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Country report

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on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

Germany's federal structure determines shared competences of the *Bund* (German federation) and the *Länder* (federal states) in education and training. The *Grundgesetz* (Basic Constitutional Law of the Federal Republic of Germany) stipulates that primary responsibility for legislation and administration in education rests with the *Länder*. The scope of the Federal Government's responsibilities in the field of education is also defined in the *Grundgesetz*, according to which the *Bund* bears responsibility particularly for the regulations governing the following domains of education:

- In-company vocational training and vocational further education
- Admission to higher education institutions and higher education degrees (here the *Länder* may enact laws at variance with the legislation of the Federation)
- Financial assistance for pupils and students
- Legal protection of participants of correspondence courses
- Regulations on entry to the legal profession
- Regulations on entry to medical and paramedical professions
- Employment promotion measures as well as occupational and labour market research

Due to Germany's federal structure, a common legal framework and a standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level and across education sectors does not exist in the country.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is taking place in all education sectors. However, all education sectors have different, but tailor-made approaches to validation in place. Moreover, validation of non-formal and informal learning supports the transition from one education sector to another, for example from school to VET or from VET to higher education.

Since the introduction of the Vocational Training Act in 1969, the *Externenprüfung* (External Students' Examination) provides a legally based instrument for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by giving access to the regular (final) examination within the formal VET system without prior formal training. So far, the External Students' Examination has been the major instrument related to validation within vocational education and training. In Higher Education (HE), decisions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) regarding crediting qualifications acquired at work are implemented by federal state laws. Within this legal framework, validation initiatives primarily take place at university level. There are a number of elaborated validation instruments within the Adult Education Sector and in the Third Sector (Further and Continuing Education and Training).

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG, *Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*) was introduced in 2012. It is meant to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications acquired abroad. This Act is currently perceived as a starting point to shift paradigms with regards to validation. This is due to its consideration of professional experience as a central aspect of an individual's competence profile and vocational qualifications, and its openness to validation of non-certified learning, albeit only for holders of a formal foreign qualification. This potential is currently explored at project level.

At national level, the topic of validation is currently discussed in different initiatives and projects. Discussions on referencing the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning to the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) are still in progress.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

Further steps have been implemented during the past two years. Within the formal system of education, which already contains elements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, bottom-up and top-down approaches complement each other.

Since 2014, two intertwined national working groups have been convened on the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level. An expert working group on referencing results of non-formal learning to the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) was convened by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK). The working group provided its recommendations to the DQR working group in 2014 (see Expertengruppe, 2014). The recommendations are still under discussion within the DQR working group. The second working group has been convened by the BMBF on the subject of “validation of non-formal and informal competences”.

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) is extensively monitored and the validation opportunity integrated into the BQFG through the so-called “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” (qualification analysis) has been researched and further developed in the context of two projects: “*Prototyping*” and “*Prototyping Transfer*”. The “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” is currently taken up in the “*ValiKom*” project that explores a similar approach emerging from foreign qualifications. The “*ValiKom*” project aims at developing a standardised procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by taking into account the approach established in the frame of the BQFG. Due to its consideration of professional experience as a central aspect of an individual’s competence profile and vocational qualifications and its openness to validation of non-certified learning, the BQFG can be considered as a catalyst for further development of validation-specific methods, quality criteria, training for validation professionals, information, advice, and guidance (IAG), etc. The “*ValiKom*” project is currently exploring a potential transfer of results to a wider target group.

In addition to these operational approaches, there have been a number of further initiatives and (research) projects undertaken or started on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A research project on the implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning was implemented by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in 2015. The focus of validation efforts is therefore primarily focused on validation in the context of vocational education and training and on the existing formal education structures and standards.

The *External students’ examination* as well as measures described with regard to *higher education* and validation in the *Third sector* in the previous Inventory updates (such as in the 2010 and 2014 country reports), remain in operation.

Validation in Germany is widely understood as an overall process that includes all four stages of validation, as well as one step within the validation processes in between assessment and certification (Annen & Bretschneider, 2014). However, in practice, the understanding of validation still differs across education sectors and thus leads to the need for further discussion and confidence building in order to develop mutual understanding and trust as a basis for next steps related to validation.

Although awareness about validation opportunities among potential validation users is still at a rather low level, research suggests that awareness of and trust into the existing validation instruments seems to be increasing; this is especially so in the context of the BQFG, targeting primarily immigrants/refugees due to its focus on foreign qualifications. There have

been efforts undertaken with regard to the development of validation infrastructures, including awareness raising, IAG, etc., in the context of immigration. They are strongly related to the BQFG, but there are also a number of other validation instruments and initiatives implemented by different bodies across the country and targeting the validation of learning of immigrants/refugees

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is taking place within all education sectors in Germany with all sectors having different approaches in place. Approaches to and understanding of validation differ.

In 2013, two working groups have been convened on the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level. An expert working group on referencing results of non-formal learning to the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) was convened by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) in April 2013. This expert working group provided its recommendations to the DQR working group in 2014 (see Expertengruppe, 2014). The recommendations are still under discussion within the DQR working group.

The second working group has been convened by the BMBF on “validation of non-formal and informal competences” in order to exploit expert knowledge from policy, practice, science and social partners and to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning on a political level and in practice through a joint approach. The working group identified thematic areas to be addressed within future activities (BMBF, 2015a).

The Coalition Agreement between the political parties CDU, CSU and SPD (CDU, CSU & SPD, 2013) specifies the development and testing of methods for the recognition of informal learning in the context of vocational education and training. This is also where initiatives with regard to validation have been focused on in the past two years (2014-2016).

