup>1</sup>), given difficulties in establishing discipline based benchmarks at national level (Yorke 2002<sup>2</sup>) and also at local level, as different markers award widely different marks to the same work unless there are efforts made to seek shared subjectivity, which is not always the case (Wright 1996<sup>3</sup>). Yet, little work has been undertaken on the extent to which assessors share understandings of the meaning of assessment criteria (Yorke et al. 2000<sup>4</sup>). As several writers have argued (Winter 1994<sup>5</sup>; Holroyd 2000<sup>6</sup>) while academic communities in the past were able to establish common standards, the system is now under threat for a variety of reasons including fragmentation of programmes of study, increased interdisciplinary work and larger workloads.

Tests and examinations are a popular approach to validate non-formal and informal learning by educational institutions. Indeed, a large number of higher education institutions in Europe have set up systems for validating competences acquired through such methods (Leathwood 2005<sup>7</sup>). The processes of assessing learning from experience and other non-formal and informal learning they use, however, tends to conform to other assessment processes they have in place, originally devised for the assessment of learning gained through study in an educational context (Peters 2005<sup>8</sup>).

It is important to acknowledge, as the research we have conducted suggests, that for individuals accessing validation as a 'second chance', in particular in those cases when they have dropped out of formal education earlier in life, tests and examinations may represent a barrier to access, as they may be associated with previous negative experiences of education and training. It is important to highlight that, when validation is used to provide access to courses or partial exemption from them, the students that have made use of validation seem to perform at least as well as those that do not make use of

<sup>1</sup> Price, M. (2005) 'Assessment standards: the role of communities of practice and the scholarship assessment' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 3(3):215-230.

<sup>2</sup> Yorke, M. (2002) 'Subject benchmarking and the assessment of student learning' *Quality Assurance in Education* vol. 10(3):155-171.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, P. (1996) 'Mass higher education and the search for standards: reflections on some issues emerging from the graduate standards programme' *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol.50(1):75-81.

<sup>4</sup> Yorke, M., Bridges, P. and Woolf, H. (2000) 'Mark distribution and marking practices in UK higher education' *Active Learning in Higher Education*, vol.1(1):7-27.

<sup>5</sup> Winter, R. (1994) 'The problem of educational levels part 2: a new framework for credit accumulation in higher education' *Journal for Further and Higher Education*, vol. 18(1):92-107.

<sup>6</sup> Holroyd, C. (2000) 'Are assessors professional? Student assessment and the professionalism of academics' *Active Learning in Higher Education*, vol. 1(1):28-44.

<sup>7</sup> Leathwood, C. (2005) 'Assessment policy and practice in higher education: purpose, standards and equity' *Assessment and evaluation in higher education*, vol.30(3):307-324.

<sup>8</sup> Peters, H. (2005) 'Contested discourses: assessing the outcomes of learning from experience for the award of credit in higher education' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 30(3):273-285.

it. This supported similar findings from Aarts et al. (1999<sup>1</sup>) in Canada, who studied a comprehensive database of over 3,000 learners who had undertaken validation for entrance into HE courses and their characteristics to report that the average course grades of these learners were as high or higher than those of traditional students in the same programmes. Yet, academic staff seem to be very concerned about validating learning to people that may then not perform well in the courses they enrol, perhaps given the closer role that they have in the admission of those students, vis-à-vis students who follow other admission channels (see also Peters 2005).

*Declarative approaches* may be more accessible to groups which are at a distance from formal education and training. For example, the public sector compendium examines the use of the '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP) in Luxembourg to support job-seekers in their search for employment. Declarative methods can be used to provide an overview of the competences and skills that an individual has gained throughout his or her 'life-wide' experiences, including those acquired at home, through voluntary or community work and in employment. However, declarative methods rely on the individual's ability to provide a realistic assessment of his or her own competences. In terms of validity and reliability, the strength of this method therefore depends on clear guidelines and standards for the individual to use and on the provision of support or 'mentoring' during the preparation phase.

The *portfolio* approach aims to overcome the risk of subjectivity, by introducing a mix of instruments to assess the individual's competences and can incorporate assessments by third parties. This approach has recently been highly taken up for validation of informal and informal learning in some public service professions, such as teachers and trainers. There is much evidence in the portfolio literature that the selection process included in portfolio building promotes self-assessment and focuses students' attention on quality criteria (Dysthea and Engelsen 2004<sup>2</sup>), as also documented in the Inventory. Some countries that provide national guidelines, rather than prescribing the methods that should be used for validation, recommend a stage in the validation process which involves some form of assessment by a third party (e.g. the jury procedure in France) in order to ensure greater validity and reliability of portfolios, which they tend to advocate vis-à-vis declarative approaches.

However, the introduction of third party assessment does not solve all problems. It is still very important that quality assurance processes are in place to ensure the consistency

<sup>1</sup> Aarts, S., D. Blower, R. Burke, R. Colin, B. Howell, C. E. Howorth, G. H. Lamarre and J. Van Kleeb (1999) 'A slice of the iceberg: cross-Canada study of prior learning assessment and recognition' Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

<sup>2</sup> Dysthe, Olga and Engelsen, KnutSteinar (2004) 'Portfolios and assessment in teacher education in Norway: a theory-based discussion of different models in two sites', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 29:2, 239 – 258.

and transparency of this third party assessment and ensure equality and fairness in the validation process for all candidates. In general, we have seen that a good portfolio for validation, in the eyes of assessors, is characterised by being easy to assess because it is focused on specific matched learning outcomes (see also Peters 2005). The most important risks in the preparation of portfolios we have seen in the course of our research, which can result in a clear lack of focus, is when applicants prepare these alone or with little mediation from one tutor. One practice that counters such possible limitations is gathering groups of claimants together specifically for the purposes of sharing experience and learning from each other, thus enabling all participants to proceed with greater assurance to preparing their own portfolio for validation (Webb 2007<sup>1</sup>). Such sessions can then be complemented with individual tutorials.

One recent trend more used in the public sector than in other sectors is the use of digital portfolios. Whilst interesting and essentially building on the tradition of paper-based portfolios (Davies and Willis 2001<sup>2</sup>), such portfolios are still under the risk that the technological novelty of the product can overshadow the purpose of the portfolio and that the learning to use the technology itself could subsume the learning opportunities of portfolio construction, therefore offsetting to some extent the advantages that such portfolios could offer (for a review of their advantage see Piper 2000<sup>3</sup>; Barrett 2000<sup>4</sup>), such as the possibility to combine text, audio, graphic and video-based representation of information, greater capacity to accumulate data (see also Woodward and Nanlohy 2004<sup>5</sup>) which can provide the audience with greater insights into the achievements and successes of the learner (Kimeldorf 1997<sup>6</sup>) and increased learner motivation. As argued by Harnell-Young and Morris (1999<sup>7</sup>), technology should support, rather than drive, portfolio development.

Examples of the use of *Observation* can often be found in the vocational education and training sector. As stated above, observation involves the extraction of evidence of

<sup>1</sup> Webb, E. (2007) Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning for VET teachers and trainers in the EU Member States. CEDEFOP Panorama Series 147. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, M. and Willis, E. (2001) 'Through the looking glass....preservice professional portfolios' *The teacher educator*, vol. 37(1):7-31.

<sup>3</sup> Piper, C. (2000) *Electronic portfolios in teacher education reading methods courses*, AACE SITE2000. Available online at: [www.chapman.edu/soe/faculty/piper/aera.htm](http://www.chapman.edu/soe/faculty/piper/aera.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, H. (2000) *Electronic teaching portfolios: multimedia skills\_portfolio development\_powerful professional development*, AACE SITE2000. Available online at: <http://transition.alaska.edu/www/portfolios/site2000.html>

<sup>5</sup> Woodward, H. and P. Nanlohy (2004) 'Digital portfolios: fact or fashion?' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 29(2) 227-238.

<sup>6</sup> Kimeldorf, M. (1997) *Portfolio power: the new way to showcase all your job skills and experience* (Princeton, NJ, Peterson's Publishing Group).

<sup>7</sup> Hartnell-Young, E. & Morris, M. (1999) *Digital professional portfolios for change* (Australia, Hawker Brownlow Education).

competences while an individual is performing everyday tasks at work, which then is judged by a third party. It stands to reason that this approach is particularly appropriate in vocational education and training. The implementation of such an approach is facilitated when learning outcomes or standards for the knowledge to be validated already exist. The vocational education and training sector often tends to use the competence-based approach to the development of standards, which makes it easier to apply observation approaches in validation in this sector. The problem of recruitment / training of assessors may not be such an issue in the public / formal education sector (compared to other sectors –see below), as staff can be expected to have a good understanding of the assessment criteria for each qualification.

As it was the case in the 2005 inventory, it is more difficult to identify examples of *simulation* methods or *evidences extracted from work*. However, the Danish Knowledge Centres, which form the subject of one of the Inventory case studies, do offer an example in which simulation is used to assess the competences of unemployed immigrants. Evidences extracted from work have been found to be employed in a number of cases to be constituent parts of portfolios –e.g. individuals may collect evidence of their learning outcomes from different environments which are then compiled in a portfolio or dossier, for assessment by a third party.

In a number of countries, there appears to be some hesitation or reluctance to adopt validation initiatives, due to the traditional importance and value attached to formal qualifications; and also a fear or lack of a possible change in working practices and attitudes. In the HE sector in particular, there was initially an element of hesitance and mistrust towards enrolling learners from non-traditional groups, based on competences and learning outcomes, rather than inputs such as duration of study or subjects/ courses completed. To address this, partnership working with other stakeholders with more experience in this area can be beneficial.

The need for partnership-working, consultation and sharing experiences is clear for **private sector** organisations involved in validation. This is all the more important since the place of validation in companies' overall business and training plans will always evolve according to the needs of the organisations. A first important point is to make validation known amongst potential users. During our research, we have come across examples of how this is done through information sessions, validation workshops, supply of evidence lists, individual meetings between learners and workplace assessors and negotiated opportunities for the employer. Validation is, moreover, part of broader organisational processes, including companies' assessment and training agendas (Blom et al. 2004<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> Blom, K., B. Clayton, A. Bateman, M. Bedggood and E. Hughe (2004) 'What's in it for me? Recognition of prior learning in enterprise-based registered training organisations' Australian Training Authority.

In this case, often stakeholders involved in validation are unfamiliar with education standards and procedures and therefore training for staff within the sector, or collaboration with partners with the relevant experience and expertise, may help to ensure greater success of their initiatives. As in the third sector –see below-, it seems that declarative and portfolio methods are the most prevalent in the private sector, although the research has also uncovered examples of the use of tests / examinations.

*Tests and examinations* are mainly used to validate informal and non-formal learning in order to award full qualifications or certificates that may be integrated in national standards –see also the discussion below in the third sector section, in relation to the implications of the lack of integration with national standards in terms of sustainability and transferability of the certificates obtained. The *portfolio method* can also be used to award certificates in the private sector, for instance by social partners delivering non-formal training. The opportunity for employees to gain (formal) qualifications while continuing their work can be positive for both employer and employee – for example in order to meet regulations regarding qualifications or to facilitate career development for the individual.

*Declarative and portfolio methods* can be used to conduct a summative or formative assessment of the beneficiary of the validation procedures and are widely taken-up within the private sector. Summative assessments can help to inform the career development of an individual and may serve as evidence to support career progression and salary increases (for other benefits see also Brown et al. 2003<sup>1</sup>, based on replies from over 350 learners), while formative assessments can help employers/employees to identify skills gaps and training needs. As in the third sector, the fact that these methods represent both a cost-effective and flexible approach to validation adds to their popularity in the private sector. In particular employees who undertake validation in addition to their daily job are likely to appreciate the possibility to prepare their validation 'application' at a pace that suits their own circumstances and abilities. The stages of the portfolio preparation that need to be implemented in relation to the portfolio method, such as the compilation of evidence, tended to be viewed as problematic in instances where employees had felt that they had been left to negotiate their own path through what was considered as a potentially complex and time-consuming process (see also Bateman and Knight 2003<sup>2</sup>). Where employees had received a reasonable level of support –including, for instance, the availability of pathways and materials on validation and previous examples of portfolios in companies' intranets-, can could rarely see concerns about any aspect of the validation process (see also Blom 2004).

<sup>1</sup> Brown, J., McCrink, C. and Maybee, R. (2003) 'What employers want: how portfolio development fosters leadership and critical thinking in the workplace' Paper presented at the Accountability for Educational Quality: Shared responsibility Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Chicago, April 21-25 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Bateman, A. and Knight, B. (2003) 'Giving credit: a review of RPL and credit transfer in the vocational education and training sector, 1995 to 2001' NCVET, Adelaide.

In the **third sector**, the predominant methodologies appear to be *declarative methods and the portfolio method*. They represent cost-effective, flexible approaches to the validation of an individual's learning, which suit the needs of both the beneficiaries and the third sector organisations. Declarative and portfolio methods also offer a more accessible approach for certain target groups, who may be unaccustomed to or have had previous negative experiences in a formal education environment.

In the third sector compendium it is suggested that, in general, validation initiatives are likely to be more sustainable and transferable if they are linked to national frameworks of qualifications or standards (where these exist). One of the weaknesses which can be associated with the use of declarative and portfolio methods in the third sector is that it may be difficult to link them to such frameworks. It may also be more difficult for third sector providers, without appropriate training, to design and deliver validation initiatives which are linked to them. Moreover, declarative and portfolio methods rely on a significant input from the individual beneficiary. In order for beneficiaries to successfully link their learning to formal standards or qualification frameworks, it is likely that a high level of support would be required by them, which is difficult for third sector organisations to provide due to staffing and resource constraints. This need for support to individuals puts pressure on voluntary organisations in the third sector, above all in terms of the expertise that is needed to skillfully guide those of their members wanting to have their competences validated.

In order to maximise the strengths of the methods (the fact that they meet the needs of the third sector organisations and providers) while at the same time overcoming their weaknesses (questions of reliability and transferability), partnership working and consultation with relevant stakeholders is necessary. Working in partnership with formal education providers, for example, might be a way to facilitate the design and delivery of validation methods which link in with national frameworks, while consulting and collaborating more widely with other organisations involved in validation can help to overcome problems and find solutions by sharing experiences. Finally, maximising the use of the support on offer (e.g. from national validation agencies, European-level guidance and information such as the European Common Principles for validation and the European Inventory) can also help to ensure the success of each initiative.

The European Inventory has uncovered a great number of good practice examples of validation initiatives across the 32 countries and the three sectors covered. However, it is clear that there remains work to be done in order to improve the quality of these initiatives; to widen the use of validation across the countries and sectors and to enable more individuals to take up the opportunities which validation offers; and to share lessons learned and good practice across the sectors and countries. The European Inventory

aims to contribute to the facilitation of this mutual learning and in the next section we will explore how this can be continued in the future.

## **43.6 Summary**

Placed at the heart of the notion of lifelong learning, validation of informal and non-formal learning has been found to be an increasingly important area of activity for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders across the 32 countries covered by the 2007 Inventory. Stakeholders continue to be motivated to undertake validation activities for a variety of "core" reasons which were identified two years ago (economic, social and systemic factors) and a number of emerging reasons (demographic, technological, EU policy and increased awareness/acceptance), which have accentuated their importance since the publication of the 2005 Inventory.

As in 2005, the take-up and acceptance of methods to validate non-formal and informal learning varies greatly across the countries, sectors and methodologies. In 2007, it is possible to identify four different categories among the 32 countries - countries displaying a high, medium or low degree of development and countries at an initial stage of the development process. The significance of validation in those countries with higher take-up levels shows the potential of validation to benefit a wide spectrum of the population.

As validation is developed and becomes more accepted across the countries, new stakeholders are emerging and the roles of existing stakeholders are evolving.

Provided that stakeholders accept the very principle of validation, are involved in the development of validation methods and become more active in their implementation, it is likely that developments in the coming years will take place at an even faster pace and more diversified form. This scenario also hinges on a sustained political process at national and European level, not the least in overcoming administrative obstacles and ensuring the necessary coordination between different policy fields. The challenge for the next version of the European Inventory will be to capture and distil learning from these developments, to the benefit of all countries and stakeholders involved.

## 44.0 Recommendations – the future of the European Inventory

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### 44.1 Learning from experience – the 2005 and 2007 Inventories

The emphasis of the 2007 update of the European Inventory was on providing accurate information on high quality initiatives on validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) from different Member States.

The overall objective of the contract was to:

- quality assure and update information contained in the previous versions of the European Inventory (2004 and 2005 versions);
- further develop the format and presentation of the European Inventory to facilitate exchange of experiences and support mutual learning.

The methodology section of this report outlines our approach to fulfil these objectives and gave a brief indication of some of the problems encountered and solutions which were found. These problems merit further examination in this section, as they must be taken into account when deciding on how the next version of the Inventory should take shape.

The Inventories of 2005 and 2007 faced very different challenges. In 2005, there was a relatively limited amount of information available at national but particularly at European level.<sup>2</sup> Most information was gathered by national experts through a literature review of national sources, and through interviews with key stakeholders (mostly from public agencies). The production of the 2005 Inventory was further challenged by the fact that very little work had been conducted to 'identify' good practice (best initiatives) in many of the countries which fell under the study. In addition, the project's consultation process highlighted that the concept of 'validation of informal and non-formal learning' was not fully understood by the stakeholders who were not directly engaged in work in this area.

In 2007 it is clear that validation of informal and non-formal learning has not only become an important element of the social policy agenda at European level. It has also become an important and even 'fashionable' topic for the wider group of stakeholders in education and training. Thus, by 2007, there was a significant increase in the amount of literature

<sup>1</sup> Expert input provided by Odd Bjørn Ure (Consultor.)

<sup>2</sup> Not applicable to all the study countries.

available on this topic<sup>1</sup>. While the detailed literature on public systems and policies has been very beneficial for the preparation of the updated Inventory, on the other hand researchers working on certain country chapters faced a great number of examples of individual initiatives, only a few of which could be selected for inclusion within the Inventory, given the scale and nature of the project. Moreover, in relation to the suggestion that validation has become ‘fashionable’ or a ‘buzzword’, our work became more difficult as many publications and projects concerned with certification, on-the-job training or non-formal learning have been classified as initiatives to validate informal and non-formal learning – though in many cases the aspects of identification, assessment and recognition are limited, or even non-existent. Several reasons explain the tendency to put too much under the label of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Firstly, it may be the case that some stakeholders still do not have a deep understanding of VINFL. Secondly, it may be that stakeholders simply try to classify as many of their initiatives as they can as ‘validation’ initiatives, though in some cases their validation components are weak<sup>2</sup>. Thirdly, many publications on validation also choose to analyse both approaches dealing with validation of non-formal and informal learning and practices dealing with recognition of prior formal qualifications (e.g. foreign ones).

As a result, the preparation of this updated version of the European Inventory has required a significant allocation of resources for the assessment and identification of the methods that demonstrate effective practice and the greatest degree of validity and reliability.

If a new version of the European Inventory is to be produced, it is likely that these challenges experienced in 2007 will recur. In fact, as the awareness of validation increases, together with greater incentives at both national and European level to introduce VINFL, it is likely that the challenge of an abundance of information will in fact grow considerably. Therefore, the proposal for the format of the next update of the Inventory must take these potential challenges into account. Below, we examine other issues which must be considered before a final ‘specification’ is set for the next Inventory.

## **44.2 The future of the European Inventory – issues for consideration**

### **44.2.1 Setting clear objectives**

Given the challenges outlined above, it is important that the next version of the Inventory is based on clear aims and objectives, in particular in relation to the need for a comprehensive overview of initiatives and developments and the need to identify good practice –in which case a focus on less than 32 countries may be advisable, and the experience of countries outside Europe might be included.

<sup>1</sup> Once again, not however applicable to all the study countries.

<sup>2</sup> See also Refernet network and OECD work in this area for a similar conclusion.

#### 44.2.2 Identifying the target audience

When defining the rationale for a future update, it is also essential to be clear on who the end users will be. The current version has been updated to ensure that a number of stakeholders can make use of the Inventory. In particular, the addition of the public, private and third sector compendia ensures that the 2007 update adds value to the previous Inventory by providing a practical overview of key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches within the three different sectors. The idea is that these compendia will serve as important tools for practitioners by enhancing the exchange of experiences and enabling different stakeholders to learn from tried and tested initiatives in their field, without needing to refer to the detailed individual country chapters. The databases of public, private and third sector initiatives, together with the literature abstracts, are also new additions to the inventory which will appeal to practitioners and other users.

