

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning

GERMANY (draft)

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1.0 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 level¹ 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’.²

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. 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

¹ 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

² See Hippach-Schneider, Ute; Krause, Martina; Woll, Christian, 2007, Berufsbildung in Deutschland. Kurzbeschreibung, publ. by Bousquet, Sylvie, Cedefop Panorama series 136, Luxembourg

workforce.³ 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.⁴

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.⁵

³ 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

⁴ 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

⁵ *ibid*, p. 23

2.0 Public Sector

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.

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*)⁶ 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”⁷ as an approach to consolidate the diverse developments and as a

⁶ The BLK doesn't exist anymore due to the federalism reform in 2006. Its follow-up institution is the Common Scientific Conference (*Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz*)

⁷ <http://www.blk-bonn.de/papers/heft115.pdf>

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.

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*⁸ (Informal Learning. International Conclusions for Lifelong Learning for all),
- *Expertenberichte des Forum Bildung. Bildungs- und Qualifikationsziele von morgen - Vorläufige Leitsätze des Forum Bildung*⁹ (Education Forum Expert Report. Objectives of Education and Vocational Training in the Future),
- *Lernkultur Kompetenzentwicklung. Inhalte - Ergebnisse – Perspektiven*¹⁰ (Learning Culture. Content. Evidence. Perspectives),
- *Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens – ProfilPASS* (Further Education Pass with Certification of Informal Learning)¹¹,
- *Schlussbericht der unabhängigen Expertenkommission Finanzierung Lebenslangen Lernens: Der Weg in die Zukunft*¹² (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*¹³ (Integrated Joint Report on the Situation of Continued Education in Germany),

⁸ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/das_informelle_lernen.pdf

⁹ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/expertenberichte_des_forum_bildung.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.abwf.de>

¹¹ <http://www.profilpass.de>

¹² http://www.bmbf.de/pub/schlussbericht_kommission_III.pdf

¹³ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/berichtssystem_weiterbildung_neun.pdf

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 qualifications¹⁴ 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 more closely with each other and can be used in a flexible manner.¹⁵ 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).¹⁶

In the course of ECTS¹⁷ 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.

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.

¹⁴ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

¹⁵ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

¹⁶ 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'

¹⁷ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Moreover, in May 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research established an innovation forum for vocational education (*Innovationskreis Berufliche Bildung*)¹⁸ and an innovation forum for continuing education (*Innovationskreis Weiterbildung*)¹⁹. 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.

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 training²⁰, or
- can demonstrate, by producing certificates or by some other means, that they have acquired the necessary vocational proficiency for admission to the examination.²¹

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 pre-requisite 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.²² 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

¹⁸ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/IKBB-Broschuere-10_Leitlinien.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/empfehlungen_innovationskreis_weiterbildung.pdf

²⁰ Periods of employment also include training periods in another relevant apprenticeship trade

²¹ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

²² 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'

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.²³

In the 1990s, a study was conducted into External students' Examinations.²⁴ 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.

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 qualifications²⁵ 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.

²³ 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'

²⁴ Hecker, 1994, Ein nachgeholt Berufsabschluss lohnt sich allemal – Externenprüfung in der Praxis, In: Berufsbildung in Wissenschaft und Praxis (6) p. 27-33

²⁵ In general, a vocational certificate and a minimum term of practical employment are pre-requisites for further training examinations

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.

2.5 Higher Education (HE)

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 qualifications represents only a small proportion. The second educational pathway²⁶ 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%)).²⁷

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.²⁸ 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

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ § 27 Framework Act for Higher Education (*Hochschulrahmengesetz*)

summarised by Land for interested parties and the expert audience.²⁹ 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 conclusions show that students entering from the world of work have no greater difficulties and no verifiably lower results than other students.

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*).³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² 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

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ <http://ankom.his.de>

³¹ See BMBF (2005): Richtlinien für die Förderung von Initiativen 'Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulzugänge'

³² <http://ankom.his.de/modellprojekte/index.php>

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.

