Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Public Sector: A Compendium

1.1 Introduction

This compendium forms part of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning[1]. 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[2], 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.

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[1] www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/

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

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1.2 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:

1.2.1 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[1], 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.

1.2.2 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.

1.2.3 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.

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[1] 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.

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 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.

1.2.4 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.[1]

1.2.5 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'*[2] 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.

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[1] See the full case study available from the European Inventory website

[2] 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

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1.2.6   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 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).

1.2.7   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[1] 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). <mark>Section 1.7</mark> will explore further the wide range of benefits to individuals, stakeholders and societies / economies as a whole from the introduction of VINFL.

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[1] FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

1.3 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.

1.3.1 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 (*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.
1991	A law passed on the 31st December 1991 gave all workers with at least five years professional experience[1] a legal right to obtain a *bilan de compétences* (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 *bilan de compétences* is also available to those out of work.

[1] And having worked for the same company for at least 12 months

1992	Further legislation[1] 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 (competences) gained through their experience, which was then examined by an assessment panel (*jury*), 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 (*certification*) 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 *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)* 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 1.4.

1.3.2 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[2].

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

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[1] 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
[2] Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Computer Driving Licence (CDL), launched in 1994, has since become a widely 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[1]. 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[2]. Thus, we

[1] 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
[2] *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

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.

1.3.3 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[1], 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[2].

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

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[1] Ds 2003:23, *Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande*
[2] 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.

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.

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.

1.3.4 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[1]. 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[2] 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

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[1] Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe (2007)
[2] 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

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 this on a national basis[1]. 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.

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[1] 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

1.4 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 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. Germany, 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.

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1.4.1   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.[1]

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.

[1] Data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

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 *(rérérentiel 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*.

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.[1]

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

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[1] Rapport conjoint 2008 sur la mise en oeuvre du programme "Education et Formation 2010", Belgique francophone

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*".[1] 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[2]) 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[3]) and Castle (2004[4]) also 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[5]) and O´Donnovan et al. (2001[6]), 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.

~~Thus, it is possible to see that the development of competence-based standards can help to facilitate the introduction of VINFL and ensure that assessments are consistent across all sectors and providers.~~

[1] 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

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

[3] Beaumont, G. (1995) *Review of 100 NVQs and SVQs*. London, Department for Education and Employment.

[4] Castle, K. (2004) "Retention and achievement: Making a difference for NVQs" in Maey, R. *The Research and Development Bulleting.* The Research Centre, City College Norwich, vol. 2, num.3.

[5] 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.

[6] 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.

1.4.2   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 achieved and when in life it is achieved"*[1]. The Framework comprises ten different reference levels, each defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill and competence[2]. 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[3].

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[4]. 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.

[1] Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training (June 2005)
[2] FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.
[3] Ibid.
[4] The CQFW Credit Common Accord (2006);

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.

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.

1.4.3   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[1] 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

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[1] Erkenning Verworven Competenties - Recognition of Acquired Skills

in education and the labour market, in regions and in sectors.[1] 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.

A National Validation Agency, Vox, Norway[2]

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, 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. 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

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[1] Information taken from the website of the EVC Knowledge Centre,
http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php
[2] 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!.

A National Validation Agency, Vox, Norway[2]
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[1]. The Commission is responsible for working out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

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).

[1] *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

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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"*.[1] 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 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

[1] European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Third follow-up report 2005

1.5 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[1] 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 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

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[1] The Government will propose a change in this legal right from "born prior to" to "25 years or more" in spring 2008

system for adults[1]. 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[2].

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

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[1] *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
[2] Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education,* Sense publishers

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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)[1].

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[2].

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.[3] As a result, the overall use of validation methods has varied from one university and faculty to another[4]. 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[5] produced for the Beflex Project[6] 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

[1] Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.
[2] Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.
[3] Act 645/1997, Decree 115/1998 and Decree 794/2004
[4] Lehikoinen et al (2007) Aiemmin suoritettujen opintojen ja aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen korkeakouluissa. Opetusministeriö
[5] Viron, Françoise de, The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Background Paper – 33rd EUCEN Conference, Ljubljana, 15-17 March 2007
[6] 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.

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 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[1]. 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[2].

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[1] Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.
[2] *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden,* refernet CEDEFOP

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

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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[1]. 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[2]. 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.

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

[1] Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; Overview of Finland. CEDEFOP.
[2] Centre for Applied Language Studies / Jyväskylä University

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1.6   Methodologies employed

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

- o Tests and examinations
- o Declarative methods
- o The portfolio method
- o Observation
- o 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[1], Norway) or five (e.g. France[2], Netherlands) basic steps.   In Norway for example, based on the conclusions from the national Validation Project[3], 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.

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[4]. The elements of a validation procedure and structure to be followed are[5]: **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

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[1] 1) Identification, 2) Assessment, 3) Recognition
[2] 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.
[3] *Realkompetanseprosjektet,* 1999 - 2002
[4] *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006
[5] *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

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[1]:

- 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.

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.

1.6.1 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

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[1] *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

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[1] 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.

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

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[1] 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)

formal vocational training programme) which permits admission to final examinations under Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG)[1]. Under this provision, individuals can be admitted to a final examination for a recognised occupation 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[2]. To gain admission, evidence of employment in work relevant to the training occupation must be provided. 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 training occupation can also be credited towards the required periods of employment.