It is important to define the target audience of the next Inventory as it is clear that different products are required by different users. If the target audience is again to be made up of a mix of stakeholders, then it will be important to provide a mix of 'products' tailored to their needs, as has been done in 2007.

#### 44.2.3 Ensuring complementarity

There are a number of other initiatives which collect and share information on the validation of informal and non-formal learning and it is important that in the future, efforts are continued and where possible strengthened, to enhance synergies between these initiatives and the Inventory.

For the 2007 update, ECOTEC has reviewed and extracted recommended examples from international comparative studies / projects which have been carried out since the Inventory of 2005. This mainly refers to the on-going OECD project on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning and the work of CEDEFOP (through the Refernet network) on its theme 08 - Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. It is essential that any future work in a similar way avoids the duplication of effort, both to ensure the most effective use of resources and also to avoid any issues of confusion or frustration among stakeholders who might be approached with multiple requests for information on validation.

It is important to recognise here that the purposes, structure, emphasis and country coverage of the OECD and Refernet activities are different when compared to the Inventory, and that the Inventory precedes these. Each project therefore has different data requirements and serves a different purpose for a range of target audiences. However, synergies between the projects could be further explored in the future (for instance by collecting data at the same time, even if the data needed by different projects differs).

Other studies and awareness-raising initiatives relating to validation have been supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme. These tend to have a more specific, often more practical focus. An example is the EuroguideVAL pilot project<sup>1</sup>, which took place from 2005 to 2007. This project developed occupational standards, training standards and training materials for professionals working in the field of validation aiming to define a common European framework of competences for the initial and continuing training of these professionals. Several Leonardo da Vinci projects addressing this theme are being presented and discussed in the Virtual Community opening up new potential synergies with future versions of the Inventory.

Another initiative by the European Commission of relevance for the Inventory is the Mutual Learning Programme belonging to the European Employment Strategy under the auspices of DG Employment. A seminar held recently addressed policy learning between ten countries in the field of VINFL<sup>2</sup>

If it is decided that the European Inventory is to take on a more specific focus in the future, with more detail on good practice in methods and more focus on the target audience of practitioners, it will be important that the learning from these studies should be taken into account and also that collaboration with key stakeholders working in this area –although, of course, not exclusively with them - should feature in the research. Equally, the work of the cluster of learning outcomes and National Validation Agencies (or equivalent) should be closely monitored to ensure the relevance and 'completeness' of the Inventory.

### **44.3 The future of the European Inventory – possible options**

In this section, we will explore some of the alternative options for the next version of the Inventory. Any decisions on the future of the Inventory should of course be informed by consultation with current and potential users in the sphere of validation and the needs of the "owner" of the Inventory, the European Commission. This might take place through a survey on the Inventory website once this is transferred to the CEDEFOP server, through more in-depth consultation with relevant stakeholders, such as a focus group or individual interviews, or using the current cluster on validation (although this does not include representatives from the public and third sectors, which have been so far key target groups for the inventory). The future of the Inventory should also take into consideration future developments (e.g. the transfer of the Inventory website to CEDEFOP and its implications –for instance, it is unknown whether registration and password will then be needed to access the website, in which case the number of visits received by the website could be reduced, or some of the options described below could be difficult to implement).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.euroguideval.org/choix.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mutual-learning-employment.net/stories/storyReader\\$224](http://www.mutual-learning-employment.net/stories/storyReader$224)

#### 44.3.1 “Tried and tested”

Future updates of the European Inventory could present a similar ‘map’ of national initiatives as the current and previous versions, from 2004. New policies and trends in practice should be explored in each new version of the Inventory. For instance, the 2007 version has included more detail on Higher Education and the introduction of national (and European) qualifications frameworks than previous versions of the inventory. A subsequent version could include a survey of the private sector –or an analysis of survey results gathered through one of the existing EU surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey- to enhance our understanding of validation in this area.

Providing a ‘like-for-like’ update of the Inventory, using the same format (exploring initiatives in the public, private and third sectors of each country) enables users to quickly and easily find the information they are looking for and identify progress over time, at the same time that the Inventory builds on its previous versions. In this respect, it is important to highlight that ECOTEC has gathered positive feedback on the current approach adopted by the Inventory project from practitioners and researchers alike since the launch of the 2007 project.

#### 44.3.2 Making the Inventory a permanent platform

The European Inventory could also become a permanent platform detailing developments in validation of non-formal and informal learning in 32 countries, such as the "European Employment Observatory" in the area of employment –although much narrower in scope and much smaller in terms of the resources needed. This would, in our view, not overlap with the Virtual Community on validation of non-formal and informal learning, since the Observatory would still be a closed platform where researchers (in this case, national correspondents) would be in charge of informing about developments in certain areas in their countries of expertise, rather than reactively awaiting information provided by users. The experience from the Virtual Community so far shows, in our view, that it is not a good tool for collecting comprehensive information about validation on a systematic basis.

Each year, the information fed into the Observatory could be gathered in synthesis reports, which could be more analytical in nature than the versions of the Inventory so far produced, in which most effort has been devoted to data collection, with relatively little scope for analysis of the data gathered.

#### 44.3.3 Narrowing the Inventory objectives

As we have emphasized above, the collection of data on validation initiatives across a large number of countries is a time-consuming task. One option might therefore be to narrow the aims and objectives of the future editions of the Inventory.

The 2005 Inventory suggested that ‘methodologically-specific’ Inventories could be produced in the future, which would focus mainly on illustrating best-practice. This might be one way of focusing the research on good practice, rather than on ‘mapping’ initiatives and developments. If the aim of the Inventory was mainly to gather information on high quality initiatives, rather than update each country chapter, then the focus of the research could be channelled to select such good practice examples from across the countries and examine these in more depth, rather than to provide examples for each country, although this would lose in terms of the comprehensiveness in new developments currently achieved by the Inventory.

Another approach would be to produce sector-specific inventories in the future. Thus, rather than a country-by-country approach, the Inventory could consider each sector in turn, again in more depth. Depending on the resources available, this could be carried out on a rota basis if necessary (private-voluntary-public).

A decision to narrow the objectives of the Inventory might be taken if other initiatives to collect information on national developments emerge (for instance through Leonardo or other EU-Projects), or if this role begins to be covered by existing organisations such as NARIC.

#### 44.3.4 Widening the scope

Developments in the sphere of validation are not limited to countries in Europe. In fact, there is a significant amount of learning and good practice which could be shared with and from non-European countries (e.g. Canada, the USA, New Zealand, etc.). The next Inventory could take into account developments outside of Europe – perhaps through a chapter focusing on good practice initiatives in the ‘rest of the world’ in addition to the individual country chapters, or for countries where significant progress has been made, individual country chapters. This could be partly based on data gathered through other organisations, such as the ILO and OECD, yet this option would reside on the elaboration of a distinct approach from the one already applied by the OECD project on validation to target the information to the needs of the Inventory and also cover non-OECD countries.

#### 44.3.5 Adding to the functionality of the website

The current Inventory website already presents a comprehensive source of information (‘internal’ – i.e. the Inventory products – and external – e.g. the links to publications) for its users. Following the 2007 update to the Inventory, the site will incorporate:

- Overview report (2007) *plus archive overview reports from 2004 and 2005*
- 32 individual country chapters (2007) *plus archive of 30 2005 country chapters*

- Six case studies (2007) *plus archive of ten case studies from 2005*
- Three sectoral compendia - public, private and third sector (2007)
- Three 'databases' of good practice initiatives – public private and third sector (2007)
- Over 100 abstracts of relevant literature (2007)
- Glossary of key terms
- Publications and research activities
- Links to other useful websites

The site is thus already a very comprehensive platform for information relating to validation and has high visibility (it is the first search result under "European Inventory" or "validation informal non-formal" in google.com and other search engines). It therefore represents the ideal central 'forum' for further sharing of information and good practice. If it continues to be enhanced and regularly updated, the website would continue serve as a unique 'one-stop' point of information for all stakeholders in the sphere of validation. This might help to overcome the difficulties outlined above relating to the ever-increasing amount of data on this topic, which begins to create a 'maze' for the interested audiences, who may not be able to differentiate between good practice initiatives and those which are still in a development phase.

Thus, if the website were to be enhanced and to act as a central information point, certain additional functions could be added (existing functions should continue to be regularly quality checked and updated as appropriate). One function might be to add a 'diary' where stakeholders could post information relating to events in the sphere of validation (or to provide a link to the CEDEFOP virtual community, which also offers a 'diary' of events). Another function might be to create a database of validation tools and materials, similar to the 'Equal Works'<sup>1</sup> website which has been set up to disseminate the outputs from the ESF Equal Programme. This database could be used to store fully quality-assured materials such as portfolio templates, guidelines on validation procedures, handbooks and case studies. It would however require a quality assurance procedure to validate the materials before publication, which of course brings certain cost implications and would depend on how long the website should be maintained. Videos and other multi-media functions could also be included, providing stories about validation initiatives from users or downloadable video-presentations. Search functions could relate to, for example, the type of method, language of the materials, the target group or sector. This would somehow

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.equal-works.com/>

complement the current focus of the Inventory with more practical and "real-life" stories for practitioners rather than focusing mainly in the analysis of good practice.

It is of course important to bear in mind that, as emphasized in the 2005 Inventory, "the platform for updating the Inventory in the future can be supported, but cannot be led by *the establishment of a permanent project website with a central point of contact. Information on public, but in particular private and voluntary sector initiatives needs to be actively sought by the Inventory manager, rather than be expected from stakeholders.*" This has been the approach used in the production of the 2005 and 2007 Inventory, entailing a large task in following up leads on validation initiatives obtained in conferences, interviews and literature review. Our experience leads us to conclude that this pro-active approach of seeking information is the best, and perhaps only, way forward if the future updates of the Inventory are to continue to gather comprehensive data about validation initiatives and highlight good practice.

## **Annex One: Terms of Reference**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Call for Tender (open procedure) n° EAC 42/06**

**European Inventory on validation of non-formal and  
informal learning; update and further development**

**Contracting Authority: European Commission**

## 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A majority of European countries are currently developing and implementing methods, institutions and systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The objective is to make visible (identify) and value (assess and recognise) the results and outcomes of learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions - for example at work, in voluntary and leisure-time activities and at home. Lifelong learning, it is emphasised, is only possible if individual citizens can combine learning outcomes from different settings and contexts. The value of knowledge, skills and competences can not exclusively be judged according to learning inputs (location, duration and teaching methods) but must increasingly take into account learning outcomes – irrespective of whether these have been acquired inside or outside formal education and training.

This shift in focus has resulted in the development of and agreement on national validation policies in most European countries (European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2004 and 2005, Colardyn and Bjornavold 2005). Frequently this takes the form of legal initiatives defining the roles to be played by different actors, institutions and methodologies. These initiatives are important as they (re) define who are allowed to value learning, how this is going to be done and according to which standards and references. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is thus not exclusively about technical changes or reforms but also about highly politicised decisions potentially changing the balance between interest groups. Basically we can observe three significant (but sometimes overlapping) stages of policy formulation and implementation in Europe today:

- Countries still at an experimental stage tend to accept the need for initiatives in this field but are still uncertain on how this could influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis. Experiments provide a political as well as a practical basis for taking forward more permanent methodological and institutional changes.
- A number of countries are currently moving towards national validation systems and have thus accepted the need for permanent solutions approaches based on a clearly defined legal and institutional basis.
- Some countries have established permanent national systems. These approaches are very much focussed on learning outcomes. Any learning pathway or outcome will be recognised as long as it matches the assessment standards established at national level.

The political initiatives are accompanied by extensive methodological developments addressing the challenges of validity, reliability and credibility of validation results. All countries and stakeholders involved face the challenge of how to appropriately identify and ‘measure’ learning outcomes. The non-standardised and diverse character of learning taking place outside formal education and training systems seriously challenges existing assessment methods and approaches.

The development of national policies in the field of validation has been paralleled by numerous initiatives at enterprise and sector level. Actors in the private sector are increasingly recognising the need to make use of the full range of learning outcomes, irrespective of their origin or formal status. This has resulted in the development and implementation of a wide variety of validation and measurement initiatives supporting human resource development at different levels. Compared to developments in the public domain, developments at enterprise and sector level have been less systematically mapped and analysed. A challenge in the coming period is thus to systematically strengthen the overview over and understanding of these initiatives.

The rapid developments of methods and systems for validation – both in the public and private domain - were recognised already in the 2001 ‘Communication on Lifelong Learning’. The European Commission recommended the setting up of a ‘European Inventory’ to support exchange of experiences and mutual learning in the field of validation. A first version of this inventory was made available to the public in 2004, followed up by an extended and deepened version in 2005. This web-site can be consulted at:

<http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/2005.html>

The need for exchange of experiences and mutual learning has not diminished since the original request for a European Inventory was made in 2001. This is why the Commission now seek the necessary expertise, for the period November 2006–December 2007, to assist in the updating and further development of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The legal basis on which this call for tender is based is Decision n° 791/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. CONTRACT OBJECTIVES & EXPECTED RESULTS**

### **2.1. Overall objectives**

The overall objectives to which this contract will contribute are:

- to quality assure and update information currently contained in the European Inventory (2004 and 2005 versions);
- to further develop the format and presentation of the European Inventory to facilitate exchange of experiences and support mutual learning.

### **2.2. Specific objectives**

The contractor will be expected to assist the Commission in:

- assessing and improving the quality of the information currently contained in the Inventory;
- adding relevant information currently not covered by the Inventory, covering initiatives in the public as well as in the private domain;

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament and the Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities in the field of education and training (Action 3B: Support for activities contributing to the achievement of the future objectives of the education and training systems in Europe (“Education & Training 2010 work programme”))

- developing the Inventory into an efficient electronic platform able to serve diverse needs and a broad range of stakeholders at national, sectoral and enterprise level.
- developing the Inventory into a tool more actively supporting the ‘Education and Training 2010’ cluster on ‘Recognition of learning outcomes’ started March 2006.
- seeking a closer integration of the European Inventory and the Virtual Community on validation of non-formal learning currently administered by Cedefop.

### **2.3. Results to be achieved by the Contractor**

- To produce two updates of the Inventory; the first 6 months after signature of the contract by the last of the two parties; the second 12 months after the signature of the contract by the last of the two parties. All countries covered by the Education and training 2010 process should be covered by the inventory.
- To further develop and finalise a flexible electronic format supporting the needs of diverse users with different needs.
- To suggest solutions for future updating and maintenance of the Inventory, including closer integration into other lifelong learning information systems currently being developed by the Commission, Cedefop and OECD.

### **3. SCOPE OF THE WORK**

#### **3.1. General**

The updating of the European Inventory will be closely linked to the cluster on 'Recognition of learning outcomes' set up in March 2006. This cluster will pursue two main issues:

- The development of methods for validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- The shift from a learning input to a learning outcomes perspective in national education and training policies.

The shift towards learning outcomes, focussing on what an individual is expected to know or able to do, facilitates the assessment of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences. The updating of the Inventory must take into account these broader developments, exemplified by the setting up of national qualifications frameworks and the European qualifications framework.

#### **3.2. Specific activities**

The work to be done consists mainly of:

- preparations for data-collection; through desk-based research and through existing expert networks (Commission, Cedefop, OECD etc), if necessary by establishing contacts in countries or institutions.
- Collection of data at national level and, in particular, at sector and enterprise level.
- Compared to existing inventory provide more detailed information on methodological issues to directly support the need for mutual learning in this field;
- Systematic quality assurance of data to ensure sufficient validity and reliability;
- Improving the presentation in electronic format: website including both the Inventory and the Virtual Community.

##### ***3.2.1. Geographical area to be covered***

The provision of consultancy services must cover the 32 countries participating in the "Education & Training 2010" work programme as of the date the contract is signed, i.e. the 25 Member States of the European Union, the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), the accession countries (Romania and Bulgaria) and the candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey).

### **3.3 PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

#### **3.3.1 Responsible body**

Education and Culture Directorate General, Directorate A, Unit A1.

#### **3.3.2 Facilities to be provided by the Contracting Authority and/or other parties**

Not applicable

## **4. LOGISTICS AND TIMING**

### **4.1. Location**

The contractor will work mainly from his/her own location using his/her own premises and equipment, except for the time needed for participation in the planned meetings as necessary.

### **4.2. Commencement date & Period of execution**

The indicative intended commencement date is November 2006 and the period of execution of the contract will be 12 months. Actual commencement will take place after signature of the contract by the last of the two parties.

Amendments may be made to the contract (for example, extension in time) only where the amendment is judged by the Contracting Authority to be necessary for the completion of the project, and where the reason for the amendment is beyond the control of the Contractor.

### **4.3. Time Schedule**

The work is scheduled to start in November 2006. A first updated version of the Inventory should be produced by mid 2007. The second updated version by the end of 2007. Developments of the presentation form (web-site and virtual community) should be started immediately after signing the contract by the last of two parties, a final version should be ready by mid 2007 supporting the first update.

## **5. PERSONNEL**

### **5.1. Overall requirements**

The Contracting Authority estimates that 220 expert/days of work will be required to execute the tasks satisfactorily, including the attendance at the necessary meetings.

Tenderers remain free to propose any allocation of resources which they believe will best achieve the desired results.

### **5.2. Key experts**

All experts who have a crucial role in implementing the contract are referred to as key experts. It is recommended that the key expert(s) proposed by the Tenderer has all the knowledge, skills and experience described below:

- General, up-to-date knowledge and understanding of lifelong learning policies and approaches in Europe.
- Considerable experience of and credibility in the field of non-formal learning.
- Excellent leadership, organisational, analytical and communication skills, as well as experience of running projects and working in an international context. Ability to interact with key actors both in governmental and education circles.
- Up-to date knowledge of validation practises in the public as well as the private domain, at national, sector an enterprise level..
- In-depth knowledge of European initiatives in the field of validation, including a general overview over activities in the 'Education and training 2010' programme.
- Several years of experience dealing with European issues at a level extending beyond national borders/agendas.
- Access to existing networks working in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### **5.3. Facilities to be provided by the Contractor**

The Contractor shall ensure that experts are adequately supported and equipped. In particular it shall ensure that there is sufficient administrative, secretarial, translation and interpreting provision as necessary, to enable experts to concentrate on their primary responsibilities.

## **6. REPORTS**

### **6.1. Reporting requirements**

Each report will be submitted in 5 copies in the English language. The Commission will comment on all reports within 20 days. In the absence of observations from the Commission within the deadline, the report will be considered as being approved.

Within 15 days of receiving the Commission's observations, the Contractor will submit the report in definitive form, taking full account of these observations, either by following them precisely, or by explaining clearly why not. Should the Commission still not consider the report acceptable, the Contractor will be invited to amend the report until the Commission is satisfied.