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.

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.³³

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*).³⁴ 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.

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)

³³ <http://www.abwf.de>

³⁴ further information can be found at <http://kompetenzmodelle.dipf.de/>

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 feasibility³⁵ of introducing a *Weiterbildungspass*³⁶ 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 were designed and evaluated. Both elements form the *ProfilPASS*-System³⁷. 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

³⁵ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/weiterbildungspass_mit_zertifizierung_informellen_lernens.pdf

³⁶ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

³⁷ Information for users and advisers can be found at <http://www.profilpass.de>

(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 *ProfilPASSes* and *ProfilPASSes* for young people have been awarded and 1,700 advisers have been qualified by the initiative.

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.

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.³⁸

2.11 Challenges

The 2007 OECD report on 'Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany'³⁹ 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.

³⁸ 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

³⁹ 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'

3.0 Private Sector

3.0 Private Sector

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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.

⁴⁰ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

⁴¹ as at July 2007

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).

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*).

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.⁴²

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.

⁴² *ibid.*

- The 'collective agreement remuneration framework (*Tarifvertrag über das Entgelttrahmenabkommen - 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 competences are recorded in five assessment levels: efficiency, quality, flexibility, responsible behaviour, co-operation and leadership.⁴³

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 2003⁴⁴, 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.⁴⁵ Underrepresented groups are employees who have not completed an initial vocational qualification, labourers, foreign and older workers⁴⁶. 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

⁴³ 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'

⁴⁴ Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX: Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland, BMBF, 2006, p. 188.

⁴⁵ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

participants in informal learning than people with a lower level of education and older people.⁴⁷ Informal learning activity declines with increasing age.

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.

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 essential⁴⁸, 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.⁴⁹

However, the existing systems are predominantly tailor-made for the specific needs of the companies and this discourages others from using them.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ This is also evidenced by a study on the validation of informal learning in the

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

⁴⁹ Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, interview April 23, 2004

⁵⁰ Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, interview, June 23, 2004

⁵¹ 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

private sector.⁵² 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.

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ Specific models for strengthening and recognising informal learning at work are also being developed for the IT sector.⁵⁶

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 erfahrungsgeleiteten Arbeitens und selbstgesteuerten Lernens bei industriellen Fachkräften - NAKIF*)⁵⁷, 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 education⁵⁸, for

⁵² Instrumente zur Erfassung informellen Lernens im Prozess der Erwerbsarbeit, 2005, Institut für betriebliche Bildung und Unternehmenskultur IBU, Ansprechpartner: Dr. Gerhard Herz

⁵³ Erpenbeck, J., von Rosenstiel, Lutz, 2007, Handbuch Kompetenzmessung, Erkennen, verstehen und bewerten von Kompetenzen in der betrieblichen, pädagogischen und psychologischen Praxis

⁵⁴ Edition QUEM, 2005, Kompetenzmessung im Unternehmen, Lernkultur- und Kompetenzanalysen im betrieblichen Umfeld, Band 18

⁵⁵ http://www.rkw.de/02_loesung/Tools/rkw-aqua/index.html; www.inflow.eu.com

⁵⁶ <http://www.apo-it.de/index.html>

⁵⁷ <http://www.nakif.de>

⁵⁸ ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006

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 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.

4.0 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.

4.1 Qualipass

The „Qualipass”⁵⁹ 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*.

4.2 Berufswahlpass

The initiative *Berufswahlpass*⁶⁰ 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 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

⁵⁹ <http://www.qualipass-info.de>

⁶⁰ <http://www.berufswahlpass.de>

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.

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*).⁶¹ 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.

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

⁶¹ <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.⁶²

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*)⁶³ 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.’

⁶² 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

⁶³ <http://www.dji.de/familienkompetenzen/DasInstrument.pdf>

5.0 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 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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