Overall, validation in Germany can still be described as a colourful mosaic of local, regional, sectoral and national approaches and initiatives which also reflects the allocation of responsibilities within the complex German educational system. Experts therefore claim that a national validation system has not yet become apparent in Germany, although it is discussed in the framework of the European education policy debate (Dehnbostel, 2015).

The *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, BIBB) currently implements the project “*Einführung von Verfahren zur Validierung nichtformalen und informellen Lernens – Anforderungen und Handlungsoptionen*” (Implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – requirements and possible courses of action). This project intends to: a) identify quality indicators for validation methods; b) analyse existing validation options in Germany based on the identified indicators; c) develop scenarios for the different variations of possible validation methods; and, d) evaluate those scenarios regarding their potential realisation. Results are to be expected by the end of 2017.

In 2015, an expert monitoring has been implemented by the *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (BIBB) and Bertelsmann Stiftung regarding expert opinion on opportunities and limitations of validation methods for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The monitoring stressed the need for a stronger appreciation (valuing) of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. 70 % of the experts support a nation-wide validation system. Current validation opportunities such as *Externenprüfung* are considered as insufficient by the experts. (Velten & Herdin, 2016)

2.2 Validation in education and training

As discussed in the previous Country Updates, legislative provisions are in place for validation in the field of **vocational education and training**. This includes the External students' examination under § 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and § 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (HwO), which is targeted at people with vocational experience and legitimises admission to the final examination in a recognised occupation that normally requires formal training in the dual system. Therefore, the External students' examination leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regularly acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade.

In the context of the external examination, the "*Teilqualifizierung*" (partial qualification) is a potential result of the validation of non-formal and informal learning within vocational education and training. 22 occupations have been itemised into "*Ausbildungsbausteine*" (training modules) within the project JOBSTARTER CONNECT. The approach does, among others, allow for acquiring such an "*Ausbildungsbaustein*" through a competence assessment based on professional experience. The modules prepare together for the external examination within the targeted occupations (Schöpf, 2015).

Similar to the External students' examination within IVET, admission to **further vocational education** examinations in the context of the "*Industriemeister*" (industrial master) and "*Handwerksmeister*" (master craftsman) is also possible via validation. In addition, access to the examination can be granted by work experience only. Attendance of preparatory training for this examination is not compulsory.

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) – being in place since 2012 – is of major relevance here. It primarily serves the assurance of skilled labour as well as the integration of migrants in Germany. All persons possessing a qualification acquired in a foreign country have a legal right to have the equivalence of this qualification verified by a competent authority within three months based on this law. The Act applies to initial (IVET) as well as further vocational education and training (CVET). However, it does not lead to the same certificate as the formal learning pathway, but it leads to the same rights of use (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014). Engelmann & Müller-Wacker (2014) claim that a shift of paradigms has been started by the Recognition Act by considering professional experience as a central aspect of an individual's competence profile and vocational qualifications (BQFG §3, Abs. 1). However, experiences on how this is applied in practice, are different. Interviewees state that, in most cases, professional experience showed by validation candidates is sufficient in order to close gaps within formal education pathways. Engelmann & Müller-Wacker (2014) see a need for more coherence in the validation of non-formal and informal learning through professional experience.

This Act also entails in § 14 other procedures for the determination of equivalence when no proofs for prior learning can be provided, which opens opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This paragraph intends to give access to equivalence assessments for professionals who cannot provide relevant documents on their foreign formal qualifications or their further vocational education and training for reasons beyond their control. It also applies to those who, in addition to their formal qualification, claim to have professional experience for which they do not have formal proof. This is therefore the first time concrete methods for the assessment of competences below legislative level are legally specified. About 79 % of "*Handwerkskammern*" (Chamber of Crafts) confirm the high relevance of professional experience within the recognition process. (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder 2014). This "*Qualifikationsanalyse*" has been subject of the "*Prototyping*" project (2011-2014) that developed standards, supporting structures and tools for the implementation of "*Qualifikationsanalyse*" in the framework of the BQFG. The successor project "*Prototyping Transfer*" (2015-2017) aims to increase the number of quality-assured Qualification Analyses (BMBF, 2015a).

As of 2015, a new project “ValiKom” (11/2015-10/2018) has been started. Around two million young Germans aged 20 to 34 did not complete any formal vocational training. They acquired relevant skills and competences through the work process but lack a certificate or a comprehensible document demonstrating what they know and are able to do. Progression routes and social participation is hampered on impact. Moreover, employers face a variety of documents job seekers present that they cannot easily understand.

As a result, the German government has stated in its coalition treaty that it seeks to develop and test new processes leading to transparency and recognition for people who have non-formally and informally acquired skills. To this purpose, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), together with the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), agreed to ask eight chambers of both sectors to conduct the pilot project “ValiKom”. The aim of the project is to establish a framework with a view to validating occupational skills and competences through standardised procedures, assessment criteria and tools.

The project’s approach refers to the prevailing training regulations and occupational profiles and, at the end of the day, issues a certificate expressing the extent to which the skills demonstrated are equivalent to the ones regularly gained under the vocational training act.

The project addresses not only low skilled adults working in Germany but also employees with a diverse career and background who wish to access the system of further training. In addition, refugees with work experience but without formal qualifications who are regularly not targeted by the Recognition Act (BQFG) are intended to benefit from the validation procedure as well.