### **6.2. Interim report (1st update)**

The interim report shall be submitted within 6 months after the date of signature of the contract by the last of the two parties. The report shall include at least the following:

- Complete information on progress achieved towards the results specified in section 2.3 and the activities outlined in 3.2.
- Problems encountered, solutions found or proposed, and impact on future work.
- Detailed time schedule and methodology for the completion of the work. **6.3. Final**

### **report (2<sup>nd</sup> update)**

The final report shall be submitted within 12 months after the date of signature of the contract by the last of the two parties. The report shall include at least the following:

- An executive summary not exceeding 5 pages
- results of the specific activities described in point 3.2
- the overall results of the contract as specified in point 2.3

## **Annex Two: Organisations Contacted for Research and Quality Assurance**

## Interviewees<sup>1</sup> and organisations contacted for research and external quality assurance

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
<b>AT</b>	Patricia Jankovic, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Alfred Freundlinger, WKÖ	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Herwig Siegl, Wirtschaftskammer Oberösterreich	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	CVET Academy ( <i>Weiterbildungsakademie</i> )	Interviewed for initial research
<b>BE</b>	Wilfried Boomgaert, Ministry of Education and Training (Flemish Community)	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Alain Kock - the Consortium de validation des competences (French community)	Comments received and addressed
<b>BG</b>	Mrs Bonka GENOVA, Ministry of Education and Science	Confirmed agreement with comments from P. Evtimova
- // -	Mrs Petya EVTIMOVA, Ministry of Education and Science	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Lubov Stoeva, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce	Interviewed for initial research
<b>HR</b>	Tina Saric, Agency for Adult Education, Centre for Mobility and EU programmes	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Ivana Puljiz, Agency for Adult Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Nino Buić, Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Department for International Projects	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Luka Juros, Directorate for Higher Education, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Sanja Crnković-Pozaić, Director, Centre for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurship	Sent out in July
- // -	Antonio Matković, Head of Cooperation with Public Sector and Development Funds, Selectio Group Ltd. (MojPosao webportal)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Bojana Ćulum, The Association for Civil Society Development SMART	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Emita Blagdan, Spokesperson, Agency for Science and Higher Education	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Lidija Burić, Salto Youth Trainer and TREF member (TREF: professional association for improvement of work quality of trainers in non-profit sector)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Marica Jelić, Head of Office for job mediation and training, Croatian Employment Service	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Marina Crnčić Sokol, Advisor for Adult Education, Directorate for Secondary Education, MoSES	Interviewed for initial research

<sup>1</sup> Interviews conducted face-to-face, by telephone and by e-mail

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
- // -	Pero Lučin, Governing Board Director, the National Foundation for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development of the Republic of Croatia	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Sanja Crnković-Pozaić, Director, Centre for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurship	Interviewed for initial research
<b>CY</b>	Demetrios Englezakis, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education and Culture	Comments received and addressed
- // -	George Siekkeris, Senior Human Resource Officer, Human Resource Development Authority	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Leonidas Paschalides, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Nikos Nicolaou, SEK - Cyprus Workers Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
<b>CZ</b>	Monika POKORNÁ - Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Jitka Pohankova, NUOV	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Otakar Pivoda , Executive Director, Český institut pro marketing (CIMA)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Zdeněk Pracný, UNIV project (“Recognition of the results of non-formal education and informal learning in networks of schools providing education services for adults”)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Dana Moree, Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic	Interviewed for initial research
<b>DE</b>	Diekmann Knut, DIHK - Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag e.V	Interviewed for initial research
<b>DK</b>	Mrs Annelise Hauch, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Angethe Nordentoft, The Danish Adult Education Association	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Angethe Nordentoft, The Danish Adult Education Association	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Annelise Hauch, Ministry of Education	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Irene Mortensen, Knowledge Centre Mid-West	Interviewed for case study
- // -	Annete Saskia Junge, Ministry of Labour	Interviewed for case study
<b>EE</b>	Kulli All, Adviser, Vocational and adult Education Department, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mrs Maaja-Katrin KEREM, Estonian Qualification Authority	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Aili Saluveer, University of Tartu	Comments received and addressed

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
- // -	Ave Lobja, Employers' Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Kristi-Jette Remi, Employers' Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Mari-Anne Rebane, Estonian Qualification Authority (Kutsekoda)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Thor-Sten Vertmann, Employers' Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Aili Saluveer, University of Tartu	Interviewed for initial research and case study
<b>ES</b>	Mrs Gema Cavada, Ministry of Education and Science	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Myriam Sánchez, Dep. Proyectos Europeos, Balear de Desarrollo y Formación	Interviewed for initial research
<b>FI</b>	Heikki Suomalainen, Confederation of Finnish Industries	Comments received and addressed
	Jorma Ahola, Ministry of Education	Confirmed data in chapter to be correct
<b>FR</b>	Patrick Begue, Directeur, Department Certification et Ingenierie AFPA	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Yolande Fermon, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed Interviewed for case study
- // -	Emmanuelle Gardan, Agence Europe Education Formation France	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Francoise Divisia, Ministere de l'Education Nationale, de l'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Georges Michailesco, Coordonnateur Academique de la Formation Continue, Directeur de la Formation Continue et de la VAE	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Marie-Pierre Chalimbaum, Agence Europe Education Formation France	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Yolande Fermon, Ministere de l'Education Nationale, de l'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Stéphane Bellini, University of Poitiers	Interviewed for case study
- // -	Vincent Ribaud, University of Brest	Interviewed for case study
<b>DE</b>	Eckart Lilienthal, Ministry of Education and Research	Confirmed approval of chapter
<b>GR</b>	Grigorios Tseregof, General Director, EKEPIS (National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training)	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Chrysa Georgitsi, director of the Athens Office of Staregister	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Milona, director of the education department of the Aluminium de Grèce company	Interviewed for initial research

<b>Country</b>	<b>Names of individuals</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>HU</b>	Ms. Eva Tot, National Education Institute	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mrs Nóra MILOTAY, Ministry of Education and Culture	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Eva Tot, National Education Institute	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Hollosi Szabolcs, Oracle project	Interviewed for initial research
<b>IS</b>	Heimir Jón Guðjónsson, Education and Training Service Centre	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Fjola Maria Larusdottir, The Education and Training Service Centre	Interviewed for initial research
<b>IE</b>	Dr. Anna Murphy, Director of Research and Strategic Planning, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Carmel Kelly, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Mrs Angela LAMBKIN, Further Education and Training Awards Council	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Angela Lambkin, FETAC	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Anna Murphy, NQAI	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Karena Maguire, HETAC	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Roisin Sweeney, FETAC and Consultant	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Wendy Ryan, Consultant/Construction Industry Federation	Interviewed for initial research
<b>IT</b>	Mr Fabio ROMA, ISFOL	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mrs Gabriella DI FRANCESCO, ISFOL	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Consuelo Corradi, Ph.D., Professor of sociology, Lumsa University	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Evelyn Viertel, the European Training Foundation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Gabriella Di Francesco, ISFOL	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Stefano Orlandoni, Eurocentro Srl,	Interviewed for initial research
<b>LIE</b>	Werner Kranz, Principal of the Office for vocational training and career guidance	Comments received and addressed
<b>LT</b>	Lina Vaitkute, National Observatory for VET	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Dr. Arvidas Masiulis, Director of Studies, Klaipeda University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Dr. Eglė Stasiūnaitienė, Director of Competence Centre, Vytautas Magnus University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Giedrė Žentelytė, Chief of Personal Department,	Interviewed for initial research

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
	"Achema" SC	
- // -	Prof. Gintaras Dikčius, Director of Studies, Vilnius University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Inga Gustaitė, Human Resource Manager, "Achema" SC	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Dr. Inga Milišiūnaitė, Director of Studies, Kaunas University of Technology	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Jurgita Valiukevičiūtė, "Child Line"	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Laima Liukinevičienė, Director of Studies, Siauliai University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Dr. Laima Sajienė, Director of Academic Affairs, Vytautas Magnus University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Linas Kadys, Director of the Department of Human Recourse Development, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Prof. Margarita Teresevičienė, Head of the Department of Education, Vytautas Magnus University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Mindaugas Puidokas, Director for Information and Public Relations, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Prof. Rimvydas Jasinevičius, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Robertas Povilaitis, Director, "Child Line"	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Rūta Sabalytė, Training Manager, "Panevezio statybos trestas" SC (PST)	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Vytautas Plakys, Director of Studies, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	Interviewed for initial research
<b>LV</b>	Līga Vilde, Ministry of Education and Science	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mr. Gunars Krusts, Director of the Department of Vocational and Further Education, Ministry of Education and Science	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Mrs. Baiba Ramina, Head of National Observatory	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Elina Egle, Director General, Employers Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Ilona Kiukucane, Advisor on Education and Employment Affairs, Employers Confederation	Interviewed for initial research
<b>LU</b>	Jos Noesen, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Carlo Frising, Chambre des employés privés	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Marc Lippert, ADEM (Administration de l'emploi)	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Claude Houssemand, University of Luxembourg	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Carlo Frising, Chambre des employés privés	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Jos Noesen, Ministère de l'Education	Interviewed for initial research

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
<b>MT</b>	Mr John PRECA, Education Division	Comments received and addressed
- // -	James Calleja, Malta Qualifications Council	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	John Preca, The Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment	Interviewed for initial research
<b>NL</b>	Ms Charlotte van Trier, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	Interviewed for initial research Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mr. Eric Kaemingk, Knowledge Centre EVC	Interviewed for initial research Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Mrs. Lian Bastiaansen, Projectdirectie leren en Werken, Ministerie van SZW en OCW	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Drs. Charlotte, C. van Trier, project-adviser, Leren & Werken	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Martine Maes, CINOP	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Jorien Weerdenburg, FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvraagstukken	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	ing. Martin Bröcker, project manager Vocational Practise / International projectleider Beroepspraktijkvorming / Internationaal Kenteq Kenniscentrum Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	G.J. (Gert) van Dam, Senior Consultant Sales & Consultancy, VAPRO-OVP	Interviewed for case study
- // -	Marie-Louise van der Laan, VAPRO-OVP	Interviewed for case study
- // -	Karel van Orsouw, Kamira	Interviewed for case study
<b>NO</b>	Ms Torild Nilsen Mohn, VOX - Institute for Adult Learning	Comments received and addressed
<b>PL</b>	Mrs Ewa RUDOMINO, Ministry of National Education	Comments received and addressed
<b>PT</b>	Cristina Duarte, National Agency for Qualifications	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Ana Umbellino, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Arminda Coutinho, National Qualifications Agency	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Francisca Nobre, Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity	Interviewed for initial research
<b>RO</b>	Mrs Carmen ROTARU, National Adult Training Board	Comments received and addressed
-// -	Ms. Prof. Dr. Dorin Herlo, Director of National Association of the Regional Centres for Adult Education (Anczea)	Comments received and addressed
-// -	Carmen Rotaru, National Adults' Training Board (NATB)	Interviewed for initial research
-// -	Prof. Dr. Dorin HerloNational, Association of the Regional Centres for Adult Education (Anczea), Director of Department for Teaching Staff Training "Aurel Vlaicu", University of Arad	Interviewed for initial research
-// -	Georgeta Jurcan, Centrul de Resurse si Formare in Profesiuni Sociale PRO VOCATIE	Interviewed for initial research

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
-// -	Peter Vlad SZASZ, National Trade Union Confederation - Cartel ALFA	Interviewed for initial research
<b>SE</b>	Mr Fritjof KARLSSON Ministry of Education and Research	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Mrs Anna-Karin JANSSON, Ministry of Education, Research	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Eva Nordlund / Michael Roslund, National Commission on validation	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Eva Nordlund, Per Anders Strandberg	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Mr. Fritjof Karlsson, Ministry of Education and Research	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Helena Mähler Lejon, Association of Swedish Higher education	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Ronny Nilsson / Ingela Bergman, Malmö Centre of Validation	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Dr. Ruud Klarus, Faculteit Educatie/Department of Education Hogeschool Arnhem Nijmegen/HAN University	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Ir. J.H.M. Paulusse, European Educative Projects BV	Interviewed for initial research
<b>SL</b>	Mrs Slava PEVEC GRM M.A., National Institute for Vocational Education and Training	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Alenka Kralj Pučko, Education and Training Centre Krka,d.d., Novo mesto	Interviewed for initial research
<b>SK</b>	Mrs Daniela KOCANOVA, Ministry of Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mrs Eva ZALEPOVA, ASPEKT Foundation	Confirmed approval of chapter
- // -	Daniela Kocanova, Ministry of Education	Interviewed for initial research
<b>TR</b>	Mr Ibrahim BÜKEL, Ministry of National Education	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Kerim Rodoplu; Director; Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Training	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Nuran Senar, Director of Training Department, The Confederation of tradesmen and Craftsmen in Turkey, TESK	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Otto Bauer; Head of Board of Directors, Foundation for Development of Technological Education, Stiftung Zur Förderung der Technologieausbildung	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Zübeyde Çelebioğlu, Research, Development and Training Expert, Turkish Confederation of Employers' Associations, TISK	Interviewed for initial research
<b>UK</b>	Kenn Palmer – Welsh Assembly Government	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Mervyn Morgan, Welsh Qualifications Authority	Comments received and addressed
- // -	Ray Burberry - WAMITAB	Confirmed approval of chapter

Country	Names of individuals	Progress
- // -	Amy Budd, The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Jackie Galbraith, Scottish Executive	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Kenn Palmer, CQFW Welsh Assembly Government	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Lyn Forsyth, Scottish Executive	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Ray Burberry, WAMITAB	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Val Williams, Sylfaen Cymunedol	Interviewed for initial research
- // -	Veronica Davids, The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	Interviewed for initial research

## **Annex Three: Compendium of literature abstracts**

## METHODOLOGY PAPERS

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### **Implementation of “Education & Training 2010” Work Programme: Validation of non-formal and informal learning - Contribution of the Commission expert group**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2003, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper was delivered by an expert group to the European Commission and is focused on developing common principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It identifies three areas of validation purposes: Validation in relation to formal education and training, Validation in relation to the labour market (enterprises, branches and sectors) and Validation in relation to voluntary work. It states that important elements can be shared across main categories, in particular those related to quality.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/non-formal-and-informal-learning\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/non-formal-and-informal-learning_en.pdf)

### **Draft Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2004

**Brief description:** The document invites member states, the Commission and other stakeholders to develop and support coherent and comparable ways of presenting the results of the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning at European level, and to consider how the existing instruments in the Europass framework for transparency of qualifications and competences can contribute to this.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/validation2004\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/validation2004_en.pdf)

## **Recognising Experiential Learning: Practices in European Universities**

**Author(s):** Corradi C, Evans N & Valk A

**Published:** 2006, Tartu University

**Brief description:** This report summarises papers from the EULLEARN (European University Lifelong Learning Network) project. The report discusses recognition, assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning, especially in the context of higher education. The report also provides practical examples from universities across Europe.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice, Country overview

**Document type:** Methodology Paper, Public Sector Examples

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.eullearn.net/>

## **Postgraduate diploma: Specialist in Accreditation of Prior Learning**

**Author(s):** Instituto Universitario Federal des Hautes Etudes en Formation Professionnelle (IUFFP)

**Published:** 2007, Lugano

**Brief description:** This document is a thorough introduction to the postgraduate diploma of 'Specialist in Accreditation and Validation of Prior Learning' in Switzerland. It introduces the legislative framework and an overview of training and sets out the development work, characteristics of the diploma and competence profile.

**Keywords:** Country overview, National Policy, Public Sector Examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Switzerland

**Resource location:** Not available on the internet

## **Professional development for APEL Practitioners**

**Author(s):** EuroguideVAL, Leonardo European Project

**Published:** 2006, European Commission

**Brief description:** The document is a result of a Leonardo European Project and is an example of the development of European standards for the professional development of people working in the field of adult vocational information including validation of informal and non-formal learning. It sets out certification requirements: occupational standards, training standards, contributions for certification standards etc. in Provence University.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** France

**Resource location:** [http://www.euroguideval.org/article.php3?id\\_article=125](http://www.euroguideval.org/article.php3?id_article=125), Document number: 3

### **Former les professionnels à accueillir des populations en risque d'exclusion dans les dispositifs VAE**

**Author(s):** Krichewsky, M.

**Published:** 2006

**Brief description:** The paper is focused on the training of APEL (Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning) professionals and especially to respond to the special needs of people at high risk of exclusion.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** Not available on the internet

### **Methodical material for the process of identification and validation of non – formal and informal learning**

**Author(s):** Sawomir Jêdrzejowski, S., Krol, G., Eiháková, H., Marinková, H., Stretti, M.

**Published:** 2006

**Brief description:** The paper presents results of the Leonardo da Vinci project 'European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning – EPANIL' on methodical material for the process of identification and validation of non – formal and informal learning. It sets out the procedure of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the assessment standard for the profession of cook.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.epanil.net/aprodukty.html>

### **Guidelines, examples of good practice and recognition procedures**

**Author(s):** Èiháková H., Konrad, J., Krol, G., Nagyová L., Stretti, M.

**Published:** 2006

**Brief description:** This is an overview paper of guidelines, examples of good practice and recognition procedures in Europe. It was a starting point for the Leonardo da Vinci EPANIL (European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning).

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.epanil.net/aprodukty.html>

**Guide for the coach: Method to assess knowledge, experiences and skills acquired through voluntary activities - Pilot project “AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences”**

**Author(s):** “AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences”, Leonardo da Vinci programme project

**Published:** Leonardo da Vinci programme - European Commission

**Brief description:** The project report presents guidelines for a coach for assessing voluntary experiences: identifying, assessing and validating skills and qualifications acquired through volunteering as informal and non formal learning for a professional purpose.

**Keywords:** Voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [Not available on the internet](#)

**Guide for the volunteer: Method to assess knowledge, experiences and skills acquired through voluntary activities - Pilot project “AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences”**

**Author(s):** “AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences”, Leonardo da Vinci programme project

**Published:** Leonardo da Vinci programme - European Commission

**Brief description:** The project report presents a tool for a volunteer to assess knowledge, experiences and skills acquired through voluntary activities as informal and non formal learning for a professional purpose.

**Keywords:** Voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [Not available on the internet](#)

**Accreditation of prior learning: Reference Guide for APL assessors and assessment process**

**Author(s):** The European Vocational Training Association

**Published:** 2006

**Brief description:** A validation of prior learning working group — consisting of expert members of bodies affiliated to EVTA (European Vocational Training Association) — has identified several key issues to the process of identification and validation. These include the drafting of a handbook for the attention of human resources departments and vocational training department (assessment and guidance) staff. As the role of assessor is crucial, the first edition of the handbook will provide information establishing the profile and training necessary for assessors.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [Not available on the internet](#)

## **A Summary from the Education and Training Service Centre for the NVL Expert-net on Validation**

**Author(s):** Fjola Maria Larusdottir

**Published:** May 2006, Iceland

**Brief Description:** This report gives an overview of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. It includes project details and a general update from the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC). and is based on a previous ECOTEC report from 2004.

**Keywords:** Country overview, national policy, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** Iceland

**Resource location:** [www.nordvux.net/download/1025/validationoverviewicelandap061.doc](http://www.nordvux.net/download/1025/validationoverviewicelandap061.doc)

## **Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training**

**Author(s):** The National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI)

**Published:** June 2005, Ireland

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the national guidelines for the application of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Ireland.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** <http://www.nqai.ie/en/Publications/>

## **RPL: Policy and Guidelines (Draft)**

**Author(s):** The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

**Published:** 2006, Ireland

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the national guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Ireland, specifically for the further education sector.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** [http://www.fetac.ie/rpl/RPL\\_Policy\\_and\\_\\_draft\\_\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.fetac.ie/rpl/RPL_Policy_and__draft__guidelines.pdf)

## **Recognition Policy, Criteria and Process for a Direct Application to HETAC for a Named Award**

**Author(s):** The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)

**Published:** March 2006

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the policies and procedures for RPL in the higher education sector.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** <http://www.hetac.ie/publications.cfm?SID=11>

## **Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Update: April 2007**

**Author(s):** SCQF

**Published:** April 2007

**Brief Description:** SCQF publish regular updates, detailing the latest news with respect to the SCQF. The latest update published in April 2007 provided an update on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) activity.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.scqf.org.uk/news.asp>

## **Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning**

**Author(s):** The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**Published:** September 2004, England

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) procedures for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The Guidelines have been drawn up by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education at the request of individuals and groups within the HE community, in order to help ensure that APL can be conducted with a high level of security and in the light of the best current practice.

**Keywords:** National policy, country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/apl.pdf>

### **Reforming Qualifications and Promoting Learning in the 21st Century**

**Author(s):** Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

**Published:** February 2005, Northern Ireland

**Brief Description:** This document offers a response from Northern Ireland to the English Framework for Achievement.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)

### **Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) Implementation Plan**

**Author(s):** CQFW, Welsh Assembly Government

**Published:** July 2006, Wales

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the actions needed to implement the CQFW within a time frame.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **CQFW Credit Common Accord**

**Author(s):** CQFW, Welsh Assembly Government

**Published:** April 2006, Wales

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the quality assurance procedures underpinning the CQFW.

**Keywords:** Country overview, policy outline

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning**

**Author(s):** OECD

**Published:** 1996, OECD

**Brief Description:** This document provides an in-depth review of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark.

**Keywords:** National policy, country overview

**Document type:** Methodology paper

**Country coverage:** Denmark

**Resource location:** <http://www.oecd.org>

**Recognition, Validation and Certification of informal and non-formal learning Synthesis Report (Draft)**

**Author(s):** UNESCO Institute for Education

**Published:** 2005, European Commission

**Brief description:** A comprehensive document synthesising and analysing national policies and practices on recognition, validation and certification of non-formal and informal learning. Generated relevant data give a thorough overview of existing national frameworks, institutional structures and programmes. The explorations are intended to be used for further political, legal and methodological investigations, to highlight shortcomings, create awareness about the issue, and facilitate effective policy making.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodological paper

**Country coverage:** International

**Resource location:** <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/recognitiondraftsynthesis.pdf>

**EFT – Assessment based on competence (ABC): Identifying the main principles underlying assessment based on competence and taking stock of practices in the European Union**

**Author(s):** Colardyn, D., Professor at the College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium)

**Published:** 2002, European Commission

**Brief description:** The document analyses national practices of assessment based on competence, identifying the main underlying principles and taking stock of practices in the European Union.