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,[3] 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

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

[1] *ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006. Cedefop.*
[2] *ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006. Cedefop.*
[3] 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

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.

1.6.2   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[1] is a developmental instrument based on user self-assessment supported by professional guidance.

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.

[1] http://www.profilpass-online.de/

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).

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.

1.6.3 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 competences'* 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.

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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[1] 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[2], 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

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

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;

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.[1]

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

[1] Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

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.

1.6.4   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)

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.

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1.6.5   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[1].
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

[1] 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.

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[1].

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.

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.

A declarative Methodology, FETAC, Ireland

Stage	Criteria
1. Award Identification/eligibility of the learner - 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

[1] Mortensen I.Q. (2007). A Danish model for Assessing Competences of Immigrants at the Labour Market, conference material

2. Matching of experience to Standards - 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
3. Gathering of Evidence 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
4. Assessment of Evidence 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.
5. Recommendation for an award 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.
6. Monitoring 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.

1.7 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.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3] 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.[4] 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.

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[1] In 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to higher education (HE).[1] 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).

[2] Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

[3] 'Education et Formation 2010", Rapport National France 2007

[4] Information taken from the website of the Féderation Nationale des CIBC, www.cibc.net, June 2007

The competence-based qualification system (*Näyttötutkinto*) is the most established form of validation in **Finland** covering the whole adult education system. 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. 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.[1] 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.[2]

As we have seen above (section 1.5), 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.[3]

In **Portugal,** in recent years, in the scope of the SNCP[4] (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:

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[1] Normally, two years of theoretical training and two years of practical apprenticeship are required to take a crafts examination.
[2] Statistics Norway, www.ssb.no
[3] New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway
[4] It is important to note that the SNCP is currently undergoing a reform

- **Germany:** From September 2004 to April 2005 the ProfilPASS system was piloted by more than 30 cooperating partner institutions in different regions and settings. More than 12,000 passes have already been issued to users and 90 to counsellors.

- **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[1]. 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[2]. 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[3].

- **Slovenia:** By 2007, 15,271 NVQ certificates had been awarded, of which 3,961 certificates were issued in 2005 and 8,158 in 2006.[4]

- **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[5].

- **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[6].

Considerable progress has also been made in developing occupational profiles / standards and setting up national reference points for validation. In France, the national vocational

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[1] Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

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

[3] NATB website

[4] Data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

[5] *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden,* refernet CEDEFOP

[6] 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.

certifications directory (RNCP) now contains over 4,100 'fiches' relating to vocational qualifications.[1] 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.

1.7.1 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;
- 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;

[1] Ministry of Labour, 2007

- 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[1], 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[2].

In Portugal, the update to the 2004 study "Impact of recognition and certification of skills acquired through life" produced in 2007[3] 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%

[1] 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

[2] 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*

[3] Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos (CIDEC), May 2007, The Impact of the Recognition and Certification of Lifelong-Learned Competences: Update, published by the Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional (DGFV)

Attractiveness of the system	96	4.6%
Career progression	749	35.9%
Other unspecified reasons	749	4.1%
Total	2087	100%

Source: CIDEC "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.

1.7.2 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 1.2 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';

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- 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.

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1.8   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.

1.8.1   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[1]. 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.[2] Inadequate financial resources were stated as the second most prominent barrier by over a third of all the centres (38 per cent).

1.8.2   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[3], 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

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[1] 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)

[2] The Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos – CIDEC (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)

[3] 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

generally more used to formal examination procedures, and in many cases have not received detailed training on how to implement such (validation) assessment methodologies.[1]

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[2] 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.

1.8.3   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.

1.8.4   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.

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[1] Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007
[2] FETAC (2007) Recognition of Prior Learning; Evaluation Report 2007.

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.

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.[1]

1.8.5 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[2].

1.8.6 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.[3]

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.[4]

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[1] New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

[2] Yrjölä, P. (2000) Näyttötutkintojärjestelmän kokonaisarviointi. National Board of Education.

[3] National report on the progress in the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2005, p.13

[4] Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

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1.8.7 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"[1] 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.

1.8.8 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*"[2] 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.[3] As a result, while requests for information regarding VAE have increased considerably, only a small number result in an actual application.[4] 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.[5]

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[1] Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Económicos, CIDEC (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)

[2] Haugerud,.V., Røstad, S (2004) *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget, sluttrapport.* Oslo: Vox

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

[4] ibid

[5] 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

1.8.9   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.[1]

1.8.10   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)[2]. 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.

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[1] Refernet (2005-2006) , Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, France, published by Cedefop
[2] Charraud, A-M., The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

1.9   Success Factors

1.9.1   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. [1]

1.9.2   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. [2]

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:

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[1] *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden,* Refernet CEDEFOP
[2] National Report on the Progress in The Implementation of the Education And Training 2010 Work Programme

- a national information campaign based on two main services: the internet portal www.vae.gouv.fr[1], 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.[2]

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.[3]

1.9.3 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.

1.9.4 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 consultation process among all stakeholders to assist the development of a quality

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[1] This website, specifically dedicated to VAE, has contributions from all the ministries and other stakeholders involved.
[2] Ibid
[3] Charraud, A-M, The French approach of VPL, An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

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. [1]

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).

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[1] Notice that the universities are not included as a signed party in the agreement

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1.10   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.