Within **Higher Education**, the situation primarily remains the same as described in the country report in 2014: the decisions of the KMK which determine the framework for recognition by universities remain in place. These relate to providing credit for competences acquired at work (2002, extended 2008) and granting access to HE for qualified workers (2009). Validation of non-formal and informal learning within higher education has been further taken up in the framework of the ANKOM-initiative described in the 2010 and 2014 updates and is also part of the “*Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen*” (Advancement through Education: Open Universities) initiatives in the sense of permeability between vocational education and training and higher education. Higher education initiatives in this context are implemented primarily by individual higher education institutions and partnerships. In this context, either so-called ‘individual’ or ‘global’ procedures can be employed, or a combination of both. Individual procedures are based on proof provided by applicants that are compared to the contents of a degree programme. Global procedures are based on a comparison of vocational curricula and curricula of higher education programmes to identify global equivalences that can be recognised (see Stamm-Riemer, Loroff & Hartmann, 2011). However, only degrees that result from formal further training are relevant to this. Since special work experience is a precondition for the acquisition of these degrees, the approach may also be regarded as recognition of non-formal and informal learning. On the other hand, initiatives aiming at the recognition of learning from higher education, in the context of vocational education and training, take place on project basis and are usually limited to a particular region.

The validation of learning undertaken by means of open education resources (OERs), specifically in the context of **MOOCs and Open Course Ware** initiatives, is at an early stage of development and very heterogeneous. MOOCs are specifically available in the context of higher education, but also within adult learning. Nevertheless, the recognition of learning is treated very differently from one provider to another.

The *OPCO12* initiative has been implemented by a consortium involving, among others, higher education institutions. The initiative provided recognition opportunities in the context of ECTS points for students at the Frankfurt University when combined with tutorials or

additional performance records. Alternatively, online badges on three levels have been awarded based on course performance. In addition, the *Kaiserslautener Open Online Course* (KLOOC) awards ECTS points to students at TU Kaiserslautern. Similar initiatives are carried out in other universities. The platform diversity offers a specific ECTS-Track that involves a final examination and ECTS points from the university of the lecturer. It is however up to the learner's university to recognise those credits.

The adult education centre, MOOCs (VHS MOOC), and the "mooin" learning platform work with a badge system for its participants. There is no data available about the level of acceptance or recognition of such badges on the labour market or in society at large.

However, validation of learning undertaken by means of OERs does so far not play a major role, according to studies and publications (see DIPF, 2016 and BMBF & KMK, 2015).

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Further Projects and initiatives directed towards auditing individual competence profiles in order to define a career project or plan a professional reorientation or training are often (but not exclusively) initiated below legislative level. This includes, to a large extent, validation opportunities that have been described in the 2010 and 2014 updates such as:

■ **ProfilPASS**

ProfilPASS identifies skills and competences gained throughout life. It is available as an *eProfilPASS* and a regular *ProfilPASS* and can be used with and without consultation of a qualified coach. The *ProfilPASS* system is scientifically accompanied by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) and the Institute for Development Planning and Structural Research (ies).

■ **"Qualipass/Qualipass – Bildungspass Baden Württemberg" (Education pass Baden Württemberg)**

Qualipass addresses young people and adults; the latter with a special instrument. It documents a wide range of practical experiences and competences gained in different settings and is used together with coaches. It has a strong focus on voluntary engagement and is overseen by Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg.

■ **"Qualifizierungspass" (Qualification pass)**

The Qualification pass is used in order to document vocational qualifications and experiences within and outside of formal initial and continuous VET. It can be used within post-qualification related to the *External students' examination*, as described above. It is handed out by providers that comply with standards for post-qualification, which have been upon with the BIBB. It has therefore a direct link to the formal education system and its results can be used to obtain access to the *External students' examination*.

■ **AiKomPass**

A new approach, the *AiKomPass*, has been developed in the project 'Recognition of informally acquired competences (AIKO)' in Baden Württemberg. The approach focuses on results of informal learning related to work in the metal and electrical industry. The tool is meant to support skilled workers as well as job-seekers in their career development.

In the context of collective labour agreements, a number of branches validated competences acquired through informal learning with qualifications in the formal education system. Examples are the metal and electrical industry, as well as the building industry. However, this is not based on an actual assessment, but on the performance rating of employers with regard to individual employees' competences. There is usually no documentation of this classification. (Schöpf, 2015)

Furthermore, there are a number of approaches applied at company level; those are, among others, assessments, competence checks, diagnostics, personnel and work analysis approaches or supplier certificates (Dehnbostel, 2015).

2.3.1 Skills audits

To better integrate young people into training and counteract shortages of skilled staff, the BMBF, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the Federal Employment Agency (BA) consolidated and expanded certain funding measures in 2014. The “Educational Chains” initiative (*“Abschluss und Anschluss - Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss”*), funded by the Federal Government, BA and ESF, aims to provide up to 500 000 potential analyses for students at schools and career start coaching for up to 115 000 students at around 2 550 schools between 2015 and 2018. These activities will be supplemented by careers orientation measures, career entry support activities and special training support measures. The whole of the process from vocational orientation to the start of training is documented by using a central organisational and support instrument such as the **career choice pass (Berufswahlpass)**. The aim is to introduce this into all schools and forms of schools on a gradual basis. Since July 2014, the National Association *Berufswahlpass* is coordinated by the “*Servicestelle Bildungskette*” at the BIBB. Currently the Federal and Länder governments are negotiating the sustainable anchoring of the Educational Chains approach in the regular Länder education and training system in Federal-Länder agreements.