**Keywords:** EU policy, National policy, Country overview, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodological Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/publications.html>

**CEDEFOP – Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: clarification of the concept and prototype**

**Author(s):** Winterton, J., - Le Deist, F. D., Stringfellow, E., Centre for European Research on Employment and Human Resources, Groupe ESC Toulouse

**Published:** 2005, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report is one in a series launched by the European Commission and Cedefop to support the work of the Copenhagen Process Technical Working group on Credit Transfer. It investigates how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Methodological Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

**AEFP EVTA Development of a joint model for the accreditation and/or certification of prior learning**

**Author(s):** European Vocational Training Association (EVTA)

**Published:** 2001, European Commission

**Brief description:** The subject of the report is to devise a methodological model of assessment, accreditation, and/or certification of prior learning in conformity with the Leonardo project “Development of a joint model for the accreditation of prior learning”, which was put forward by the European Vocational Training Association. The project aimed to work out a joint method with a view to furthering the accreditation of prior learning through experience and transparency of professional skills, through the conception and experimentation of a joint model for the accreditation and certification of prior learning at a national level and at the level of the Member States.

**Keywords:** EU policy, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodological Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.evta.net/docs/methodoen.pdf>

**Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning. Presidency Conference “Realizing the European Learning Area”, Munich, 4-5 June 2007**

**Author(s):** Freitag, W.K.

**Published:** 2007, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper introduces the results of the presidency conference and urges further discussions and actions for permeability in education, vocational training and further education as the key enabler for lifelong learning. It gives a good overview of the experience of the leading countries in Europe and beyond, explains key concepts and introduces the contribution the National Qualifications Framework can bring to the whole process.

**Keywords:** Country overview, assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** EU-27

**Resource location:**

[http://www2.vhs-bayern.de/contentserv/4.2/bvv.de/data/media/\\_stories/372/Expertise\\_Forum\\_III.pdf](http://www2.vhs-bayern.de/contentserv/4.2/bvv.de/data/media/_stories/372/Expertise_Forum_III.pdf)

### **Attestation de compétences acquises dans le domaine de l'éducation non formelle, Phase Pilote 2006-2007, Concept général**

**Author(s):** Fédération Nationale des Eclaireurs et Eclaireuses (FNEL) and Service National de la Jeunesse (SNJ)

**Published:** 2004, August 2005, Luxembourg

**Brief description:** The document outlines the methodology of a pilot project for the validation of competences of young volunteers. It includes a description of the methodology and templates for certification documents.

**Keywords:** Voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Luxembourg

**Resource location:** [http://www.snj.public.lu/publications/publications-diverses-ancien/attestation-competences-brochure/attestation-competences\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.snj.public.lu/publications/publications-diverses-ancien/attestation-competences-brochure/attestation-competences_brochure.pdf)

### **Les entreprises et les acteurs socio-économiques face à la VAE**

**Author(s):** Boursier, S., Massip, A., Croze, C.

**Published:** 2006, Paris

**Brief description:** A guide prepared by a national working group which examines the experiences of the CRIS (Cellules Régionales Inter-Services) in working with socio-economic actors in the validation of informal and non-formal learning. The guide aims to make the services delivered by the CRIS more transparent, to illustrate and valorise local and regional actions, to develop collective actions for validation and to encourage the transfer of experience.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (France)

**Resource location:** <http://www.travail.gouv.fr/dossiers/formation-professionnelle/validation-acquis-experience-vae/les-entreprises-les-acteurs-socio-economiques-face-vae-actions-projets-animations-cellules-regionales-inter-services-cris-3215.html>.

### **Consortium de Validation des Compétences, Rapport d'activités 2006**

**Author(s):** Consortium de Validation des Compétences

**Published:** 2007, Brussels

**Brief description:** Annual report of the Consortium de Validation des Compétences, which oversees the system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the French Community of Belgium. The report lists progress against the consortium's objectives, including statistical data regarding the number of candidates to date. The objectives for 2007 are also outlined.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Belgium

**Resource location:** <http://www.validationdescompetences.be/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabID=401>

**Zwei Jahre 'Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung'. Inhalte - Ergebnisse - Perspektiven. Qualificational Development (QUEM) project**

**Author(s):** Association for Research in Professional Development (ABWF)

**Published:** 2003, Berlin

**Brief description:** The Project study investigated innovative methods for the transfer and validation of learning, with regard to: formal, non-formal and informal learning; self-organised learning processes; and competencies as learning outcomes. Different learning venues including continuing education establishments, workplace, social environment and Internet/multimedia were explored to establish their potential for competence development.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Assessment of Good Practice

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:** [www.abwf.de](http://www.abwf.de)

**Das informelle Lernen. Die internationale Erschließung einer bisher vernachlässigten Grundform menschlichen Lernens für das lebenslange Lernen aller**

**Author(s):** Dohmen, G.

**Published:** 2001, Bonn. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Brief description:** This is a broad and comprehensive study evaluating informal learning: starting with its definition, historical development, overview of international initiatives, benefits and potential it can deliver to the development of lifelong learning system in Germany.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:** [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/das\\_informelle\\_lernen.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/das_informelle_lernen.pdf)

**Expertenberichte des Forum Bildung. Bildungs- und Qualifikationsziele von morgen - Vorläufige Leitsätze des Forum Bildung**

**Author(s):** Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung (Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion )

**Published:** 2002, Bonn, Berlin. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Brief description:** This broad study was delivered by a specially established expert group in order to provide scientific insights on the future challenges for the educational system in Germany that should start to be addressed already today. The main aspect that is emphasised in the study is the need to shift towards competence building as the main objective for the education system and qualifications. The study also defines the main objectives that should be met by each level of educational system in Germany, starting from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, vocational and institutions of higher education as well as further education of adults. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is part of the action agenda.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:** [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/expertenberichte\\_des\\_forum\\_bildung.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/expertenberichte_des_forum_bildung.pdf)

**Schlussbericht der unabhängigen Expertenkommission Finanzierung Lebenslangen Lernens:  
Der Weg in die Zukunft**

**Author(s):** Die Expertenkommission „Finanzierung Lebenslangen Lernens“

**Published:** July 2004, Bonn, Berlin. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Brief description:** This report was delivered by a special Expert Commission established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany in order to provide recommendations on how the lifelong learning system should be financed by the state. It discusses various financial instruments, gives a good overview of the existing practice in other European countries and suggests possible financing mechanisms for Germany.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:** [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/schlussbericht\\_kommission\\_III.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/schlussbericht_kommission_III.pdf)

**New skills requirements in the field of experiential working and self-directed learning for specialised industrial workers**

**Author(s):** NAKIF

**Published:** 2002, Bonn, Berlin. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Brief description:** This was a BMBF project, implemented by the project management agency Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe - Production and Manufacturing Technologies. The advance of learning in the work process and working life opens the door to continuing learning for unqualified staff who are wholly fulfilling their responsibilities in terms of operative activities, information and quality processes, process security and industrial safety tasks, whilst dispensing with the often unpopular teaching arrangements. The unqualified are the touchstone which shows the potential for fostering social aspects by encouraging self-organised learning, competency development and a competence-based culture of learning. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is the key element here.

**Keywords:** Private sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Germany)

**Resource location:** <http://www.nakif.de>

### **Competencies' Assessment in Non-formal and Informal Learning**

**Author(s):** Laužackas R., Teresevičienė M., Stasiūnaitienė E.

**Published:** 2005, Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University

**Brief description:** The book analyses assessment methodologies and processes of the achievements acquired through non-formal and informal learning and its validation within a lifelong learning context, delineating the situation in Lithuania and discussing prospective directions for the development of the system in Lithuania.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Lithuania

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **Du kannst was! Berufsabschlüsse für Niedrigqualifizierte und Bildungsferne durch Anerkennung informell und non-formal erworbener Kompetenzen (Vocational qualifications for low qualified/low skilled and for those in sections of society where educational achievement is low. Recognition of competences acquired informally and non-formally)**

**Author(s):** Wenidoppler, H.

**Published:** November, 2006. Grieskirchen

**Brief description:** "Du kannst was" is a regional project that aims to explore possibilities for identification, assessment and recognition of competences acquired informally and non-formally, as a new opportunity for low qualified and respectively 'illiterate' people in Oberoesterreich'.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Private sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Methodology Paper, Public Sector Examples

**Country coverage:** Austria

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **Aspekte der Zertifizierung erworbener beruflicher Qualifikation. Europäische Beispiele und Ansätze**

**Author(s):** Wallner, J.

**Published:** November, 2002. Institute für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft

**Brief description:** The study analyses various aspects of identification, assessment and recognition / certification of learning acquired through informal and non-formal learning either through personal efforts or work experience. It gives a good overview of the approaches being undertaken across Europe and suggests suitable implementation models for Austria.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Austria)

**Resource location:** [http://www.ibw.at/ibw\\_mitteilungen/fb/wal\\_078\\_03\\_bw.pdf](http://www.ibw.at/ibw_mitteilungen/fb/wal_078_03_bw.pdf)

## **Modularisierung der Lehrlingsausbildung**

**Author(s):** Archan, S.

**Published:** November, 2005, Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft

**Brief description:** This study analyses modularisation of apprenticeship training in the dual system in Austria. It was delivered under the commission of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour. The study describes possibilities for modularisation of in-company and school-based training and presents trends in the apprenticeship field. Greater inclusion of informally acquired competences is also discussed within this context.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Austria)

**Resource location:** <http://www.ibw.at/html/infos/modularisierung/endbericht.pdf>

## **Von der Lehre zur postsekundären Bildung. Eine Studie und Modelle zur Durchlässigkeit im österreichischen Ausbildungssystem**

**Author(s):** Klimmer, S., Schlögl, P.

**Published:** 2005, Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke

**Brief description:** The study looked at the mobility issues in the Austrian training system from the apprenticeship to post-secondary education. It also suggested innovative models for the combination of apprenticeship and university or academy access nationally and internationally. This aspect directly relates to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, as the well developed apprenticeship programme in Austria was intended to some extent to validate knowledge, skills and competences acquired through work experience.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Austria

**Resource location:** [http://www.oeibf.at/\\_TCgi\\_Images/oeibf/20070822135128\\_lehre-postsek-bildung.pdf](http://www.oeibf.at/_TCgi_Images/oeibf/20070822135128_lehre-postsek-bildung.pdf)

### **Zertifizierung betrieblicher Weiterbildungsleistungen im Kontext nationaler und internationaler Entwicklungen. Eine Überblicksexpertise. Unveröffentlichtes Manuskript**

**Author(s):** Markowitsch, J., Michaela, J.

**Published:** 2005, BMWA

**Brief description:** This is a broad study on certification of in-company continuing education achievements in the context of national and international developments. This aspect directly relates to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, as the well developed apprenticeship programme in Austria was intended to some extent to validate knowledge, skills and competences acquired through work experience.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, Private sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Austria

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **An overview offering expertise on “certification of in-company continuing education achievements in the context of national and international developments”**

**Author(s):** Markowitsch, J., Michaela, J.

**Published:** 2005, BMWA

**Brief description:** This is a broad study on certification of in-company continuing education achievements in the context of national and international developments. This aspect directly relates to the validation of informal and non-formal learning as the well developed apprenticeship programme in Austria was intended to some extent validate knowledge, skills and competences acquired through work experience.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Austria)

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

### **Continuing vocational education and training**

**Author(s):** Schneeberger, A. Petanovitsch, A.

**Published:** 2004, Vienna

**Brief description:** This is an Austrian study on validation of non-formal and informal learning. It describes the relevance of European approaches of recognition of non-formal and informal learning for Austria.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy, EU policy

**Document type:** Methodology Paper

**Country coverage:** Austria

**Resource location:** Not published on the web.

## **POLICY OUTLINE**

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### **White Paper on Education and Training - Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society COM(95) 590**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 1995, European Commission

**Brief description:** This White Paper from the European Commission helped to define and emphasise the relevance of informal and non-formal learning and presented the idea of a common European approach in the area of identification, assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning. The resulting programmes (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci, ADAPT) initiated a number of experimental activities.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white\\_papers/pdf/com95\\_590\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com95_590_en.pdf)

### **Education and Training 2010**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2002, European Commission

**Brief description:** This document provides a detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe. The promotion of lifelong learning with methodologies for recognition of learning taken place outside of formal education system is at the core of these priorities. The document also emphasises the importance of methodological work in this area.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et\\_2010\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html)

### **UN Treaty Europe Region Convention**

**Author(s):** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

**Published:** 1979, UN

**Brief description:** The Treaty and its two main conventions - Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region and the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region - are one of the earliest documents which called for joint actions ensuring that studies, certificates, diplomas and degrees are recognised as widely as possible, taking into account the principles of the promotion of lifelong education, the democratisation of education, and the adoption and application of an education policy allowing for

structural, economic, technological and social changes and suited to the cultural context of each country.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** International, European Union

**Resource location:**

[http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/tools/conventions\\_eur\\_cover.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/tools/conventions_eur_cover.shtml)

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION; Adult learning: It is never too late to learn**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2006, Brussels

**Brief description:** This is a Communication from the European Commission, calling on the Member States to promote adult learning in Europe. The document touches upon validation of learning outcomes, which is seen as essential in motivating adults to participate in lifelong learning. The document invites Member States to link validation systems to their National Qualification Frameworks, within the context of the European Qualification Framework.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006\\_0614en01.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0614en01.pdf)

### **The unfinished story of VPL Valuation & Validation of Prior Learning in Europe's learning cultures**

**Author(s):** Duvekot, R., Schuur, K., Paulusse, J. (editors)

**Published:** 2005, the Netherlands

**Brief description:** The book presents results of the research and knowledge exchange of Valuation (and Validation) of Prior Learning (VPL) in European practices. It is the result of a three-year Leonardo-network project in the field concerned.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** European Union, Switzerland, Norway.

**Resource location:**

<http://www.cinop.nl/producten/publicats/A00307%20The%20unfinished%20story%20of%20VPL.htm>

## **The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2006, Brussels

**Brief description:** Communiqué of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, the European Social partners and the European Commission, convened in Helsinki on December 2006 to review the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen Process.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline, Stakeholder position paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:**

[http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/vet2006/pdf/Helsinki\\_Communique\\_en.pdf](http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/vet2006/pdf/Helsinki_Communique_en.pdf)

## **Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** December, 2004

**Brief description:** On 14 December 2004, in Maastricht, the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of 32 European countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation with a view to: modernising their vocational education and training systems in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy, and offering all Europeans, whether they are young people, older workers, unemployed or disadvantaged, the qualifications and competences they need to be fully integrated into the emerging knowledge based society, contributing to more and better jobs.

**Keywords:** EU policy, Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht_Communique.pdf)

## **Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe (2007)**

**Author(s):** The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

**Published:** 2007, Iceland

**Brief Description:** The publication states Iceland's position in developing a new qualification framework in line with the EQF.

**Keywords:** National policy

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** Iceland

**Resource location:** <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/publications/>

### **Qualifications Matter: A Brief Guide to the National Framework of Qualifications**

**Author(s):** The Irish Government and the European Union under the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

**Published:** 2000, Ireland

**Brief Description:** This document offers an overview of the NFQ in Ireland. It outlines the benefits of the NFQ for the learner and the employer/recruiter. It explains how the NFQ works and includes a short section on the 'European and International dimension'

**Keywords:** Country overview

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** <http://www.nqai.ie>

### **Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Volume 2**

**Author(s):** The SCQF

**Published:** 2006, Scotland

**Brief Description:** This document sets out the national guidelines for implementing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Scotland.

**Keywords:** National policy, country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.scqf.org.uk>

### **Driving Force for the Success of Turkey, Lifelong Learning**

**Author(s):** MEB

**Published:** 2006, Ankara

**Brief Description:** This document is the draft Lifelong Learning Policy Document for Turkey. The purpose is to assess the current role of lifelong learning in Turkey and to make recommendations for policy-makers in stakeholder organisations on how to improve lifelong learning policies.

**Keywords:** National policy

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** Turkey

**Resource location:** <http://svet.meb.gov.tr>

## **The Credit and Qualifications Framework**

**Author(s):** The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

**Published:** September 2006, England

**Brief Description:** This document outlines what the new framework will be and the reasons for changing the existing framework.

**Keywords:** National policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.qca.org.uk>

## **Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System**

**Author(s):** The Danish Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs

**Published:** November 2004, Denmark

**Brief Description:** This document is the key document outlining RPL policy in Denmark. It concludes that recognition of prior learning should be applied in all sections of the education system, and that within relevant areas of education and training – including not least adult education and vocational training – initiatives need to be taken to improve the access to and opportunities for recognition of prior learning. The intention is to improve opportunities for individuals to acquire qualifications and competences that are in demand on a changeable labour market.

**Keywords:** National policy, country overview

**Document type:** Policy outline

**Country coverage:** Denmark

**Resource location:** <http://pub.uvm.dk/2005/priorlearning>

## **CEDEFOP – Making Learning visible: identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning**

**Author(s):** Bjornavald, J., DG Education and Culture

**Published:** 2001, European Commission

**Brief description:** This article considers the question of how to make learning, which takes place outside formal education and training institutions, more visible. Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning must be based on simple and inexpensive methodologies. It clarifies, through an initial theoretical discussion, the requirements for reaching successful practical solutions in this field.

**Keywords:** EU policy, National policy, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:**

[http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/Website\\_Produnkte/Website\\_Nachtraege\\_050901/Bjornavold.pdf](http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/Website_Produnkte/Website_Nachtraege_050901/Bjornavold.pdf)

### **CEDEFOP – Identification and Validation of Prior and Non-Formal Learning**

**Author(s):** Bjornavald, J., DG Education and Culture

**Published:** 1997, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper gives a comprehensive overview of methodologies and systems for the identification, validation and recognition of prior and non-formal learning.

**Keywords:** Policy Outline

**Document type:** Policy Outline, Assessment of good practice

**Country coverage:** International

**Resource location:**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/15/00/0c.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/15/00/0c.pdf)

### **CEDEFOP – Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications: Roles and Responsibilities – Conference conclusions**

**Author(s):** CEDEFOP

**Published:** 2003, European Commission

**Brief description:** The main objective of the conference was to raise awareness and stress the importance of the issue of lifelong development of competences and qualifications of the workforce between the member states of the EU and the candidate countries as crucial in achieving the Lisbon European Council strategic goals and making Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. The conference provided the opportunity to initiate the discussion with social partners from candidate countries on the key priorities of the Framework of actions agreed in 2002 between the European social partners.

**Keywords:** EU policy, Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etf.eu.int>

### **CEDEFOP – Identification and recognition of informal learning in France**

**Author(s):** Feutrie, M.

**Published:** 1997, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report is a part of the CEDEFOP project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning', initiated in 1997. The document gives a comprehensive overview of identification and recognition of informal learning in France, including methodologies and systems for the identification, validation and recognition of informal learning.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** France

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### **CEDEFOP – Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Greece**

**Author(s):** Turner, C.

**Published:** 1999, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report is a part of the CEDEFOP project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning' initiated in 1997. The document gives a comprehensive overview of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Greece, including methodologies and systems for validation and recognition of non-formal learning.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Greece

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### **O.E.C.D. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland – The Role of National Qualification Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning, Country Background Report: Ireland**

**Author(s):** The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

**Published:** 2003, European Commission

**Brief description:** The document is a Country Background Report, describing and analysing the qualifications system in Ireland, including the meaning of non-formal and informal learning. It forms a contribution to the OECD activity on 'The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning'. The report was prepared over the period 2002-2003 by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which participated in the activity on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, with the support of an Advisory Group representing key stakeholder organisations.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** <http://www.oecd.org/>

### **VOX Norwegian Institute for Adult Education – Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway: The Realkompetanse Project 1999-2002**

**Author(s):** VOX, Norwegian Institute for Adult Education

**Published:** 2002, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report has been compiled in order to present the experiences, results and conclusions of the work with validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway. This is an abridged version of a final report for the Ministry of Education and Research in order to put forward a complete description of the work of the Realkompetanse Project which took place between August 1999 and July 2002.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Norway)

**Resource location:** <http://www.vox.no/upload/realkomp%20bibliotek/realE.pdf>

### **CEDEFOP – Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Spain**

**Author(s):** Castillo Juan, J., Alas-Pumariño, A., Santos, M.

**Published:** 2000, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report is a part of the CEDEFOP project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning' initiated in 1997. The document presents identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Spain.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Spain

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### **National Board for Youth Affairs, Sweden – Evaluating knowledge: Getting the most from informal learning and non-formal education**

**Author(s):** National Board for Youth Affairs, Sweden

**Published:** 2000, National Board for Youth Affairs, Sweden

**Brief description:** Informal learning and non-formal education take place in youth organisations, youth projects and organised youth exchanges. The National Board for Youth Affairs has been commissioned to put forward methods for enhancing the value of informal learning and non-formal education and the skills that these promote.