Under the jurisdiction of the social code (SGB II and SGB III), the Vocational and Career Psychology Service (BPW) of the German National Employment Agency has developed **services for competence assessment**. They are intended to “*better identify soft skills of their [the employment agencies] customers and use the results for job search and targeted integration measures*” (IAG, 2014, p.6). In addition, this profiling of the German employment service can be seen as a kind of skills audit. This profiling includes competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning. It is based on a multistage process in order to identify different competence dimensions (IAB, 2014):

- K1 – Questionnaire for the self-assessment of performance within professional life;
- K2 – Test to assess perception;
- K3 – Assessment of performance orientation; and,
- K4 – Assessment centre to assess social and communication skills. The results of this assessment are used internally within job-search assistance. A certification for external use, such as for job application, is not yet foreseen (Schöpf, 2015).

2.4 Validation and the third sector

A number of different certificates and validation opportunities exist in the third sector, in order to document voluntary engagement. Major certificates in this field are:

- “Kompetenznachweis Kultur” (Certificate of Competence Culture)

The “Certificate of Competence Culture” is usually awarded to young people up to the age of 27 and covers different areas of competence development outside of formal education settings. It is mostly used to document competences acquired in the context of artistic and cultural youth work, such as activities in art or music schools, theatre and dance workshops, media centres or museums. The competence certificate follows a portfolio approach and is implemented in four steps: (1) a praxis analysis that identifies the potential competences that can be acquired within a relevant programme; (2) an observation of the young person’s performance by a qualified coach; (3) a dialogue between the coach and the young person on the observation results in order to start a

self-reflection process; and, (4) a documentation of competences in the competence pass.

- “*Nachweis International*” (Certificate International)

“*Nachweise International*” documents the participation (Certificate of Participation International), the engagement (Certificate of Engagement International) and the competences (Certificate of Competence International) acquired in international youth work projects. The Certificate of Participation International contains a short description of the sponsor, a brief explanation of the work field of international youth work, as well as a characterisation of the project and its educational goals. The Certificate of Engagement International contains all information on the Certificate of participation. In addition, engagement demonstrated individually by the young person, as well as their active contributions, are described. The Certificate of Competence International gives testimony in detailed form to individually demonstrated competences, which have been worked out in an especially developed procedure of certification. It can only be issued by certified KNI-coaches and consists of the four steps competence-based analysis of a project, surveillance, dialogue and text of evidence. Target groups are the participants of international youth work projects.

The *Certificate of Competence International* is based on the *Certificate of Competence Culture*. Both issuing organisations agreed on common education standards for their coaches and are based on the same quality assurance mechanisms.

Other relevant certificates are:

- the Youthpass;
- JuLeiCa (Jugendleiterkarte, Youth Leader Card);
- the above-mentioned Qualipass/ Qualipass – Education pass Baden Württemberg (Bildungspass Baden Württemberg);
- the Certificate of Competence Hessen (Kompetenznachweis Hessen); and,
- the above mentioned ProfilPASS.

All those certificates have a coaching/training system and/or an approval system in place for documentation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. In addition to the above-listed system, a number of other certificates exist that are purely based on a self-assessment approach or limited to a certificate of participation.

Links to the general education system are so far not in place although strongly advocated by youth and youth workers. On the other hand, such validation results have been evaluated as very positively perceived by potential employers. (Baumbast, Hoffmann-van de Poll & Lüders, 2012).

3 Links to national qualification systems

The German Qualifications Framework (DQR) is expected to support fostering of the learning outcomes approach through underlining the importance of what a learner knows, understands and can do rather than the place and duration of learning. It is therefore considered to provide an important impetus to the topic of validation. Based on descriptors for learning outcomes, the DQR is generally open for the alignment of learning outcomes of all education sectors and is expected to support the permeability of the entire education system, as well as the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Following the referencing of formal qualifications to the DQR, the referencing of competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning is intended to be the next step (BMBF, 2015a).

An expert working group on referencing results of non-formal learning to the DQR was convened by the BMBF and the KMK in April 2013. The working group provided its recommendations to the DQR working group in 2014. The working group, in their recommendations, referred to: standards for documentation, assessment of learning outcomes, input criteria, employability as a criteria, framework curricula in organisations, quality assurance, weighting of referencing criteria, relation to qualifications within formal education and the scope of referencing process (see Expertengruppe, 2014). The role of the time spent in training has been heavily discussed in the expert working group and it has been concluded that a minimum learning volume is necessary in order to reach a certain level of vocational 'active' competence (Nuissl, 2014).

The expert working group's recommendations are currently under discussion in the DQR working group (BMBF, 2015a). At this point in time, the discussion has a focus on fostering understanding and acceptance across the different education sectors as a basis for mutual trust.

4 Standards

Formal education programmes and certificates are the major reference for validation processes in Germany (Gössling & Sloane, 2015). This is also underlined by the above-mentioned expert working group that recommends a comparison of outcomes of the non-formal and informal learning with those of formal qualifications in every case (Expertengruppe, 2014). Formal qualifications provide the standard against which non-formal and informal learning outcomes are assessed. Validation aims on stating equivalence with a formal qualification or certificate. Referring to recognised standards facilitates the acceptance of validation outcomes. In this sense, the *External students' examination* also applies the same standards and assessment of learning outcomes as used within formal vocational education and training. Therefore, it also leads to the same certificate as formal education, having the same market value. Similarly, also within higher education, learning outcomes obtained in non-formal and informal learning settings are usually compared to the standards of the given formal programme.