**Keywords:** Voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Sweden)

**Resource location:** <http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se>

### **CEDEFOP – Identification, validation and accreditation of prior and informal learning in the UK. Scottish Qualifications Authority**

**Author(s):** Scottish Qualifications Authority

**Published:** 2000, European Commission

**Brief description:** This report is a part of the CEDEFOP project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning' initiated in 1997. The document presents identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in the UK.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (UK)

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### **Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä (Recognition of prior learning in the educational system)**

**Author(s):** Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä (Committee on recognition of prior learning in the educational system, Ministry of Education, Finland)

**Published:** 2004, Opetusministeriön (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Finland)

**Brief description:** The document was delivered by the Committee on recognition of prior learning in the educational system of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Finland. It defines the principles for recognition of general and vocational upper secondary studies, prior studies and other prior learning; explores ways to give credits for studies or for other prior learning essentially applicable to a programme; explores ways to create more efficient recognition of prior learning when students move from secondary to higher education and proposes ways of monitoring recognition of prior learning. The committee proposed that a system and procedures be devised for identifying, assessing and recognising prior learning which would enable learning to be acknowledged irrespective of how, when or where the knowledge and skills have been acquired.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples, Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Finland)

**Resource location:** <http://bcbu oulu.fi/ahosaatu.pdf>

### **Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen korkeakouluissa (Recognising prior learning in higher education institutions)**

**Author(s):** Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä (Committee on recognising prior learning and credit transfer in higher education institutions, Ministry of Education, Finland)

**Published:** 2007, Opetusministeriön (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Finland)

**Brief description:** The document was delivered by the Committee on recognising prior learning and credit transfer in higher education institutions of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Finland. It was established with the aim to review practices used by different higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer and to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the current practices and their conformity with European guidelines. The committee highlighted national and international good practices in the recognition of prior learning and made recommendations for common principles and for a process to be used in the recognition of prior learning in HEIs.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples, Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Finland)

**Resource location:**

<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2007/liitteet/tr04.pdf?lang=fi>

### **The Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences: Update**

**Author(s):** Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Economicos (CIDEDEC), Portugal

**Published:** 2007, Direccao Geral de Formacao Vocacional (DGFV)

**Brief description:** The report is a result of empirical research based on survey of secondary schools and case studies of good practice on the impact of the recognition and certification of lifelong-learned competences after the expansion of the network of Centres of the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) under the New Opportunities Initiative.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Portugal)

**Resource location:** <http://www.cidec.pt/contactos.htm>

### **O Impacto do Reconhecimento e Certificação de Competências Adquiridas ao Longo da Vida**

**Author(s):** Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Economicos (CIDEDEC), Portugal

**Published:** 2004, Direccao\_Geral de Formacao Vocacional (DGFV)

**Brief description:** The study was delivered by the Directorate General on Vocational Training of the CIDEDEC. It analyses the impact of validation of non-formal and informal learning of adults developing lifelong learning system in Portugal.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Portugal)

**Resource location:** <http://www.cidec.pt/contactos.htm>

### **Projet de loi portant réforme de la formation professionnelle et portant modification**

**Author(s):** Ministre de l'Education nationale et de la Formation professionnelle)

**Published:** October, 2006

**Brief description:** A bill submitted to the Luxembourg parliament outlining proposed reforms to the professional training system in the country. The reforms include provision for the development of a comprehensive system for the validation of all types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) for formal professional qualifications.

**Keywords:** National policy

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Luxembourg)

**Resource location:** <http://www.cepl.lu/ceplweb/av2006/TextesLoi/65-2006-FormProfTexte.pdf>

### **Interim Report of the Swedish National Commission on Validation**

**Author(s):** Secretariat of the Swedish National Commission on Validation

**Published:** 2006, Norrköping

**Brief description:** The document is a comprehensive study on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Sweden. It presents the concept of validation and its benefits, development work in 2006, actions and proposals made by the Swedish National Commission in the field concerned as well as aspects of validation of foreign higher education and professional experience.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Sweden

**Resource location:**

[http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/pdf/Rapporter/interim\\_report\\_dec2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/pdf/Rapporter/interim_report_dec2006_english.pdf)

### **Delrapport från Valideringsdelegationen (Interim Report of the Swedish National Commission on Validation)**

**Author(s):** Secretariat of the Swedish National Commission on Validation

**Published:** 2006, Norrköping

**Brief description:** The document is a comprehensive study on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Sweden. It presents the concept of validation and its benefits, development work in 2006, actions and proposals made by the Swedish National Commission in the field concerned as well as aspects of validation of foreign higher education and professional experience.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Sweden

**Resource location:**

[http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/pdf/Rapporter/VLD\\_delrapport\\_dec2006.pdf](http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/pdf/Rapporter/VLD_delrapport_dec2006.pdf)

### **Strategie für Lebenslanges Lernen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland**

**Author(s):** Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung (BLK)  
(Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion)

**Published:** 2004, Bonn. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Brief description:** The document was delivered by the Commission for further development of education and research. This is a strategic document in Germany defining policy outlines, setting an action plan and defining the ways in which the system of lifelong learning should be strategically developed in Germany.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:** [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/strategie\\_lebenslanges\\_lernen\\_blk\\_heft115.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/strategie_lebenslanges_lernen_blk_heft115.pdf)

## **Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX. Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland**

**Author(s):** Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

**Published:** 2006, Bonn, Berlin.

**Brief description:** This is a comprehensive integrated policy paper which gives thorough overview of the educational system in Germany from the perspective of the development of lifelong learning system. The document includes rich statistical data and provides a good context for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Policy Outline

**Country coverage:** Individual countries (Germany)

**Resource location:** [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/berichtssystem\\_weiterbildung\\_neun.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/berichtssystem_weiterbildung_neun.pdf)

## EVALUATION

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### **La Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience en Actes, Rapport de Mission sur l'application de la validation des acquis de l'expérience**

**Author(s):** Prof. Benhamou, A. C.

**Published:** 2005

**Brief description:** Report describing the current state of play with regards validation of informal and non-formal learning in France and outlining proposals for improvement in the existing methodologies and practice.

**Keywords:** National policy

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** France

**Resource location:**

[ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/rapport/benhamou/vae\\_rapport\\_mission\\_0605.pdf](ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/rapport/benhamou/vae_rapport_mission_0605.pdf)

### **Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation, Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe – UNICE/UEAPME and European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** 2006

**Brief description:** A wide group of social partners presented a thorough evaluation of the present situation concerning lifelong development of competences and qualifications and provided a framework of urgent actions including the establishment and promotion of means of recognition and validation of workers' competences.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

### **Recognition of Prior Learning Pilot Project - Evaluation Report 2007**

**Author(s):** The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

**Published:** 2007, Ireland

**Brief Description:** This document provides an evaluation of the first uses of the new RPL processes in the further education sector in Ireland.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Ireland

**Resource location:** <http://www.fetac.ie>

### **Recognition of Prior Informal Learning Resource Pack**

**Author(s):** Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

**Published:** February 2006, Scotland

**Brief Description:** This document provides examples of RPL usage across post 16 education and training in Scotland.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples, assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.scqf.org.uk>

### **Evaluation of the SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework) Implementation Plan**

**Author(s):** Gallacher J et. al. Glasgow Caledonian University

**Published:** June 2006, Scotland

**Brief Description:** This document assesses achievement of the SCQF against national targets.

**Keywords:** Assessment of good practice, country overview, public sector examples

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.scqf.org.uk>

### **OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (Draft country background report for the U.K)**

**Author(s):** Tom Leney

**Published:** November 2006

**Brief Description:** This report provides a detailed review of non-formal and informal learning in the U.K.

**Keywords:** Country overview, public sector examples, private sector examples, voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** United Kingdom

**Resource location:** <http://www.oecd.org/> (to be published)

### **National Overview of Methodologies and Systems for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Denmark**

**Author(s):** Prof. Seyfried, E., Hauch, A. and Souto Otero, M.

**Published:** 2006, Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samrad

**Brief Description:** This document provides an overview of validation in each educational setting in Denmark and gives examples of validation in the private and third sectors.

**Keywords:** National policy, country overview

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Denmark

**Resource location:** <http://www.dfs.dk/inenglish/priorlearning/validation.aspx>

**Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications. Evaluation Report**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation, Union of Industrial and Employers Confederation of Europe, European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** 2006, Europe

**Brief Description:** This document provides an overview of private initiatives in Denmark.

**Keyword:** National policy, country overview, stakeholder position paper, private sector examples, assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Denmark

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

**Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications. Third Follow up Report**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation, Union of Industrial and Employers Confederation of Europe, European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** 2005, Europe

**Brief Description:** This document provides an overview of private initiatives in Denmark.

**Keyword:** National policy, country overview, stakeholder position paper, private sector examples, assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Denmark

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

**National Open College Network – The Rewards of Recognition: the Value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning**

**Author(s):** National Open College Network

**Published:** 2003, National Open College Network

**Brief description:** The research report examines the policy context and how Government intervention in recognising the learning achievements of adults continues to exert a substantial influence on practice. It addresses the confusion of meaning in the use of language related to recognition of achievement and accreditation and examines examples of local funded OCN projects that in different ways have sought to support organisations offering non-accredited learning provision, and in some cases recognise achievements associated with non-accredited learning.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper, Assessment of good practice, Public sector examples

**Document type:** Evaluation  
**Country coverage:** International  
**Resource location:** <http://www.nocn.org.uk/>

### **Recognition of Prior Learning: Policy and Practice in Australia**

**Published:** 2002, Australia  
**Brief description:** The chapter considers international Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) practice. It identifies international RPL projects to demonstrate the value placed on RPL by international bodies. It then examines RPL practice in the United Kingdom, the province of British Columbia in Canada and South Africa, and draws parallels with Australian experience.  
**Keywords:** Country overview  
**Document type:** Evaluation  
**Country coverage:** Australia  
**Resource location:** <http://www.scu.edu.au>

### **A Disciplinary-Specific Approach to the Recognition of Prior informal Experience in Adult Pedagogy: "rpl" as Opposed to "RPL"**

**Author(s):** Mignonne, B.  
**Published:** 2005, Studies in Continuing Education, Vol. 27 No. 1 p. 51-65, Mar 2005  
**Brief description:** "Recognition of Prior Learning" (RPL) is usually associated with assessment processes prior to entry into an educational programme. This paper considers the recognition of prior learning in post-entry pedagogy ("rpl"). The focus is on informal learning or experience in courses in Labour Law at two universities in South Africa.  
**Keywords:** Public sector examples  
**Document type:** Evaluation  
**Country coverage:** South Africa  
**Resource location:** Studies in Continuing Education,  
<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/carfax/0158037X.html>

### **Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens. Machbarkeitsstudie im Rahmen des BLK-Verbundprojektes**

**Author(s):** Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion), Germany  
**Published:** 2004, Berlin  
**Brief description:** The document is a feasibility study which for the first time analysed inclusion of validation of non-formal and informal learning into the pass of further education in Germany. This comprehensive study was commissioned by the Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (BLK), in order to review existing pass initiatives and deliver recommendations on how validation of informal and non-formal learning could be described and included in similar kinds of documentation. The study found that the present documentation was

usually limited to describing activities or confirming attendance at training events, so that competencies were rarely recorded. Therefore, there was a limited ability for the passport to assist individuals to improve their position in the labour market. Instead, they are viewed as supplementary activities to existing qualifications. Based on the study outcomes a new pass – PROFILPass was created by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview, Public Sector examples

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Germany

**Resource location:**

[http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass\\_mit\\_zertifizierung\\_informellen\\_lernens.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf)

### **Die Bedeutung und Berücksichtigung außerfachlicher Aspekte bei der Personalauswahl und Veinstellung**

**Author(s):** Krenn, M., Papouschek, U., Vogt, M.

**Published:** 2004, Wien

**Brief description:** The report was prepared under the survey commissioned by the Lower Austrian Labour Market Service on the acceptance of certificates recording social and communicative competences, which was conducted in 2004.

**Keywords:** Country overview, Public sector examples, National policy

**Document type:** Evaluation

**Country coverage:** Austria

**Resource location:** [http://www.forba.at/files/download/index.php?\\_mmc=czo2OijYXQ9NDMiOw](http://www.forba.at/files/download/index.php?_mmc=czo2OijYXQ9NDMiOw)

## POSITION PAPER

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### **UEAPME response to the consultation of the ACVT on Common European Principles for the validation of informal and non-formal learning**

**Author(s):** European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**Published:** 2004, European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**Brief description:** UEAPME stresses the importance of informal and non-formal learning in SMEs and the need to find methods and systems which recognise and validate it. The Association calls to build bridges between the “islands” of validation methods and systems currently being developed at local, regional and national level in order to strengthen the comparability of qualifications and competences acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Position paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:**

[http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos\\_papers/2004/UEAPME%20PP%20validation%20informal%20learning.doc](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2004/UEAPME%20PP%20validation%20informal%20learning.doc)

### **First structured dialogue on vocational education and training: UEAPME stresses need for validation of informal learning. Press Release : “The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

**Author(s):** European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**Published:** 2003, European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**Brief description:** UEAPME calls on the Education Ministers to recognise informal learning as a tool for enhanced competencies. The recognition and validation of non-formal learning is vital for European SMEs and their employees, as this is their main tool for the development of competencies.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Position paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/press\\_releases/pr\\_2003/030204\\_%20training.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/press_releases/pr_2003/030204_%20training.pdf)

### **The European Qualifications Framework. Resolution adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee in their meeting held in Brussels on 18-19 October 2006**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation

**Published:** 2006, European Trade Union Confederation

**Brief description:** The document is a position paper of ETUC on ‘Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)’. The EQF is seen as the tool to help create common references for the Member States, enterprises and citizens to compare the certifications issued by the various European education and training systems. The ETUC strongly supports the development of skills and competencies and the

validation of non-formal and informal learning in all countries and at all levels of education and training. Validation backs up social integration, employability and the development and utilisation of human resources and is particularly important for people seeking to join or rejoin education and training, the employment market and society as a whole.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Position paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org/a/2996>

### **Empowering & Motivating. EQUAL validates Non-formal and Informal Workplace Learning**

**Author(s):** EQUAL – European Commission

**Published:** 2002, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper states that informal and non-formal learning are widely underestimated or lack recognition in contrast to formal training. When employees and employers are unaware of employees' informal skills, both employees and businesses remain underdeveloped. Validation contributes to a more mobile and adaptable workforce. The paper lists practical benefits for all stakeholders, gives an overview of validation tools in practice and partnership, sectoral and transnational approaches that work and gives policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Position paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:**

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/empl/equal\\_etg/library?l=/etg0/etg0\\_policy\\_briefs/empowerment\\_motivationdo/\\_EN\\_2.2\\_&a=d](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/empl/equal_etg/library?l=/etg0/etg0_policy_briefs/empowerment_motivationdo/_EN_2.2_&a=d)

### **Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19–20 May 2005 – “The European Higher Education Area: Achieving the Goals”**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2005, European Commission

**Brief description:** Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process, have met for a mid-term review and for setting goals and priorities towards 2010. This is the communiqué from the meeting.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** Education and Training 2010 - countries

**Resource location:** [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050520\\_Bergen\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf)

**European Commission – “Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field”**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2004, European Commission

**Brief description:** Both the European Commission and the Council of Europe feel that it is now time to develop a common position and action with regard to education, training and learning in youth activities as part of voluntary and civil society activities, in particular on the validation and recognition of these activities. The main motivation is not to improve employability of young people, but to ensure their social inclusion and to encourage them towards active citizenship, solidarity, personal development and self-fulfilment, voluntary activities and self-confidence.

**Keywords:** EU policy, Voluntary sector examples

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.training-youth.net>

**Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Review of the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002)**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2004, European Commission

**Brief description:** On 14 December 2004, in Maastricht, the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of 32 European countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation with a view to modernising their vocational education and training systems in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy, and offering all Europeans, whether they are young people, older workers, unemployed or disadvantaged, the qualifications and competences they need to be fully integrated into the emerging knowledge based society, contributing to more and better jobs. The development of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning are mentioned among the main priorities for the national countries.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** Education and Training 2010 - countries

**Resource location:** [http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht_Communique.pdf)

**European Commission – “Education & Training 2010”: The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms (Draft joint interim report on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe)**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2003, European Commission

**Brief description:** The document is draft joint interim report on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe within the

context of Lisbon strategy. It gives a comprehensive state-of-the-art and defines main priorities for success among which the identification, assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning are mentioned as one of the key areas establishing European system of education and training.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** –European Union

**Resource location:** [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir\\_council\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf)

**European Commission – Implementation of “Education & Training 2010” Work Programme: Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Progress Report, November, 2003**

**Author(s):** European Commission

**Published:** 2003, European Commission

**Brief description:** The document urges the development of a set of common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning. An expert group suggests organising the discussion according to the three main purposes for validation: validation in relation to formal education and training, validation in relation to the labour market (enterprises, branches and sectors) and validation in relation to voluntary work.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** –European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.euracademy-observatory.org>

**Youth Forum – Policy Paper on youth organisations as non-formal educators: recognising our role**

**Author(s):** Youth Forum

**Published:** 2003, Youth Forum

**Brief description:** The document is a position paper on youth organisations as non-formal educators. Youth organisations are very important providers of non-formal education but young people are not always aware of the fact that they are acquiring a wide range of skills through their participation in youth activities. This paper aims to recognise the role of youth organisations in the field concerned and calls political institutions to promote recognition of non-formal education by funding and supporting youth activities and encouraging the creation of environments that are conducive to non-formal education, such as youth organisations.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://www.umki.hr/docs/Uloga\\_NGO\\_u\\_educaciji\\_mladih\\_EN.pdf](http://www.umki.hr/docs/Uloga_NGO_u_educaciji_mladih_EN.pdf)

### **Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, First follow-up report**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE/UEAPME), European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** March 2003, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

**Brief Description:** The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC agreed to promote the framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications at all appropriate levels, taking account of national practices and to transmit this document to all interested players at European and national levels. The social partners also decided to draw up an annual report on the national actions carried out on the four priorities identified. This is the first annual follow-up report.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper, Private Sector examples

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

### **Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Second follow-up report**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE/UEAPME), European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** March 2004, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

**Brief Description:** The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC agreed to promote the framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications at all appropriate levels, taking account of national practices and to transmit this document to all interested players at European and national levels. The social partners also decided to draw up an annual report on the national actions carried out on the four priorities identified. This is the second annual follow-up report and the first one reporting on a full year of activities.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper, Private Sector examples

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

## **Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Third follow-up report**

**Author(s):** European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE/UEAPME), European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

**Published:** March 2005, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

**Brief Description:** The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC agreed to promote the framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications at all appropriate levels, taking account of national practices and to transmit this document to all interested players at European and national levels. The social partners also decided to draw up an annual report on the national actions carried out on the four priorities identified. This is the third annual follow-up report and the first one including reports on social partners activities in the new EU Member States.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder position paper, Private Sector examples

**Document type:** Position Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** <http://www.etuc.org>

## CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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### **Priznavanje Znanja, Pridobljenega z Neformalnim in Izkusvenim Ucenjem** **(Validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning)**

**Author(s):** Gomezel Omerzel, D., and Trunk Sirca, N.

**Published:** Journal "Management" 1(2)

**Brief Description:** The paper discusses procedures for the validation of previous education and all kinds of knowledge, skills and competencies that people develop within various contexts to be valued and accredited within the higher education institutions. This article describes the conditions in the EU and particularly in Slovenia. It presents the results of empirical research, aimed at investigating the motivation of educational institutions to cooperate in the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Universities and other institutions that are involved in adult education are included. The particular focus of this article is to present the perception from inside and outside the academy groups with regard to recognizing and accrediting the non-formal and informal learning.

**Keywords:** Country overview, National policy

**Document type:** Conceptual Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://www.fm-kp.si/zalozba/ISSN/1854-4231/1\\_159-173.pdf](http://www.fm-kp.si/zalozba/ISSN/1854-4231/1_159-173.pdf)

### **Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme. Thematic Group on "Transparency of non-formal and informal learning, Credit transfer". Background Report**

**Author(s):** Education and Culture Lifelong learning programme, Leonardo da Vinci, European Commission

**Published:** 2007, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper was produced by the Thematic Group on "Transparency of non-formal and informal learning, Credit transfer" and is a thorough analysis of the State of the art and perspectives for the future of transparency of qualifications and Credit transfer and validation of non-formal and informal learning. It also defines aspects of transparency and validation within the Leonardo da Vinci Programme and the new Lifelong Learning Programme.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Conceptual paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:** [http://www.tg4transparency.com/Background\\_report.pdf](http://www.tg4transparency.com/Background_report.pdf)

### **Higher Institute for Labour Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium – A policy of opportunities embedded in a competence-oriented approach in Flanders**

**Author(s):** Vanhoren, I., Higher Institute for Labour Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium

**Published:** 2003, Higher Institute for Labour Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium

**Brief description:** The article examines aspects of the debate concerning life-long learning (international developments, the problems surrounding participation in life-long learning and its added value, career guidance and the recognition of acquired competences). It introduces an integrated approach for adults from the perspective of the individual and his/her aspirations and needs and especially focuses on underprivileged groups.

**Keywords:** Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice, Country overview

**Document type:** Conceptual Paper

**Country coverage:** International

**Resource location:** <http://www.kuleuven.be>

### **Kenniscentrum EVC – The world of EVC: the application of EVC in the Netherlands in four spheres**

**Author(s):** Duvekot, R., Kaemingk, E. and Pijls, T.

**Published:** 2003, Kenniscentrum EVC

**Brief description:** The Recognition of Competencies Acquired Elsewhere (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties, "EVC") has many forms, procedures and applications. This is logical, as EVC can be deployed within a wide range of objectives, from personal certification to an integrated HR approach at organisation level, from individual career development to sectoral training policy, etc. This article classifies the main application areas or 'spheres' of EVC. It provides an explanation of the functions of EVC, making the widely deployable world of EVC more accessible for the individual and the organisation.

The basis for the description is a survey of the opinions of the various stakeholders responsible for the 'EVC development'.

**Keywords:** National policy, Country overview

**Document type:** Conceptual Paper

**Country coverage:** Netherlands

**Resource location:** <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

### **Learning and Skills Research Centre – Informality and formality in learning**

**Author(s):** Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. and Malcom, J.

**Published:** 2003, Learning and Skills Research Centre

**Brief description:** A comprehensive study suggesting that 'formal', 'informal' or 'non-formal' learning are not discrete categories and to think that they are is to misunderstand the nature of learning. It identifies attributes, explores their relationships, and identifies their effects on learners, teachers and the learning environment. The study covers dimensions in the evolution of informal and non-formal learning, models of formal, non-formal and informal learning, attributes and aspects of formality and informality in learning and examples of learning: relationships between formality and informality.

**Keywords:** National policy, Public sector examples, Assessment of good practice

**Document type:** Conceptual Paper

**Country coverage:** International

**Resource location:** <http://www.lseducation.org.uk/pubs/pages/031492.aspx>

### **The VPL-model in short**

**Author(s):** Leonardo da Vinci Programme, European Commission

**Published:** 2006, European Commission

**Brief description:** The paper briefly explains the VPL (Valuation of Prior Learning) model. VPL aims at recognition, accreditation/validation and further development of what an individual has learned in every possible learning environment: in formal environments such as school and non-formal or informal environments such as the working place and at home.

**Keywords:** EU policy

**Document type:** Conceptual Paper

**Country coverage:** European Union

**Resource location:**

<http://www.vpl4.eu/cms/content/downloads/VPL-model%20in%20short.pdf>

## **Annex Four: Database of public sector initiatives**

# Public sector – Database of Initiatives

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## Examples of Tests and Examinations

### Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** National

**Country:** Austria

**Sector:** Vocational Education and Training

**Background:** The *Berufsausbildungsgesetz* (Vocational Training Act) provides for access to final examinations on vocational training courses. Individuals who have not been enrolled in the dual system of vocational training may still take the *Lehrabschlussprüfung* (apprenticeship completion examination).

**Key features of the methodology:** In order to be able to sit the examination, the candidate must:

- be aged 18 or over
- have proof that the skills required in order to achieve the apprenticeship have been acquired, for instance through practical experience, a comprehensive relevant learning process or participation in a relevant training programme.

If the experience acquired does not cover all competences required for the apprenticeship exam, individuals have to undergo additional training. However, they receive credit for their experience, thus reducing by up to two thirds the regular duration of an apprenticeship.

This method of recognising skills gained informally therefore adheres to the standard national system of vocational qualification and does not establish a separate set of requirements.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Successful completion of the examination means the relevant professional qualification is awarded. It also gives the same rights in terms of industrial/labour law and social law as those given to people who have acquired the qualifications within the formal education and training system. In 2003, approximately 5,300 people were admitted to apprenticeship exams on the basis of this mechanism.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** National

**Country:** Germany

**Sector:** Vocational Education and Training

**Background:** An important legislative provision relating to the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BIBiG). Under this provision, individuals can be admitted to a final examination for a qualification in a recognised apprenticeship trade which would normally require formal training.

**Key features of the methodology:**

Individuals must provide evidence that they:

- have been employed in the occupation for which they wish to take the examination for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training (Periods of employment also include training periods in another relevant apprenticeship trade), or
- can demonstrate, by producing certificates or by some other means, that they have acquired the necessary vocational proficiency for admission to the examination.

Foreign qualifications and periods of employment abroad may also be taken into account. Credit can be obtained for a higher level of general educational attainment, such as the *Fachoberschulreife* (entrance qualification for specialised upper secondary school), which shortens the period of employment for which evidence must be produced. A previous relevant programme of IVET in a different occupation can also be credited towards the required periods of employment.

Candidates take an examination known as the *Externen-Prüfung* (examination for external candidates, i.e. those not involved in a formal vocational training programme).

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** In 2005, over 7% of candidates for these qualifications applied via the *Externen-Prüfung*. Most 'external applications' (80%) were for professions in the 'industry and commerce' sector, while the 'domestic' sector is the second most important (11%). However, in most training sectors, external candidates generally have a lower examination pass rate than candidates as a whole

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** The National Board of Education

**Country:** Finland

**Sector:** Languages

**Background:** The National Certificate of Language Proficiency is a test aimed at adults to measure their practical language skills, regardless of how and where their linguistic proficiency has been acquired.

**Key features of the methodology:** The tests measure language skills in practical situations in which an adult could be required to speak, listen, write or read a foreign language.

**Partnership:** The National Board of Education developed the National Certificate in Language Proficiency test with help from its language examination committee, which has 9 members (most with language teaching experience).

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The Act on language tests was passed in 1994 and the first national certificates of language proficiency were granted in the same year. Some 22,000 people were granted a Certificate by the end of 2003<sup>1</sup>. The test can now be taken in 9 different languages and there are over 100 educational institutions arranging tests.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Information Technology Development Centre (TIEKE)

**Country:** Finland

**Sector:** Information Technology

**Background:** TIEKE, together with together with the education and labour administration and labour market organisations launched in 1994 a Computer Driving Licence (CDL) that has since become a widely acknowledged proof of information technology skills, not only in Finland but all over the world. The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) has now been introduced in some 130 countries

**Key features of the methodology:** There are currently three levels of testing, which measure the candidate's skills, ranging from beginner to advanced user: General user (@) certificate; A certificate; and AB certificate. The examination takes the form of a skills test arranged by training organisations (e.g. schools, universities and workplaces). The two lower-level tests can be taken in Finnish, Swedish and English. The advanced (AB) test can be taken in Finnish and Swedish.

**Partnership:** A Committee, consisting of representatives from educational institutions, social partners and

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University

national education and employment authorities, leads the development work of the Licence.

**Funding:** The development work of the CDL was initially co-financed by the Ministry of Education. The development of the European Computer Driving Licence was partly financed by the European Leonardo da Vinci programme.

**Key outcomes and impact:** The CDL tests have no official standing in Finland, and are not covered by legislation, but are, however, widely known and accepted in the labour market. More than 144,000 people have obtained the licence in Finland and over four hundred educational institutions in the country have been granted a permit from TIEKE to carry out tests and grant the certificate.

**Weblink:** <http://www.tieke.fi>

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** State Language Centre (Valsts valodas centrs)

**Country:** Latvia

**Sector:** Languages

**Background:** The State Language Examination enables a person who has not received official education in the Latvian language, having finished courses or learnt the language independently, to validate the education they have received in an informal or non-formal way.

**Key features of the methodology:** The examination of the state language knowledge is divided into three parts:

- An interview – a commission evaluates conversational skills of a person discussing the topics related to his/her work, profession or position (time period 6-7 minutes);
- Examination of reading skills: a person does reading tasks;
- Examination of writing skills: a person does writing tasks.

The first part of the examination is essential, because during the interview it is possible to define a possible level of the language knowledge. Reading and writing tasks are given according to the defined level. In addition, during the interview listening skills are examined.

**Partnership:** The National Board of Education developed the National Certificate in Language Proficiency test with help from its language examination committee, which has 9 members (most with language teaching experience).

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** According to the results of the examination process, a person receives a certificate of knowledge of the state language, where the level of the language knowledge is designated. In 2002 10,051 people (6,142 of whom were unemployed) received the certificate and in 2003 it was 10,110

(5,321 unemployed).

Although the basic reason for such an initiative lies in political motives (in Latvia 20.4 % (data of the year 2005) of the inhabitants are non-citizens - the basic aim of the law is preservation and development of the Latvian language) the validation promotes social integration, an improvement of the situation of the labour market and stimulates learning of the state language.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture

**Country:** Lithuania

**Sector:** Vocational education and training

**Background:** The equivalency examination is the main method leading to the acceptance of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults.

**Key features of the methodology:** Individuals over the age of 18 years, with at least one year of work experience, can apply to have their competences acquired outside of formal education recognised. In September of each year he or she should register in a licensed vocational school which provides the programme chosen by the individual. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements. This is done through the analysis of certificates on non-formal education and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the external students and schools agree on the timetable of appointed course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. If the results are positive, external students are allowed to take final qualification exams together with those from formal education.

**Partnership:** The National Board of Education developed the National Certificate in Language Proficiency test with help from its language examination committee, which has 9 members (most with language teaching experience).

**Funding:** Assessment and recognition services are paid by the external student themselves, by the employer in the case that they initiate the procedure and by the Labour Exchange in the case that they referred the job-seeker to take the examination.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with qualification certificates or the qualified worker diploma.

**Weblink:** No information

## Examples of Declarative Methods

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Governments of individual German Länder

**Country:** Germany

**Sector:** Vocational and higher education, public, private and voluntary sectors.

**Background:** The ProfilPASS takes into account all learning settings in which learners may acquire competences during the course of their lives.

**Key features of the methodology:** The methodology of ProfilPASS tool is based on guided critical reflection of an individual's life, experience and activities and is structured in 5 sections. Skills and competences are derived from these activities by a process of abstraction, and then assessed on a four-level scale.

**Partnership:** Wide range of concerned stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Better facilitation and mainstreaming of lifelong learning and appreciation of learning outside the setting of formal education.

**Weblink:** <http://www.profilpass-online.de/>

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation** The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

**Country:** Ireland

**Sector:** Vocational education and training

**Background:** The tool is based on the procedure for the award of its qualifications through validation, which contains elements of what could be classified as 'evidences extracted from work (or other) practices'.

**Key features of the methodology:** The process is structured around six main elements: Award Identification/eligibility of the learner, Matching of experience to Standards, Gathering of Evidence, Assessment of Evidence, Recommendation for an award and Monitoring.

**Partnership:** n/a

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Improved appreciation of work experience and better facilitation of life-long learning.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Declarative Method

**Lead organisation:** ADEM (*Administration de l'emploi*)

**Country:** Luxembourg

**Sector:** Job-seekers

**Background:** The '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP) has the specific aim of helping job-seekers to become more autonomous in their search for employment, in addition to providing a tool for evaluating their technical and social skills as well as competencies.

**Key features of the methodology:** The basis for the preparation of the BIP is via group work, in which the job-seekers are encouraged to propose and discuss their career plan, and whether it is compatible with the job market situation. At the same time, the candidate is questioned about what he/she believes are his/her personal competences, and whether they are compatible with their career plan. The BIP is prepared in the form of a 'log book', in which the candidate notes what he or she has drawn from each session of group work, and uses these notes to modify his or her occupational project and plan of action.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The 'bilan' system for evaluating competencies is used to some success in tackling unemployment in Luxembourg – according to statistics from the ADEM, 50% of those that undertook a '*bilan de compétences*' or a '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' in 2003 are still in employment.

**Weblink:** <http://www.adem.public.lu/>

## Method: Declarative Method

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of Education and Science

**Country:** Slovak Republic

**Sector:** Teacher training

**Background:** A Ministry of Education and Science Decree stipulates the qualification requirements and organisation, contents and procedure for qualification examination for teachers in kindergartens, special, basic and secondary schools. Professional capacity is understood by the Decree as a set of vocational knowledge, skills and competences gained through the studies in higher education, secondary education and in professional experience.

**Key features of the methodology:** The decree stipulates that after 5 years of teaching experience certain conditions can be recognised as a substitute to the 1st qualification examination, fulfilment of which gives a right to obtain higher teaching positions and incorporation to a higher salary scale.

Among others such substitute conditions could be:

- Completion of two-years specialised innovative course or two-years specialised qualification course accredited by the Ministry of Education;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition of independently developed, accredited and patented teaching tools submitted to the mass production,
- Authorship of textbooks and syllabi, approved by the Ministry of Education and published;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition in pedagogical reading.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** No information

**Weblink:** No information

### Method: Declarative Method

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of Education

**Country:** Portugal

**Sector:** Teacher training

**Background:** The Ministry of Education has provided for recognition of the expertise of Basic and Secondary Education teachers who have suitable scientific knowledge for teaching and wide experience of working in the education system but do not have qualified teacher status.

**Key features of the methodology:** Within the system, teachers must:

- a) hold a proper qualification in the terms of the applicable legislation;
- b) have at least five years of complete effective teaching service, of which three have been completed in the four previous years to the year of 2005/2006;
- c) have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education in the school year of 2005/2006.

Teachers who meet these requirements must complete a training module in education sciences, corresponding to the first year of in-service training (regulated by the Decree-law nr. 278/88, of August 19).

If teachers meet the requirements mentioned above at point a) and c), they are excused from further in-service training if they are in one of the following situations:

- a) they have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education, completed in three of the four previous years of 2005/2006, are 45 years old and have 10 years of effective teaching service.
- b) they have held an administrative contract of teaching service with the Ministry of Education, completed in

three of the four previous years of 2005/2006, and have 15 years of effective teaching service.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** No information

**Weblink:** No information

## Examples of Portfolio Methods

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of the Flemish Government for Education and Vocational Training) and Ministry for Culture, Youth and Sport

**Country:** Belgium (Flemish community)

**Sector:** All sectors

**Background:** The stated aim of EVC in the Flemish Community is to help individuals to achieve personal development and increased integration into the labour market and society in general. The Flemish model of EVC has two aspects: Recognition and transfer of competencies (summative function) and Career and Personal Guidance (formative function).

**Key features of the methodology:** In practical terms, EVC in Flanders comprises three main elements or stages:

Identification (*Herkenning*): the recognition of non-formal and informal learning will often start through career advice, through which an initial "portfolio" of an individual's competencies may be drawn up. This portfolio forms the basis for further advice and eventual recognition of competencies.

Assessment (*Beoordeling*): assessment of competencies can result from referral from the identification phase or from an individual's own initiative. The assessment is based on professional standards set by the Social and Economic Council or SERV (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*) or fixed training standards and may entail written or practical tests, interviews and/or evidence of acquired skills (other certificates or examples of work etc.).

Recognition (*Erkenning*): the formal recognition of competencies (potentially in the form of an experience certificate) can theoretically be undertaken by any organisation that satisfies official regulations.

**Partnership:** The Flemish government has decision-making responsibilities, with support from the SERV and the Education Council (VLOR).

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The 'experience certificate' or 'title of professional competence' is an official recognised certificate issued by the Flemish government. The certificate confirms that an individual has acquired specific professional skills. Currently, there are procedures in place for the delivery of experience certificates for bus drivers, coach drivers, outside-school-hours child care workers, call centre operators,

industrial painters and tower crane operators, although this list is constantly being updated with new occupations. Since early 2007, there are now also test centres for barbers and hairdressers, hairstylist parlour managers, removals packers and removals carriers.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** National government

**Country:** Denmark

**Sector:** All sectors

**Background:** The policy Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System (2004) proposes that recognition of non-formal and informal learning be taken into account throughout the entire education system. The policy acknowledges that the success of competency assessment or recognition of prior learning depends completely on the methods applied to assess prior learning and the quality mechanisms in place to support the process.

**Key features of the methodology:** The policy recommends that each competency assessment should include:

*Guidance and Clarification* i.e. the educational institution providing information on their options, regulations, their obligations in the process etc;

*Collection of documentation* e.g. documentation from employers, participation in seminars, training activities, liberal adult education activities, voluntary experience etc;

*Competence assessment* i.e. reviewing the documents, structured interviews, observation, asking the learner to complete a practical task, tests etc.

**Partnership:** N/A

**Funding:** N/A

**Key outcomes and impact:** Recognition of prior learning after competence assessment may result in the following:

- Entrance qualifications for an education/training programme
- A shorter study plan ('credit' in an education programme)
- Documentation of competencies/qualifications in relation to part of an education programme
- Recognition in relation to a full education programme, if possible.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** National government

**Country:** France

**Sector:** All sectors

**Background:** The 2002 Social Modernisation Act made access to validation of knowledge gained through experience a right for everyone with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience. Non-formal and informal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally-recognised qualification

**Key features of the methodology:** The 2002 Social Modernisation Act outlines a five-step approach to validation.

- 1) information about the process of VAE;
- 2) decision on the validity (*recevabilité*) of the application (in terms of duration of experience related to the content of the qualification);
- 3) development of a portfolio or "dossier" by the candidate describing his or her experience. This may include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a simulated situation and other evidence. The candidates may be mentored and financing can be available at this stage in the process;
- 4) interview/dialogue with a 'jury' – at the request of the jury or the candidate;
- 5) deliberation and decision from the jury based on the documents produced and their own observations.

**Partnership:** N/A

**Funding:** N/A

**Key outcomes and impact:** A total of over 50,000 qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005 (10,709 in 2002; 17,724 in 2003 and 22,660 in 2005).

**Weblink:** <http://www.travail.gouv.fr/vae/640.html>

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of Education and Science

**Country:** Latvia

**Sector:** Further education (teacher training)

**Background:** Workers in the educational sector (except for higher educational institutions) can receive pedagogical education by further education or self-education. This is a one-year process consisting of different training modules. The process however starts off with a procedure to validate participants' prior experience, skills and relevant activities in the field.

**Key features of the methodology:** The candidates have to prove the length of their work experience and also have to send their teaching material, teaching methodologies and any other information about relevant courses or activities in the field. Then the Special Certificate Commission (which is made up of representatives of the Ministry, vocational institutes and social partners) assesses which modular exemptions participants may get.

Participants are not likely to be exempt from all modules and they may have to do some projects or attend courses. Participants are then assessed by written exam and presentation.

**Partnership:** The Special Certificate Commission (which is made up of representatives of the Ministry, vocational institutes and social partners)

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Those who pass the final examinations then receive a nationally recognised certificate which is signed by the Ministry of Education. This does not replace the official teacher qualification (which can only be obtained by attending higher education institutes) but the certificate provides exemptions for those wanting to continue studying to become an officially qualified teacher

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:**

**Country:** Netherlands

**Sector:**

**Background:** In the Netherlands, the term "EVC" (*Erkenning Verworven Competenties*- Recognition of Acquired Skills) is the term typically used for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**Key features of the methodology:** The EVC-procedure generally consists of five phases<sup>1</sup>, for which responsibility primarily lies with the individual:

- 1) Commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences – both by the individual and by the employer
- 2) Recognition of competences - the participant usually needs to compile a *portfolio*. This portfolio is meant to offer "authentic evidence" of available competences.
- 3) Assessment of competences - the content of the portfolio is assessed and when necessary followed up by an extra assessment. This can involve an interview, test, demonstration, presentation, but also – with respect to employees - observation during work.
- 4) Further development of competences and advice on this - tThe validation offers insight into an individual's available strong competences and missing competences, which offers a great opportunity for the individual to set up a personal development plan (POP).
- 5) Embedding competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy - the last phase focuses on the structural implementation of EVC in the training and personnel policy of an organisation.