In 2014, the Board of the BIBB concluded a recommendation on the structure and design of training regulations within VET and a related set of guidelines that refer to the DQR and include a structuring of training regulations into fields of action (BIBB, 2014a). This is supposed to facilitate the comparison between reference standards and the identified learning outcomes. This revision of qualifications is considered to contribute to comparability and permeability of the German (vocational) education system. (Annen, Gutschow & Münchhausen, 2015)

The above-described Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG), with the focus on the recognition of formal qualifications abroad, also refers to the standards of the formal education system (IVET and CVET). However, the equivalence assessment does not lead to the same certificate as the formal programme does. Studies to investigate the market value and the acceptance of those alternative recognition-based certificates are currently underway, as well as projects to improve their acceptance.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Responsibility for the different approaches to validation is held by responsible organisations, as described in the 2010 and 2014 updates and summarised below.

In the case of the *External students' examination*, all the different aspects from designing the procedure/approach to evaluation and review are the responsibility of the competent

authority. Competent authorities are mainly the Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of Industry and Commerce and Chambers of Agriculture – the responsibility depends on the recognised occupation requiring occupational training. The Vocational Training Act (§ 71) designates the respective competent bodies.

Similarly, universities are responsible for the aforementioned individual or global procedures concerning *access to higher education for qualified workers*.

In **Higher Education**, the KMK and federal state laws provide the legal basis and the coordination of the various validation processes, which are under the responsibility of the universities that are autonomous. The *ANKOM*-Initiative was financially supported by the BMBF; the task of scientific supervision is to establish a dialogue between the relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, vocational training institutions, students-unions, universities and the scientific community.

The field of recognition of foreign professional *qualifications* encompasses several different areas of responsibility: information, promotion and raising awareness are the duty of public authorities. Custom-fit counselling and guidance to applicants is the mission of 16 regional networks across Germany. The competent authority in charge of the equivalence assessment depends on the profession: for each regulated profession, there is a special law and institution to administer it (e.g. in the healthcare sector). In the field of industry and commerce, applications are given to IHK FOSA; in handicrafts there is a system of main chambers to guarantee an efficient and consistent practice of assessment. Certain chambers develop experience regarding certain countries of origin. Other local chambers can contact them and ask for an evaluation and if possible confirmation of equivalences (BMBF, 2014, p. 32f). The implementation of the BQFG is monitored by BIBB.

The different competence passes, as they have been described above, are each coordinated by a particular institution. Those have been partially referred to already above.

A central institution or a standardised institutional framework for the overall coordination of the different validation approaches and systems is not in place. Different stakeholders are involved in different systems depending on their responsibilities. Within all validation processes directed towards formal qualifications, the responsible stakeholders that can award these qualifications and respective certificates use their formal standard as a reference, as described above.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Awareness-raising is improving in the context of projects which are delivered below legislative level.

It is also improving in the context of demographic change and the implementation of the Professional *Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG)*, which shows the strong political commitment to this issue. The online platform “*Anerkennung in Deutschland*” (Recognition in Germany) contains a section on the “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” with information available in 15 languages. The overall portal “*Anerkennung in Deutschland*” is available in eight languages and has so far attracted more than 3 million visitors. The project “*Anerkannt – Anerkennung von im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen in der Arbeitswelt durch Arbeitnehmervertreter fördern*” (Recognised – Fostering recognition of foreign qualifications in the world of work through employee representatives) was implemented between January 2014 and December 2015 and is an example of attracting interest. It aimed at training in-company experts on recognition topics with a specific focus on the recognition of foreign qualifications as in the BQFG.

The *DABeKom*-database provides information on validation of competences acquired in a vocational context at universities in Germany. The information is based on the details provided by universities on a voluntary basis. A similar database development has been announced for Baden-Württemberg in order to increase transparency and information for potential users of such validation opportunities, but also among universities. The database is expected to be available by the end of 2017.

However, many people are still not aware about the validation opportunities which are available in Germany. The research project about the *External students' examination* stated that 54 % of interviewed persons had found information about it "by accident", while only 46 % searched purposefully for information on the initiative (see Schreiber, Gutschow, Weber-Höller & Gei, 2012, p. 21).

Internet, meetings and written information are typical channels of information. In many cases, content is presented to a target-group in a specific manner. A lack of transparency concerning existing procedures was also identified by interviewees. Schöpf (2015, p. 107) states that information easily accessible via electronic media, such as through search engines and relevant search terms, primarily leads to scientific and education policy-related publications. He concludes that orientation in the World Wide Web is therefore rather difficult.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

Information, advice and guidance on validation is usually already linked to a concrete validation opportunity (Schöpf, 2015), as they are described above.

Information, advice and guidance regarding the *External students' examination is provided by the competent authorities*. There are supporting documents which can be used for the *External students' examination*.

The first step in the procedure for *access to higher education* for qualified workers is the provision of counselling (see Stamm-Riemer, Loroff & Hartmann, 2011, p. 61). Guidelines, such as user guides, application forms and information material (ibid. p. 62) are provided.

The *IQ-network* provides first-stage advice in Germany for applicants for an equivalence assessment in the context of the Professional *Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG)*. A new project of BMBF with DIHK "ProRecognition" establishes advisers on professional recognition also in eight delegations of German Industry and Commerce worldwide.

Candidates for professional recognition are also informed about possible alternatives like the *External students' examination* if applicable. Based on the individual initial situation, applicants are transferred precisely to the appropriate institution that carries out the equivalence assessment and supports the applicant to arrange the necessary documents. In the field of industry and commerce, the IHK-FOSA has been created, and in the skilled crafts sector there is a main chamber in each of the Länder. Furthermore, a first-stage advice procedure has been developed within the project "*Prototyping*" that contains specific guidelines for advice in the context of the "*Qualifikationsanalyse*" (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2012). The successor project "*Prototyping Transfer*" continued those efforts through further activities related to information, advice and guidance. A number of further initiatives on information, advice and guidance in the framework of the BQFG exist across Germany.

As outlined in the 2010 and 2014 update, a specific counselling concept has been developed for the *ProfilPASS* system. Apart from the *ProfilPASS*-counsellors, there are 36 *ProfilPASS*-dialogue-centres which promote the *ProfilPASS*-system in their region. They employ field workers which cooperate in networks with the counsellors. At the start of the *ProfilPASS*-process, the users receive information about informal learning, recognition and the *ProfilPASS*-approach. During the approach, the identification of competences takes place

before the personal and individual educational planning is carried out. The provider is responsible for the counselling; that is why the range of counselling is tailored to the target group of the providers. The consultation is always centred on the individual, since the *ProfilPASS* is an individual and personal tool. An electronic version of the *ProfilPASS*, the *eProfilPASS*, was introduced in 2012. In the framework of the KISS project, both passes have been translated into other languages.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

Measures to enhance awareness are informative meetings about the approaches and procedures. Often they are combined with exchange of experience amongst counsellors. Meetings are organised by the umbrella organisations. The *IQ-network*, as well as the *ProfilPASS-system*, are supported by internet-based forums for interactive communication about practical problems and to exchange information.

In the framework of the BQFG, the *BQ-Portal* has been introduced as a common point of reference on information about recognition of foreign qualifications, for employers and competent bodies. In addition to being an information portal on foreign qualifications, it also incorporates information and exchange about “*Qualifikationsanalyse*”, as described above. In a new project of BMBF and DIHK, which was launched at the beginning of 2016, “*Unternehmen Berufsanerkennung*” (Enterprise Professional Recognition) employers are informed about the advantages of recognition of foreign qualifications. A study conducted by the BIBB in 2014 found that 40 % of the interviewed companies are already aware of the BQFG (BMBF, 2015b), but only 15 % have employees with foreign qualifications.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Competent bodies decide about the admission to the *External students’ examination*. Under § 45 of the Vocational Training Act resp. § 37 of the Crafts Code, the board of examiners takes the decision in case of doubt. Only in the event of a tie, the chair of the examination board has the crucial vote. A specific profile for the chair of the board does not exist - of course, the chair (like all members of the examination board) has to be competent in the fields of examination and must be suitable to act as an examiner.

Academic staff decides on validation procedures for *access to higher education*. The specific profile is the respective professional background. The majority of lecturers in higher education take their decisions regarding the validation and recognition of students’ learning outcomes informally on the basis of their professional competence. Within the areas “health and care”, as well as “economics”, decisions are often taken systematically with regard to standardised approaches (cf. Völkl 2011, p. 182 f.). The qualification of the academic staff regarding validation and recognition procedures vary between higher educational institutions.

First-stage advice for the Professional *Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG)* equivalence assessment is delivered by professional counsellors. The equivalence assessment itself is operated by staff of the competent authority. There is no specific profile. With regard to the “*Qualifikationsanalyse*”, this is done by experts in the vocational field in question who receive the task to assess the required set of competences in a particular field (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014).

The condition for becoming a *ProfilPASS* counsellor is either a formal qualification in the field of counselling or vocational experience connected with further education in the field of counselling.

7.2 Qualification requirements

There are no mandatory qualification requirements for validation practitioners. Institutions pay attention to the professional competences by considering initial qualifications of applicants and ensuring further education regarding the appropriate institutional standards.

However, the “*Prototyping*” project developed requirements for experts in the context of the quality standards for the “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” in the framework of the BQFG. The experts are required to have a similar or higher vocational qualification in the vocational field in question and three years of professional experience within the profession. Furthermore, the project specifies requirements with regard to intercultural and communication competences and methodological competences. Every “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” is assessed by two experts. The second expert needs to prove three years of professional experience within business, administration or education (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2014).

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

For the *External students’ examination*, no detail information concerning training and support for practitioners is available.

As stated by interviewees, there is no validation-specific training and support offered for staff involved in validation processes within higher education. There are however non-formalised networks emerging, such as through the ANKOM-initiative.

The need for further training of experts for conducting the “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” in the framework of the BQFG has been taken up by the “*Prototyping Transfer*” project. The project developed and provided training and supporting material for counsellors and experts at competent bodies as well as individual support for those practitioners conducting “*Qualifikationsanalyse*”. The training for validation practitioners in this context contains training on the legal and organisational framework, preparation of qualification analysis (such as appropriateness of methods), implementation of qualification analysis (incl. aspects such as openness for alternative solutions developed within work practice and not matching requirements in the formal education system) and intercultural aspects.

Within the *ProfilPASS-system*, counsellors undertake training over at least two days. The qualification consists of the development and philosophy of *ProfilPASS-system*, recording and developing competences and developing course scenarios. A formal qualification in the field of counselling or vocational experience and further education in the field of counselling is the condition for admission. Furthermore, there are continuous information meetings for the exchange of experiences with a thematic focus on local, regional or national levels offered by dialogue-centres and the national service-centre. Similarly, training and support is also provided for counsellors for the validation opportunities in the third sector stated above.

8 Quality assurance

Quality standards (usually based on the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning) have been developed in the context of different validation measures. These quality assurance approaches are being developed by projects/initiatives themselves and they are partly mooted by relevant stakeholder groups that are involved in the developments such as educational practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Interviewees suggested that all approaches basically take into consideration the European Guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning.