**Partnership:** N/A

**Funding:** N/A

**Key outcomes and impact:** It is estimated that by 2002, approximately 6,000 persons within 500 organisations have followed an EVC procedure. The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of EVC among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures.

**Weblink:** No information

<sup>1</sup> *The VPL model in short*, Leonardo da Vinci programme, second phase 2000-2006

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** National Validation Agency, Vox

**Country:** Norway

**Sector:** Upper secondary education, vocational and higher education, public and private sectors.

**Background:** Vox is the national agency responsible for leading national validation initiatives in various fields including upper secondary education system and vocational training, public sector and higher education.

**Key features of the methodology:** Vox has developed a standard format for a 'Competence Card' to describe learning at work. It helps an individual to map and describe their professional competences such as sector knowledge, work responsibilities, working methods and personal skills. The tool is accompanied by a guide on how to successfully carry out the procedure, some good practice examples and a database tool for Human Resource Managers.

**Partnership:** The institution works with a wide range of national stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Better facilitation and mainstreaming of lifelong learning.

**Weblink:** <http://www.vox.no>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Education and Training Service Centre

**Country:** Iceland

**Sector:** Vocational and higher education, public, private and voluntary sectors.

**Background:** The ETSC has developed guidelines for validation which parallel the common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**Key features of the methodology:** The ETSC guidelines are based on five phases: Information and feedback, Documentation, Analyses, Confirmation and Validation and acceptance of competence.

**Partnership:** Education and Training Service Centre in cooperation with wide range of concerned stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Better facilitation and mainstreaming of lifelong learning and appreciation of learning outside the setting of formal education.

**Weblink:** <http://www.frae.is>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** National network of New Opportunities Centres

**Country:** Portugal

**Sector:** General secondary-level education

**Background:** Adults without the secondary-level of education can apply to a New Opportunities Centre to undergo a process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVC). The centre, through several means (e.g. personal interview, group sessions and Curriculum Vitae analyses), defines their profile and jointly (with the adult) establishes the most suitable qualifying path for them: the RVCC Process or another training itinerary.

**Key features of the methodology:** Following this initial stage, the candidate, using their profile to develop the process, takes part in sessions in which their key competences are identified according to the Competences Reference Framework. Validation must comply with the Competences Reference Framework, organised according to levels: Basic (1, 2 and 3) and Secondary.

Competences recognition is based on a range of activities, which are supported by competences assessment (competences are identified and evaluated) and by a variety of means (such as personal and group interviews, practical activities, games).

Candidates then prepare a Personal Dossier (Basic level), a Learning Reflexive Portfolio (Secondary level) and Professional Portfolio (RVCC Professional). The Dossier and Portfolio are made up of documents

which demonstrate the competences which adults have acquired through life experiences, covering the key competence areas given in the Competence Reference Frameworks. Once the evaluation is carried out, the candidate requests the validation of the key competences by a jury. The jury is constituted by an external expert (Avaliador Externo) and a technical and pedagogical team.

If the adult is found not to have the necessary competences, he/she may be offered a proposal for complementary training (up to 50 hours) that is deemed to be essential in order to fill the identified competence gaps, before being able to proceed to obtain certification of education years 4, 6, 9 or 12. Alternatively, they may be guided towards other solutions if their skill gaps justify longer training. In these cases, adults are steered towards short- term training actions or courses for adults, particularly Adult Education and Training Courses

**Partnership:** Centres are set up on the initiative of public and private sector bodies that have strong links and intervention dynamics in the community, region and nationally. Consolidation of these partnerships and network relationships is vital to the life of the Centres because they facilitate the delivery of their activities and services. Furthermore, inter-centre relationships are important as they help to shape a specialised response network for workforce development.

**Funding:** New Opportunities Centres are financed by the State and the European Commission

**Key outcomes and impact:** If the candidate is found to have the necessary competences, he/she is granted a certificate, which is recognised for all legal intents and purposes, by the education and vocational training systems, and on the labour market. The conclusion of the RVCC process can result in career progression, in educational and/or vocational training progression, and better employment situation.

**Weblink:** <http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** National Swedish Commission on Validation

**Country:** Sweden

**Sector:** All sectors

**Background:** The National Swedish Commission on Validation has identified a list of elements in the validation process. This list does not imply that all elements must always be performed, or that they have to take place on a single occasion.

**Key features of the methodology:** The elements of a validation procedure and structure to be followed are:

- General competence mapping
- In-depth competence mapping
- Competence assessment – statement of attainment
- Competence assessment by formal means – certificate, authorisation, examination etc.

The Commission indicates that each validation procedure should result in some form of documentation

indicating:

- The aim and objective;
- The model(s) used for validation;
- The method(s) used for validation;
- The supporting materials or tools on which the assessment - if any - was based;
- The validation provider's authority to issue documentation; and
- The method used for quality assurance of the process.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The Commission hopes that lead times in the validation process will be reduced - as models and methodologies are further developed - to between two and ten days at most.

**Weblink:** <http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/>

## Examples of Observation

### Method: Observation

**Lead organisation:** N/A

**Country:** Norway

**Sector:** All sectors

**Background:** In Norway, a three-stage procedure is recommended for validation (information and guidance, followed by assessment, then documentation) in upper secondary education. Within this process, several methods and tools have been developed for the implementation of the assessment stage, one of which is 'vocational testing'.

**Key features of the methodology:** Vocational 'testing' is based on an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives of the adult are charted. This interview is followed by a second one by a professional specialist, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed.

**Partnership:** Vocational Testing requires inter-departmental cooperation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Vocational 'testing' provides adults with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Observation

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs

**Country:** Slovenia

**Sector:** Vocational Education and Training

**Background:** The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a working vocational or professional qualification, required for an occupation or an individual set of tasks within an occupation.

**Key features of the methodology:** The validation process takes place as follows:

- 1) The first step is the submission of a personal application to an authorised and registered organisation by the National Examination Centre.
- 2) On the job assessment and certification of the individual is then carried out by a nominated commission (whose members must obtain a special licence from the National Examination Centre).
- 3) The NVQ may be obtained a) by certification - direct assessment of professional knowledge, skills and abilities determined in the catalogue or by recognition of a person's skills and knowledge on the basis of the individual's portfolio or b) in school - on the basis of documents acquired in educational programmes.

**Partnership:** No information

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** By 2007, 15,271 NVQ certificates had been awarded, of which 3,961 certificates in 2005 and 8,158 in 2006.

**Weblink:** No information

## Examples of Simulation

### Method: Declarative and Simulation methodology

**Lead organisation** The Knowledge Centre Mid-West

**Country:** Denmark

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** The main focus of this Centre was to bring competence assessment into real-life conditions and assess skills and competences in the workplace, where the competences can be demonstrated and where they are normally used. The tool is primarily designed for low-skilled immigrants.

**Key features of the methodology:** The process is phased and starts with an individual's workplace competence assessment resulting in an individual 'competence card'. Later on an assessment is carried out by a workplace mentor via an observation. A thorough methodology allows the assessment of personal competences, professional, language, computer and basic skills in relation to the tasks performed. Competences are interlinked with national standards.

**Partnership:** Education and Training Service Centre in cooperation with wide range of concerned stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The system is also useful for other target groups which lack professional experience. It receives considerable support from employers who are, first of all keen to take on new trainees and secondly, satisfied with the new standardised tools that minimise their time spent on giving feedback while at the same time allowing for comparability of the assessment results.

**Weblink:** No information

## Examples of Mixed Methods

### Method: Mixed Methods

**Lead organisation:** National Board of Education / Alvar

**Country:** Finland

**Sector:** Vocational education and training

**Background:** The competence-based qualification system (*Näyttötutkinto*) is the most established form of validation in Finland. Competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the competencies and knowledge have been acquired. They can be demonstrated and accredited in officially approved practical skill demonstrations / tests.<sup>1</sup>

**Key features of the methodology:** There are three levels of competence-based vocational qualifications (initial, further and specialised). Qualification guidelines determine both the qualification requirements and the means of demonstrating the skills. In terms of the latter, the most common methods are practical skill demonstrations, observation, interviews, questionnaires, portfolio work and/or project work.

**Partnership:** The responsibility for organisation and supervision of the competence-tests rests with Qualification Committees, which also write up certificates for students who have completed their qualifications. The Qualification Committees are required to have trade union and employer representatives and teachers.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Besides 52 vocational upper secondary qualifications, there are around 300 further vocational and specialist vocational qualifications on offer.

The number of individuals taking part in the competence-based qualifications is growing. Between 1997 and 2006, just under 365,000 individuals took part in the system, some 199,000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82,000 were partly qualified

**Weblink:** No information

<sup>1</sup> Ahola (2003) Validation of prior learning in Finland. Nordic Council of Ministers.

### Method: Declarative methods, Test and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Latvian Ministry of Education and Science

**Country:** Latvia

**Sector:** Vocational training

**Background:** People working in the educational sector (except for higher educational institutions) can receive pedagogical qualifications by further education or self-education.

**Key features of the methodology:** This is a one-year process consisting of different training modules delivered by training institutions certified by the Ministry. The process starts with the candidate's declaration of his/her prior experience, skills and relevant activities in the field. A Special Certificate Commission assesses which modular exemptions participants may get. Participants are then assessed by a written exam and a presentation. The nationally-recognised certificate does not substitute formal education, but provides exemptions for those wanting to continue studying to become an officially qualified teacher.

**Partnership:** Latvian Ministry of Education and Science with relevant stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Validation is used to stimulate the inflow of a new staff, to expand career opportunities and to raise the qualifications of working teachers. Provide additional opportunities for lifelong education.

**Weblink:** No information

### Method: Mixed Methods

**Lead organisation:** ADEM (*Administration de l'emploi*)

**Country:** Luxembourg

**Sector:** Job-seekers

**Background:** The 'bilan de compétences' is used as a tool to explore the personal and professional skills of the individual concerned, and the skills required by the labour market, and is formative in nature.

**Key features of the methodology:** The methodology for producing a '*bilan de competences*' is via a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and observation of the individual being assessed.

**Partnership:** The assessments are conducted by third parties on behalf of the '*Service d'accompagnement personnalisé des demandeurs d'emploi (SAPDE)*' section of the ADEM.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The 'bilan' system for evaluating competencies is used to some success in tackling unemployment in Luxembourg – according to statistics from the ADEM, 50% of those that undertook a '*bilan de compétences*' or a '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' in 2003 are still in employment.

**Weblink:** <http://www.adem.public.lu/>

## **Annex Five: Database of private sector initiatives**

# Private sector – Database of Initiatives

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## Examples of Declarative Methods

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Centre for the Future (Zukunftszentrum), Arbeiterkammer Tirol

**Country:** Austria

**Sector:** Agriculture

**Background:** The initiative was primarily aimed at assisting farmers to document their competences that they acquire via practical working experience.

**Key features of the methodology:** It is a six-step process completed over three weeks to identify the skills and knowledge a person has gained through non-formal and informal learning. A personal coach supports and guides the individual throughout this process. At the end of this validation procedure, the person receives the “Competence statement” certificate.

**Partnership:** The Zukunftszentrum has worked in cooperation with the regional government.

**Funding:** Participation is supported by the regional government, but the limited contribution (190 Euros) from an individual participant is also required.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Participation is open to all members of the Chamber of Labour. Under the pilot initiative, 1400 participants have received competence statements. The second phase of the initiative was launched in early 2006.

**Weblink:** <http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/>

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** vzw VOKANS ('Vormings- en opleidingskansen' - Vocational Training and Education Opportunities)

**Country:** Belgium

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** The validation methodology is based on the 'Competentiespiegel' ('skills mirror') with the aim to increase and sustain employment opportunities for low-skilled job-seekers and employees and especially low-skilled women with little work experience or with professions that are no longer relevant for the labour market.

**Key features of the methodology:** Participants are assisted to map their competences according to the standardised set of vocational requirements - Competentiespiegel.

**Partnership:** vzw VOKANS was set up in cooperation between the two trade unions - ACV and ACW.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The project increased motivation of the target group and enabled beneficiaries to develop new skills through e-learning (e-learning van competencies - eVC).

**Weblink:** <http://www.vokans.be/>

#### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Freescale Semiconductor Toulouse

**Country:** France

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** Validation methodologies were introduced in order to promote VAE (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* – the French national validation system) within the lifelong learning context both at the individual and collective level.

**Key features of the methodology:** The PRC developed two information tools relating to VAE within the lifelong learning strategy at Freescale: one for managers and a one for employees. They help to describe individual skills and competences as well as identify gaps. Further information and individual recommendations are provided in order to proceed with further (lifelong) training.

**Partnership:** Freescale Semiconductor Toulouse in cooperation with PRCs (Points-Relais-Conseil).

**Funding:** Activities were funded by the FONGECIF Midi-Pyrénées and the company.

**Key outcomes and impact:** The pilot action covered a target group of 880 employees. Plans are already in place to expand the initiative. As a result, around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through the French national system of VINFL.

**Weblink:** No information

#### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Aluminium de Grèce SA

**Country:** Greece

**Sector:** Aluminium Processing

**Background:** Aluminium de Grèce SA has established a 'Continuing Progress System' where employees record their own existing knowledge, skills and competences.

**Key features of the methodology:** In the 'Continuing Progress System', employees record their own

existing knowledge, skills and competences through team discussions and through the personal assessment processes.

**Partnership:** N/A

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Each employee is closely involved in determining their own and their teams' future skills needs, helping to set out the necessary training which then takes place either in-house or outside the company.

**Weblink:** <http://www.alhellas.gr/static/index.html>

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** The National Associations of Farmers and The National Associations of Small Farmers

**Country:** Norway

**Sector:** Agriculture

**Background:** The initiative was primarily aimed at assisting farmers to document their competences that they acquire via practical working experience.

**Key features of the methodology:** The two national associations provide advice to the potential beneficiaries on how to document their own knowledge and skills under the Competence Passport. Then the Agriculture Guidance Service assesses and signs the certificates. At the same time individual guidance for further education is provided as well.

**Partnership:** The lead partners have cooperated with relevant stakeholders in Nordland county (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service).

**Funding:** Funding was provided by the Norwegian State Agricultural Administration.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Helps to build self-confidence of people working in the agricultural sector.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** The VAI partnership is led by EBLA, a bilateral body involving SME associations and Trade Unions

**Country:** Europe-wide

**Sector:** SMEs

**Background:** A thorough methodology and a set of tools (the 'VAI KIT') were developed in order to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities that exist within the European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning.

**Key features of the methodology:** The VAI Model includes four steps – Information, Identification, Evaluation and Valorisation. A learning facilitator (FAI) utilises different tools and a guide to support an individual in documenting his/hers competences and abilities and identify skills gaps and training needs.

**Partnership:** SME associations and Trade Unions in cooperation with other stakeholders: consultants, learning facilitators, SME managers and heads of companies.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Improved motivation and effectiveness of work practices, contribution to promote equal opportunities accessing labour market and strengthening employability for all.

**Weblink:** <http://www.progettovai.org>

## Examples of Portfolio Methods

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Province of Macerata

**Country:** Italy

**Sector:** N/A

**Background:** The 'Investing in People' project, funded through the ESF Equal Programme, set up a validation initiative in response to a problem of unemployment in the Italian province of Macerata, resulting from the restructuring of private companies, particularly in the shoemaking industry.

**Key features of the methodology:** The method used in the project consists of a number of activities and processes, which include the completion of a portfolio and the creation of a personal plan. The portfolio, entitled the "*Individual Dossier Skills and Training Booklet*", commences by informing the employee of the validation process and the purpose of validation. It then documents their formal educational qualifications and their non-formal/informal experience.

Employees complete the portfolio with the help of a tutor. They identify all of their training and work experience and include evidence of their competences. This 'evidence' can take a number of forms. For example, a declaration from a previous employer, certification of prior vocational training, pictures of themselves working voluntarily videos etc. Employees also complete a questionnaire on their behavioural competences at this point.

On the basis of the assessment stage, the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the beneficiary all work together to produce a 'Personal Development Plan'. This plan defines a career strategy for the worker based on his/her competences and the companies' own requirements.

The Personal Development Plan, which is also known as the 'Individual Development Plan' consists of an assessment table identifying whether the employee seems 'qualified', 'unqualified', 'partially qualified' or 'unsuitable' in each of his/her job areas. It proceeds to offer a summary of the employee and provides a list of the skills that are 'possessed', 'need improvement' or 'need to be developed'. Its conclusion is a 'training forecast' which has been collectively drawn up by the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the workers and which specifies the training that each employee needs.

**Partnership:** The method was piloted primarily in three companies: *Fileni di Cingoli* (a company working in the food industry), *Lube di Treia* (a company operating in the furniture industry) and *Falc di Civitanova Marches* (working in the shoe making industry).

**Funding:** The project was supported by the ESF Equal fund.

**Key outcomes and impact:** The *Investing in People* project was initially set up to validate the skills and experience of 30 employees across the three companies and, by December 2007, it will have achieved this. The majority of these employees were over 45 years of age, with 15/20% of beneficiaries being disabled. The over 45s had a low level of educational attainment i.e. they had finished school at the age of 14 years, whilst the disabled people could in fact have been well educated but disadvantaged due to their disability.

The key benefit for the employers has been the introduction of a system of training and development in their organisation without the financial costs normally associated with this (all costs accrued through the

validation process were reimbursed by the Investing in People project). Furthermore, they have also gained insight into the skills inherent within their organisation and an understanding of where the skill gaps lie, which has led to better-targeted training.

The employees have been empowered by the knowledge that they have learned certain skills through a number of different life situations, both in work and outside of work and they should be able to use this information to progress their career. Importantly, they have accessed further training with the company without having to repeat anything that they already know about. This bespoke training has been the key output of this project.

**Weblink:** <http://web.equalmacerata.it/index.aspx?area=menu&id=0>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Chambre des employés privés (CEPL)

**Country:** Luxembourg

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** This is a new process provided by the Centre of Lifelong Learning of Luxembourg (LLLC) in order to recognise the importance of work experience.

**Key features of the methodology:** The procedure is available for the candidates with a minimum of three years' relevant experience. The process includes a dossier submitted by the candidate to the LLLC; then approved dossiers are submitted to a jury, made up of professionals and stakeholders from the LLLC evening classes, who may request an interview with the candidate or an additional test (written, oral or practical). Successful candidates are granted with the diploma (either in full or part).

**Partnership:** Chambre des employés privés (CEPL) in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The validation procedure costs 150 € in total per certificate. A small number of candidates have made use of the validation process since its introduction at the beginning of 2007.

**Weblink:** <http://www.cepl.lu>

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** VAPRO-OVP

**Country:** Netherlands

**Sector:** Processing Industry

**Background:** Since 1998, several companies within the processing industry have been using validation tools developed by VAPRO-OVP. Skills typically assessed in the processing industry through validation are operating techniques including maintenance, logistics, etc.

**Key features of the methodology:** As a first step, the candidate is informed about the specifics of the validation-procedure and is asked to fill in a **quick scan** form to gain a broad understanding of her/his own skill levels. The candidate must fill in a few questions about his/her field of work.

Secondly, when the quick scan shows that the candidate has the required knowledge and skills levels to undertake the validation-procedure, the candidate is asked to create a **portfolio**. In this portfolio, the candidate needs to collect evidence (received certificates, description of work experience, etc.) of his/her experiences. Besides the collection of evidence, the candidate must also undertake a self-assessment by filling in a list with personal criteria.

After completion of the portfolio, the competences of the candidate are further assessed at the workplace by one or two internal assessors through a **practical assessment**. After the practical assessment, a **transfer assessment** in the form of an interview is organised in the presence of an external assessor (of VAPRO-OVP) and an internal assessor (in most cases the representative of the employer).

In the last phase a complete assessment is undertaken by the portfolio supervisor and the assessors on the basis of the results of the two assessments and the portfolio. Their judgement is written up in a validation-report.

**Partnership:** VAPRO-OVP group is a service-delivery knowledge centre which has been created by a consortium of social partners (AWVN (Federation for employers), VNCI (Association of Dutch chemical industry), FNV (Trade union) and CNV (Trade Union)).

**Funding:** Since January 2007, employers who fund a validation procedure for their employees can receive a tax reduction (*wet vermindering afdracht*) of €300 for each employee undergoing validation. In the near future, employees who fund their own validation procedure can also receive a tax reduction (as long as the expense is above a threshold of €500)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, many Dutch validation procedures receive funding through ESF<sup>2</sup>.

**Key outcomes and impact:** In general it is felt that the VAPRO-OVP validation procedure leads to increased motivation among employees to obtain a certain qualification level and to remain with their current employer. In addition, for employers the gain is a more thorough understanding of existing competences of their employees.