For the *External students’ assessment* there is no explicit quality assurance system. It is the responsibility of the competent authority to verify the procedure. The BIBB research project on “Recognition of vocational competences using the example of the accreditation for the final examination within the frame of the external students’ examination” provides first insight

into the verification procedure (see Schreiber, Gutschow, Weber-Höller & Gei, 2012). Moreover, there are assistance documents to support the procedure. More than half of the competent bodies covered within the mentioned research project indicated not to use such assistant documents; 40 % refer back to internal guidelines (idib. p.30).

The individual university is responsible for the quality of the individual procedure for access *to higher education for qualified workers*. However, the ANKOM-initiative developed guidelines for quality assurance within recognition of competences acquired in vocational settings and outside higher education within higher education programmes. Those guidelines refer to learning outcome descriptions, equivalence checks, formal integration of recognition, information and advice and evaluation.

In the context of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) there is a specialist centre for recognition (*Fachstelle Anerkennung*) within the IQ-network that developed basic material for counselling. The *National Guidance Forum in Education, Career and Employment* register contributions of the IQ-network about quality in the context of counselling and competence assessment for migrants. Within the “*Prototyping*” project a guideline has been developed which is frequently used by the counsellors in the chambers (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2012). Furthermore, the “*Prototyping*” project developed quality standards for the conduct of “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2014). Those quality standards include considerations on process transparency; four-eye principle within observation; requirements on experts; preparation for the expert role; toolbox of instruments; documented observation; openness for alternative solutions; and, support in understanding the task. Data about the practical application of those standards is not available.

ProfilPASS counsellors are granted a high degree of advisory freedom in order to react flexibly to the different basic conditions in which they work. The *ProfilPASS* quality concept guarantees the necessary freedom of action to counsellors and preserves the interests of the users by implementing agreed standards. Processes within the *ProfilPASS* organisation are disclosed and responsibilities are defined on different levels, e.g. a qualification and (re-)certification system controls counsellors’ access to the *ProfilPASS* counselling and the quality of their work. Apart from that, an explicit standard has been formulated for the input, process and output dimension of the work. A feedback system grants users and stakeholders the possibility to provide feedback. A periodical evaluation of the entire system will enable further development of the *ProfilPASS*-system. Furthermore, a low-threshold evaluation is an integral part of the system. These evaluations can address different levels and be used as a kind of monitoring system. The counselling process is evaluated from the user perspective. The qualifications of counsellors are evaluated, the support by dialogue-centres is evaluated from the perspective of the counsellors, and the support by the national service-centre from the perspective of the dialogue-centres.

There are only evaluations in the context of the different measures, rather than an overall evaluation framework. The *External students’ examination* has not been evaluated but, as mentioned above, a BIBB research project delivers insights into the procedures and general set-up of the system. Part of the ANKOM-project has been a formative evaluation of developments and implementation of the financed projects. The implementation of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) is monitored by the BIBB under the coordination of the BMBF.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

Data about a ‘total budget’ for validation efforts does not exist in Germany. Funding can come from public authorities, as well as the private and the third sector. Periods of funding

vary. Measures funded by the public sector are required to develop and realise strategies for sustainability.

Measures below legislative level tend to receive funding mainly from public institutions, e.g. the Federal Government or the Länder. This funding is limited for a transitory period and means that there can be problems to sustain measures in the long term. The ProfilPASS-system is an example of an initiative which has been sustained through a public-private-partnership.

However, interviewees claim that there is a need for further funding in order to support individuals seeking validation as well as institutions offering validation and IAG.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Competent authorities and universities undertake the procedures of access and recognition from their available financial budget and without further funding.

The check of the *External students' examination* is mostly free of charge for the applicant however some competent authorities charge for the admission process. Costs arise from examination fees, preparatory courses and travel costs. Actual costs of participants varied from EUR 1 871 to EUR 4 461, depending on costs for course fees, admission fees, examination fees, travelling and accommodation (see Schreiber/Gutschow/Weber-Höller/Gei, 2012, p. 42) other authors state a range between EUR 500 and EUR 7 000 for preparation and EUR 200 – EUR 450 for examination fees (Schöpf, 2015). Sometimes candidates are released from their companies to take part in the examination.

Costs for access to higher education for qualified workers can be found on the internet sites of the individual institutions (for example, at the high school of Heilbronn or the university of Stuttgart, where applicants contribute EUR 200 for the assessment).

The implementation of the *Vocational Qualifications Assessment Law (BQFG)* is the task of the competent authorities. Costs for “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” are strongly dependent on the nature and scope of assessment necessary in each individual case. The costs range between a double-digit EUR amount (within professions such as clerk) up to four-digit EUR amounts (such as within metal professions). Some individuals can qualify to receive financial support from the public employment offices. The “*Prototyping Transfer*” project provides additional funds for the realisation of “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” in the framework of the project (Böse, Tursarinow & Wunsch, 2016). Moreover, more costs can arise when the statement of equivalence is connected with a need for further qualification measures.

The competence passes are usually free of charge. Costs for the *ProfilPASS* entail EUR 30 for the instrument itself and, optionally, fees for counsellors (EUR 60 to EUR 120 per hour) and for seminars (EUR 250 to EUR 300) (Schöpf, 2015).

Some validation opportunities such as *Externenprüfung* or *ProfilPASS* are supported by the “*Bildungsgutschein*” (education voucher) of the “*Agentur für Arbeit*” (employment agency). Furthermore, the “*Bildungsprämie*” (education premium) of the Federal Government supports the *Externenprüfung*. General competence records, independently of specific occupational profiles, such as *ProfilPASS*, are however not supported through this funding scheme.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

No studies on the benefits of the various validation procedures in place in Germany have been identified for this report.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Data on beneficiaries is not in all cases readily available.