**Weblink:** <http://www.vapro-ovp.com/default.asp?id=11>

<sup>1</sup> Kenniscentrum EVC, *EVC procedures fiscaal aftrekbaar*. Retrieved November 2007: [http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc\\_nl/fe948f7676cdc67fa067f7f4cdd19f41.php](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/fe948f7676cdc67fa067f7f4cdd19f41.php)

<sup>2</sup> Interview VAPRO-OVP, 2007

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** The National Centre for Electro-Technical Vocational Education (ELBUS) and the Advisory Council for Vocational Training in the Electro Technical Centre (OREE)

**Country:** Norway

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** The project aimed to develop a methodology of validation, assessment and transferability of formal, non formal and informal learning in the electro-technical industry throughout Europe.

**Key features of the methodology:** This multilingual validation methodology is based on a web/electronic tool that helps to document and assess accumulated knowledge and skills of an employee or a potential employee. The main components of the procedure are: information, individual assessment and a development interview and are part of an individual development plan.

**Partnership:** The lead partners cooperated with other stakeholders from Denmark, Greece, Sweden and the UK.

**Funding:** Leonardo da Vinci programme.

**Key outcomes and impact:** There were 100 individuals involved from Norway, 5 from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.

**Weblink:** [www.aks-international.com](http://www.aks-international.com)

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** BDF (*Balear de desarrollo y formación*) and *Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma*

**Country:** Spain

**Sector:** Tourism

**Background:** The aims of this project were to analyse what ICT professional competences are required in the tourist sector in Spain and other countries; what training in ICT is performed; and what training is necessary.

**Key features of the methodology:** The end results of the projects were a methodology for the recognition, validation and accreditation of competences in the work place in the tourist sector and a handbook for the harmonisation of professional competences in the tourist sector. The accreditation methodology made use of a web tool (*CREDICAST*) and an ePortfolio. The accreditation process involved the participation of an evaluation organisation, in this case the business itself as well as a certifying organisation

**Partnership:** This was a Leonardo da Vinci project project with partners Cyprus, Greece and Italy, as well as BDF (*Balear de desarrollo y formación*) and *Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma*.

**Funding:** Funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme

**Key outcomes and impact:** No information

**Weblink:** <http://www.castsite.net/>

## Examples of tests and examinations

### Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Czech Institute of Marketing (CIMA)

**Country:** Czech Republic

**Sector:** Marketing

**Background:** A system of training of certification has been developed since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing<sup>1</sup> (CIMA).

**Key features of the methodology:** Emphasis is put on competences required to practically execute the marketing profession in the labour market. CIMA has been accredited by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with the rights to issue a certificate of qualification after the completion of training courses in marketing at three levels; A, B and C. The A and B level marketing educational system, which is compatible with other similar European educational systems was introduced in 1993 at 11 educational institutes. The implementation of CIMA-C is under preparation. Participants who do not wish to undertake the courses, can apply to CIMA and the examination commission and participate directly in the exams if his or her expertise gained through non-formal and informal learning is valued to be sufficient.

**Partnership:** Developed in cooperation with in cooperation with the Dutch Institute of Marketing (NIMA) under the Phare programme, National Training Fund and Ministry of Industry and Trade in 1996.

**Funding:** Developed under the Phare programme and the National Training Fund.

**Key outcomes and impact:** More than 5000 marketing professionals passed the first level educational programme CIMA-A (about 120 training hours), and about 1000 students passed the second level of CIMA-B (about 120 training hours).

**Weblink:** No information

<sup>1</sup> CIMA was created in 1992 as a non-profit organisation by the decision of the Minister of Industry.

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Koskisen Oy

**Country:** Finland

**Sector:** Manufacturing (wood production)

**Background:** The company offers 'in-house' training, which together with work experience provides employees with an opportunity to attain one of a range of nationally recognised competence-based qualifications (e.g. various wood production and management qualifications).

**Key features of the methodology:** The skills are assessed according to accepted standards, by a team that consists of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives. The assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. All the participants are required to possess 1-2 years of work experience.

**Partnership:** The company and trade unions.

**Funding:** Fully financed by the company.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Over the past 10 years 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employed) have been able to validate their skills and the learning they have acquired at work and were awarded with an official qualification. The possibility raised the profile and credibility of the wood production industry as well as encouraged other sectoral companies (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) to introduce similar tools.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** The Education and Training Centre of the largest national pharmaceutical company Krka

**Country:** Slovenia

**Sector:** Pharmaceuticals

**Background:** Along with in-house training, Krka was the first company to develop and start implementing six standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in non-formal and informal learning that are recognised nationally.

**Key features of the methodology:** As a result, NVQs at Krka can be obtained either by completing in-house training and attending in-house lectures or by validating their practical work experience according to the agreed standards and individual results of written and practical tests.

**Partnership:** Krka worked in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, another sectoral company, a trade union confederation, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and the Chamber of Commerce.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Having built a strong network with the other Slovenian sectoral companies, Krka's Education and Training Centre is the only one which can assess and certify six NVQ standards. To date, more than 350 employees have passed certification on a national level by the, Krka. Other companies (even from other sectors) became interested in validation initiatives of non-formal and informal learning.

**Weblink:** No information

## Method: Tests and Examinations

**Lead organisation:** Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen (TESK)

**Country:** Turkey

**Sector:** Vocational

**Background:** TESK evaluates and certifies individual knowledge and skills acquired through work experience and covers the professions that are not included into the apprenticeship training system - assistant-mastership, mastership and tradesmanship.

**Key features of the methodology:** Examinations (written and/or practical exercises) are held three times a year at the trade unions that are branch organisations of TESK. Those who successfully complete this examination receive an appropriate certificate.

**Partnership:** TESK, in partnership with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of National Education.

**Funding:** No information found.

**Key outcomes and impact:** The certificates issued by TESK later can be replaced with their equivalent certificates by the Ministry of National Education, if that profession is taken under the coverage of apprenticeship training practice of the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training.

**Weblink:** No information

## Examples of Mixed Methods

### Method: Test and Examinations, Declarative and Portfolio methods and Observation

**Lead organisation:** Achema, the largest nitrogen fertilisers' company in the Baltic states

**Country:** Lithuania

**Sector:** Chemical industry

**Background:** Validation methodologies recognising work experience are among the main components of the human recourse development within the company. It has developed a system of competence requirements for every type of work activity performed within the company which later will be linked to the occupational standards currently being developed at the national level.

**Key features of the methodology:** Among the main validation methods used are observation and collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations performed by the direct line manager or formal examinations. The assessment is usually performed by the experts of the company's training centre and successful assessment of relevant skills and competences lead to the award of a company-recognised certificate.

**Partnership:** n/a

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Fairer rewards and better matching between individuals and skills needs as well as better structuring of job profiles.

**Weblink:** <http://www.achema.com/>

### Method: Tests and Examinations, Declarative and Portfolio methods and Observation

**Lead organisation:** *Radiocom* – National Radio Communications Company

**Country:** Romania

**Sector:** Electronics

**Background:** The primary aim for introducing this validation initiative within Radiocom was to keep pace with rapid technological changes in the sector. Voluntary participation of employees contributes to their own performance assessment and learning as well as career and salary progression.

**Key features of the methodology:** The methodologies validate work-related competences using observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios. Assessments are conducted by internal assessors (specialists in the field of the respective occupation) who are certified as assessors of competencies by the National Adult Training Board. Issued certificates are recognised nationally.

**Partnership:** n/a

**Funding:** Fully funded by the company.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies. Certificates have national recognition and are treated similarly to the study certificates obtained through formal learning.

**Weblink:** No information

## **Annex Six: Database of third sector initiatives**

# Third sector – Database of Initiatives

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## Examples of Declarative Methods

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Flemish Community of Belgium, the youth service Jeugd en Stad (JES)

**Country:** Belgium

**Sector:** Voluntary

**Background:** The validation methodology is based on "Competence Sticks" - digital portfolios which help young people to identify, access and develop the key competences they have learned through volunteering and to help them to understand how to use these competences in the labour market.

**Key features of the methodology:** This is a pilot initiative that enabled beneficiaries to develop their own digital portfolio on a usb drive. Individual portfolios were developed using different media tools, e.g. pictures, videos, images. In the second phase of the project, it is planned to involve more people of a wider age group.

**Partnership:** Developed by the Flemish Youth Service (*Jeugd en Stad*) in partnership with the young volunteers.

**Funding:** The initiative was fully funded by a European Social Fund grant under Objective 3, focal point 4.

**Key outcomes and impact:** 40 beneficiaries were assisted to develop their own competence portfolio.

**Weblink:** [http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!\\_june2007.pdf](http://www.yap.org/docs/yapmag!_june2007.pdf)

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Youth Academy

**Country:** Finland

**Sector:** Voluntary

**Background:** The validation methodology is based on the 'Recreational Activity Study Book' system for the recognition of qualifications and competences acquired by participating in youth voluntary activities with the emphasis on their personal development.

**Key features of the methodology:** The Recreational Activity Study Book is structured around activities, not competences and is based on a voluntary declaration. It has no criteria for the measurement of learning outcomes or performance, nor are there any public examinations held to assess the competences acquired by the young people. It is thought that by formalising the system, the basic motivation for participation in youth activities, i.e. the joy of being, doing and learning together, would be endangered.

### Method: Declarative method

**Partnership:** Developed by the Youth Academy in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The Finnish Youth Academy has a written agreement with 250 formal educational institutions on how to value and credit the entries in the book. Over 80,000 Study Books have been distributed so far.

**Weblink:** [www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)

### Method: Declarative method

**Lead organisation:** Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning

**Country:** Norway

**Sector:** Voluntary

**Background:** This Validation methodology was developed to recognise competences gained through voluntary work. It is based on an electronic tool - the Personal Competence Document, a system that assists mapping and documenting competences by self-evaluation.

**Key features of the methodology:** The Personal Competence Document system relies on self-evaluation. Electronic assistance enables users to map, describe and document the activities they are or have been involved in and the competences they have developed, with a focus on non-formal learning and voluntary activities. The PCD contains instructions and guidance, forms to document the overall competences and competences linked to single activities, examples and a dictionary of voluntary activities.

**Partnership:** Developed by the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The initiative generates high value for individuals: an improved overview of one's own competence-generating activities, increased motivation and self-esteem and increased ability to put one's competences into words. It facilitates focused choice on further training and employment.

**Weblink:** [www.vofo.no](http://www.vofo.no)

## Examples of Portfolio Methods

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** SoCiuS

**Country:** Belgium

**Sector:** Further education

**Background:** Validation methodology for the recognition of non-formal, socio-cultural adult education.

**Key features of the methodology:** The methodology is based on two types of certificates that a socio-cultural adult education provider can issue on the completion of their course of training: learning and skills certificates. The first one only proves person's participation in the course and states educational objectives of the training activity. A skills certificate shows that a coherent whole of the skills' level has in fact been acquired. To increase the recognition of such a certificate, SoCiuS provides a common format for organisations in this sector. An awarding body guarantees that the skills are in fact present and controls the quality of the process and the applied standards.

**Partnership:** Developed by SoCiuS in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Gave a clearer structure to EVC in socio-cultural education. An overview of the use of the learning and skills certificates for socio-cultural adult education was published in October 2005 - it showed that learning certificates were issued for 429 (11%) of 3,800 registered activities.

**Weblink:** <http://www.socius.be/>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** LUMSA University

**Country:** Italy

**Sector:** Higher education

**Background:** Validation methodology to facilitate access to higher education in two degrees: Educators and Managers of the Third Sector.

**Key features of the methodology:** The methodology is based on three phases. First, candidates prepare a detailed curriculum [a portfolio] detailing their former education, professional experience, vocational training or any type of formal or informal learning that he/she feels relevant. Second, they participate in an interview with the validation Committee set up at the School of Education, in which prior personal experience is assessed. And the third – preparation of an individual study plan for the degree, which brings together the “knowledge capital” of the student and the list of disciplines and examinations required for that degree by the Ministry of Education.

**Partnership:** Methodology was developed by the LUMSA University.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Provided possibility to acquire first or second (more specific for their working field) degree for people with five or more years working experience and high motivation. As well as second chance for those who attended university, but dropped out later without completing their degree. Most of the people were over 30.

**Weblink:** <http://www.lumsa.it/LUMSA/site/878/home.aspx>

## Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Consultative Commission for the training of activity leaders

**Country:** Luxembourg

**Sector:** Youth

**Background:** In 2004, the Luxembourg Federation of Scouts and the National Youth Service initiated the development of a system of validation for the skills and competences developed by young people through their participation in voluntary work. A pilot *attestation* (certificate) has now been launched, which aims to record the skills and responsibilities which young people have acquired or held during their participation in voluntary work.

**Key features of the methodology:** The attestation is made up of three principal elements: personal details, information about the organisation the young person is involved in and a description of their voluntary activities. There are three different certificates which can be obtained, according to the role and responsibilities the young person has held (leadership, training or project management). The process which must be followed to apply for an attestation is as follows:

- An interview is carried out with the young person requesting an attestation in order to discuss the evidence they can provide and the type of attestation they should request.
- An adult member of the organisation drafts an attestation for the young person, using the appropriate template. This is then discussed with the young person.
- The attestation is submitted to the National Youth Service with an accompanying letter from the organisation. The Commission d'Attestation then considers the dossier and forwards it, with their recommendations, to the Ministry of Youth.
- Approved dossiers are co-signed by the Ministry of Youth.

**Partnership:** the Luxembourg Federation of Scouts and the National Youth Service initiated the development of a system of validation for young people. This initiative was led by a working group of the Commission Consultative pour la formation d'animateurs et responsables de loisirs (consultative commission for the training of activity leaders) and began with a consultation phase with employers.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Once the pilot phase is completed and evaluated, and any necessary amendments to the process have been made, it is anticipated that the attestation will be opened up to a wider sphere of participant organisations.

**Weblink:** <http://www.snj.public.lu/publications/publications-diverses/index.html>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** STOP, the Non-Governmental Organisations' Trainers' Association

**Country:** Poland

**Sector:** NGO

**Background:** Validation methodology developed to provide competence standards for NGO trainers, supported by a certification system.

**Key features of the methodology:** STOP has developed a description of the competences and has produced a list of minimum entrance competence requirements. It covers three-stage procedure of certification and offers two degrees of certificates provided by the Certification Commission of STOP. The concept is based on sharing competences and evaluation by supervisors on the basis of actual training delivery. A set of required documents, along with the assessment by the supervisor is submitted to the Certification Commission of STOP, which takes the final decision.

**Partnership:** The validation methodology was developed by STOP in cooperation with sectoral stakeholders and beneficiaries.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Improved quality of the service provision and increased trust and motivation of NGOs in training.

**Weblink:** <http://free.ngo.pl/stop/>

### Method: Portfolio Method

**Lead organisation:** National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Country:** UK

**Sector:** Vocational education

**Background:** The methodology covers skills auditing, work experience, top-up training, and developing migrants' awareness of the UK labour market. The purpose is to support employers to overcome skill shortages, by promoting inclusive work practices, and to address the needs of refugee and migrant workers to develop and adapt their skills for the UK labour market through a range of lifelong learning opportunities.

**Key features of the methodology:** Refugees are offered an assessment by an advisor, who discusses the programme and audits candidates' language and skills levels. They are then directed either to a vocational orientation programme or a vocational language programme. Different pathways are accredited with the National Open College Network, National Vocational Qualification and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme. Once they are work-ready, refugees are offered a supervised work experience placement, where a mentor is assigned to help them integrate into the workplace.

**Partnership:** The lead partner NIACE worked in close partnership of several stakeholders, including the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham, National Open College Network, National Vocational Qualification and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

**Funding:** ESF EQUAL programme.

**Key outcomes and impact:** Different pathways are accredited with different bodies but these include: NOCN (National Open College Network) up to Level 3, NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level 2 and the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) accreditation for construction. Once they are work-ready, refugees are offered a supervised work experience placement, where a mentor is assigned to help them integrate into the workplace. Throughout the process, refugees are offered ongoing assistance with looking for a job or becoming self-employed, and may leave the programme at any time to take up paid employment.

**Weblink:** <http://www.niace.org.uk/> / <http://www.equal-works.com/ProductHome.aspx?ety=2eeca14b-594c-42b0-885d-39c555eaf280>

### Method: Portfolio method

**Lead organisation:** Sylfaen Cymunedol Charity, Wales

**Country:** Wales, UK

**Sector:** Community / charity

**Background:** This learner portfolio validation methodology was developed to recognise competences gained through community work and to facilitate further learning

**Key features of the methodology:** The validation methodology is based on credit values that are assigned to each of the learning units provided by the charity, e.g. confidence- building, introduction to community development, working with young people etc. The credit values are interrelated with the national Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. In order to achieve credit, the learners have to complete a 'portfolio', which consists of a number of 'task sheets'. An Internal and External Verifier proceeds to review the portfolios before credits are awarded.

**Partnership:** Sylfaen Cymunedol charity, in cooperation with CQFW (Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales) and the Open College Network.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Learners gained confidence, more willingly participate in volunteering community work as well as further learning and development.

**Weblink:** <http://sylfaencymunedol.org/>

## Examples of Mixed Methods

### Method: Mixed Methods

**Lead organisation:** Ministry of Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

**Country:** Germany

**Sector:** Social (mainly volunteer) sector

**Background:** „Landesnachweis Nordrhein-Westfalen – Engagiert im sozialen Ehrenamt“ is a certificate introduced in the broad social (mainly volunteer) sector (for example, either for working within health self-help groups, projects concerning women's issues, youth work activities, nursing, assistance to elderly people, etc.) in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2002.

**Key features of the methodology:** The certificate sets out the personal competences which are hard to reflect in certificates of formal learning and which usually are identifiable and visible only through work experience, but which at the same time are of particular importance in the third sector

Assessment is usually performed by the internal assessors and the procedure leads to an official certificate stating brief information about the responsible organisation, a short profile and background of the owner of the certificate, a description of tasks, and, with the approval by the person him/herself, description and evaluation of performance. The descriptions of competences vary according to the field, but usually reflect the ability to work in a team and on his/her own, creativity, reliability, commitment, personal dedication and engagement, ability to deal with conflict situations, organisational skills and project management, social proficiency, manual and craft skills, qualified care giver, business management competences, leadership skills and legal competences etc.

**Partnership:** The initiative was designed through cooperation between the Ministry of Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, social and charitable institutions as well as employers' and trade associations

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** Initially the certificate was recognised only by the parties involved in its design but as the initiative has gained trust, the certificate is more and more often recognised by a number of public institutions and private organisations. There are already 70 organisations licensed by the Ministry of Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to issue the document.

The main benefits for the beneficiaries are the recognition and appreciation of their commitment and documentation of competences and skills.

**Weblink:** [http://www.mgffi.nrw.de/ehrenamt/musterbeispiele\\_landesnachweis.pdf](http://www.mgffi.nrw.de/ehrenamt/musterbeispiele_landesnachweis.pdf)

## Method: Mixed Methods

**Lead organisation:** *Child Line*

**Country:** Lithuania

**Sector:** Non-governmental and non-profit

**Background:** The Lithuanian *Child Line* (as well as other telephone help services in Lithuania) uses a validation method to carry out an initial assessment of an individual's competences acquired in different settings (for example, family, community life, individual experience etc.) and through non-formal and informal learning. This assessment is very important in order to determine their suitability for the roles involved, since volunteers are not required to have any specific / formal qualification in order to start work within the organisation - instead they are required to have "suitable" personal features and competences that correspond to the service field checked through validation methods.

**Key features of the methodology:** *Child Line* has developed a validation system that assists in evaluating initial personal suitability and further "growth" (career development) for volunteers within the organisation. This validation system covers several competence levels. Although the identification, assessment and recognition of different competence levels is mainly linked to the volunteers' work experience within the organisation, the process also takes into account other settings where particular personal features especially desired by the organisation can be developed. The portfolio method, observation and simulation, together with evidences extracted from work, are the main methodologies used by the *Child Line*.

**Partnership:** The methodologies were usually developed in-house, with some external contributions from (e.g. sharing experiences, as in the case of the change in selection process used) other agencies of a similar kind.

**Funding:** No information

**Key outcomes and impact:** The volunteers gain in self-confidence and increased motivation. The initiative helps to attract more people to volunteering and especially shows the value of knowledge, competences and skills that the practical work can give.

The use of the procedures for recruitment and further development of the volunteers ensures that *Child Line* is able to match 'the right person to the right job' and to optimise the use of the skills and competences available within its workforce.

**Weblink:** No information