The data report to accompany the annual report on vocational education and training contains an overview of the number of candidates completing an *External students' examination*. The figures for the period from 2010 to 2013 have been summarised in Table 1.1 below.

Table 9.1 External students examination 2010 to 2013

Year	Total no of external examination (based on work experience)	Passed exams in %	Total number of examinations
2010	25 962	79.6	535 791
2011	26 109	78.8	531 501
2012	25 251	79.3	495 213
2013	24 429	80	478 374

Source: 2013: BIBB, 2015, 2012: BIBB, 2014b, 2011: BIBB, 2013, 2010: BIBB, 2012

According to statements of the Federal Statistical Office, the percentage of **qualified workers** among first-year HE students has quadrupled from nearly 0.5 % in 2001 to 1.9 % in 2010. Between 2007 and 2010, the total number of qualified workers increased from 3 040 in 2007 to 9 241 in 2010, which means a doubling from 1.09 % to 2.08 % of all first-year higher education students (Nickel & Duong, 2012). This figure further increased during the following years to 11 907 in 2011, 12 464 in 2012 and 13 215 in 2013 (CHE, 2016).

In the framework of the BQFG, there have been 60 “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” implemented in 2012, 66 in 2013 and 102 in 2014. About half of the 2013 “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” led to a certification of equivalence. The majority of the remaining assessments led to a partial equivalence. A total of 13 344 equivalence assessments have been completed based on the BQFG in 2013. (BMBF, 2015b) The reason for the rather low number of “*Qualifikationsanalyse*” is the lack of information and awareness of this option among competent bodies. Furthermore, the high efforts for such individualised assessments are perceived as an obstacle. (Böse, Tursarinow & Wunsch, 2016)

Since 2006, the *ProfilPASS* has been purchased by more than 170 000 people, of which half were adults (80 000) and the other half young people (91 000). More than 8 000 persons have been qualified as counsellors so far.

9.4.2 Validation users

Such data on users is not readily available for the different validation opportunities. Generally the focus seems to be on low-qualified workers, job returners and volunteers (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2015).

Data on users is available in the framework of the BQFG in general (see BMBF, 2015b). However, this mainly reflects users of the overall equivalence check based on formal training abroad rather than equivalence based on non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

There is a number of validation initiatives taking place that specifically target migrants/refugees. Many of them have already been described above, such as the BQFG primarily targeting migrants and the equivalence assessment of foreign formal qualifications. The “*Anerkennung in Deutschland*” portal provides a general entry for validation seekers with foreign qualifications, while *IQ-network* and the *BQ-portal* provide support and networking to employers and competent bodies when assessing foreign formal learning certificates (“*anabin*” is a similar information portal in this context). The project “*Anerkannt – Anerkennung von im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen in der Arbeitswelt durch Arbeitnehmervertreter fördern*” (Recognised – Fostering recognition of foreign qualifications in the world of work through employee representatives) was also described in the sections above. The projects “*Prototyping*” and “*Prototyping Transfer*” target foreign qualifications and therefore migrants too. The new projects of BMBF with DIHK “*ProRecognition*” (which establishes advisers on professional recognition in eight delegations of German Industry and Commerce worldwide) and “*Unternehmen Berufsanerkennung*” (“*Enterprise Professional Recognition*”) by which employers are informed about their advantages in the context of recognition of foreign qualifications are also applicable to migrants.

Furthermore, there are instruments available specifically for migrants, such as the “*Kompetenzbilanz für Migrant/inn/en*” (Competence balance for migrants). Competence balance focuses on adult migrants. It provides support in the identification and reflection of skills and competences acquired throughout life. This tool can also be adapted in the context of information and guidance related to the *External students’ examination*, as described above (Bohlinger, Splittstößer & Beinke, 2011).

Another example of validation information and guidance initiatives targeting migrants/refugees is *migranet* which provides validation information for migrants in Bavaria, with similar initiatives also existing in other “*Länder*”. Similar IAG projects are offered by the Employment Agencies (BMBF, 2015b).

In the context of higher education, the KMK issued a resolution on how to provide access to refugees who cannot provide proof of their prior qualifications (KMK, 2015).

10 Validation methods

For the admission to the *External students’ examination*, besides “standard evidence”, such as applications and CVs, formal evidence including qualified job references, attestations of employers, working contracts, trade applications and statutory declarations can be used. Alternative evidence includes references from customers, examples of work, information about former practice by the applicant him/herself, documents about a vocational or academic training that has been cut short, module-examinations in higher education and certificates of attendance or further education certificates.

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) foresees a number of concrete methods for the Qualification Analysis. Those are sample work, expert discussions, practical and theoretical exams (BQFG §14, Abs. 2). 88 % of competent bodies indicate that they apply sample work and 87 %, expert discussions (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014). Role plays, case studies, work samples and work trials in companies are also applied as methods for the Qualification Analysis.

Table 10.1 Methods applied for identification, documentation and assessment

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate	X		X
Declarative methods	X		

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Interview	X		X
Observation	X		X
Portfolio method	X	X	X
Presentation			X
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			X
Tests and examinations			X
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify	e-portfolios, so called “Qualifikationsanalyse” (BQFG)	e-portfolios, statutory declaration (BQFG)	

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11.2 Sources

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2016 Sources:

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- Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks (ZDH),
- Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW),
- Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. (IJAB).



Country report Germany

2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



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