TTnet WORKSHOP

Validation of competences and professionalisation of trainers

Cascais-Lisbon, 25-26 May 2000

Synthesis report

1. Aim

The aim of the workshop was to answer the following question:

How, and under what conditions, is the validation of trainers' competences, both professional and those drawn from experience, to be considered as a factor in the process of the professionalisation of trainers? Three aspects were considered here:

(a) the development of new, recognised qualifications related to the needs of the employment market;

(b) the introduction of transparency of trainers' qualifications related to specific job descriptions and profiles;

(c) better adaptation of training provision to needs.

2. General Framework

Two presentations made were given in order to set up a general framework:

Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop) gave an overview of the validation of competences in general, with the focus on non-formal learning. The concept of validation covers a variety of aspects, including *identification*, *assessment* and *recognition*. The results of non-formal learning are often not easily visible, so they have to be identified. They are of very variable quality, so they have to be assessed. The need for acceptance and formal credits leads to the necessity of recognition. Furthermore there is an important difference between *formative* purposes, which aim at feedback, and *summative* purposes, which aim at assessment and recognition.

Recent experiences at very different levels (*European, national, sectoral, enterprise*) show that the commonly used methodologies for the validation of non formal learning are not new and sometimes not really suitable. The most promising methodology is assessing the outcome in a practice-oriented setting, including elements of dialogue and reflection.

Anne-Marie Charraud (Ministry of Employment and Solidarity, France) highlighted various aspects of the problem of assessment in training professions. To her, the underlying question

is: 'How does one learn to be a trainer?'. She points out that one does not learn to be a trainer at school; the real qualification is based on experience or, in other words, on non-formal learning. For the validation of this experience-based knowledge it is very important to consider *which authority* gives *what kind of signal* on and in *which ways*. And to obtain results there have to be common references for assessment which, in the end, have to be the same for the results of training and experience.

3. Innovative experiences and developments at national level

Portugal

Horácio Covita, Marta Alves (INOFOR, Portugal): In Portugal the topic of the validation of non-formal learning is very important because there is a big gap between the average formal qualification and the 'actual' non-formal qualification among the population. Two examples were given by way of illustration, one of a *company* and one of a *trainer*. The big international company in the first example usually selects trainers by assessing their non-formal qualifications (performance, receptiveness, technical expertise, interpersonal skills, communication skills). The trainer in the second example has a low level of schooling but considerable experience as a trainer and a varied curriculum vitae. From this experience a 'Training Professionals Competences Assessment' model is derived for qualifying and validating training professionals in a new and flexible way.

Greece

Diamanti Stamatina (EKEPIS, Greece): In Greece EKEPIS (National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training Structures) is in the process of designing and implementing a 'National Accreditation System for Trainers' Training'. The chosen approach overcomes certain weaknesses in the existing training system, for instance the absence of a system for the training of trainers. It covers a wide range of competences: *academic background, professional background, teaching experience, pedagogical knowledge and skills, social skills*. For the future EKEPIS is planning an obligatory training of trainers through accredited training programmes.

United Kingdom

Stuart Bradley (School of PCET, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom). The well-known NVQ-system in England and Wales is going to be renewed as from with April 2001.

In this system the *Employment NTO* (one of 75 National Training Organisations), is responsible for developing qualification standards for trainers, with the focus on generic training skills. The standards are developed with an informal 'bottom up' method by organising focus groups of trainers, employers, customers and so on. The assessment is carried out by *Awarding Bodies* and monitored by the trainee. A wide range of methodologies is used, e.g. portfolio of evidence, internal and external verification, etc. The whole approach can be characterised as pragmatic and market-oriented.

Norway

May-Britt Ellingsen (NORUT, Norway): In Norway a *competence reform* is taking place, mainly directed towards the public sector and the compulsory education system but including the private sector by involving the social partners. Within this competence reform a '*non-formal learning programme*' plays a major role, aiming at developing a national system for identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. The underlying idea is cooperation between the education system and the workplace. One aim is to get more people into higher education. First experiences indicate that the integration of non-formal learning in the education system, once started, has a very strong influence on the character of the education system.

4. Discussion

A round-table discussion gave rise to a number of important questions and remarks, e.g.:

- The so-called key qualifications, such as communication skills, are very important in the context of the professionalisation of trainers, but it is very difficult to assess and validate them.
- The questions of validation of trainers' competences, the professionalisation of trainers and learning theory are closely linked.
- A very important and often problematic factor regarding assessment of non-formal qualifications is the qualification of the assessors.

5. Conclusions

Anne de Blignieres-Legeraud (Université Paris-Dauphine, France) summed up the workshop from the TTnet perspective. The main question is, under what circumstances and conditions does the validation of training professions leads to the professionalisation of trainers. In consequence, the discussion should focused primarily on professionalisation.

The question of the validation of non-formal learning and the professionalisation of trainers always depend on the national systems, culture and history. So it is very difficult to find common ground in a transnational discussion. The glossary which Cedefop developed in order to prepare the TTnet workshop could be very helpful by providing common definitions of terms.

Looking at recent experiences at the different levels (*European, national, sectoral, enterprise*), the emergence of a broader debate to incorporate experience into training and to recognise non-formal learning can be said to be a consequence of the increasing importance of lifelong learning, mobility, etc. Taken as a whole these developments are a major challenge for all actors in training and education; learning methods have to be adapted, the social dimension has to be given more preference, etc.

With regard to the subject of the validation of non-formal learning, there are a number of dilemmas to be resolved and some contradictions to be avoided. One major problem is that common standards of validation are needed, but there is a different kind of thinking and language at different levels and in different areas. A second problem is to strike a balance between blanket regulation (by the State) and opening everything up to the market.

> **For Ttnet, one priority objective came out of the workshop: to promote the development of common reference points and standards for the validation of trainer competences.**

Personal remarks by the rapporteur, Alfred Freundlinger (ibw, Austria):

The importance of non-formal learning is an inevitable consequence of the importance of lifelong learning (the thought of lifelong formal learning would be nothing less than a nightmare). Furthermore non-formal learning has proved to be more effective than formal learning in promoting the development of key qualifications and especially the development of those personal skills which make a good trainer or a good teacher.

Nevertheless there is no sufficient consensus about what kind of skills make a good trainer, how to identify them and how to assess them. Consequently a strong need is emerging for wide-ranging discussion and intensified research. The TTnet could contribute to both processes by promoting the development of common reference points and standards for the validation of trainer competences, by discussing the impact of (action-oriented) learning theory on the validation of competencies and by developing suitable assessment methodologies.

Suitable assessment methodologies are, as mentioned above, most likely assessing the outcome in a practice-oriented setting including elements of dialogue and reflection. And these are on the other hand exactly the most promising elements of a methodology to improve the working process itself in such a way as to promote and optimise non-formal learning and help enterprises to become learning organisations.

Teachers and trainers are therefore affected by our topic in two ways: firstly, the validation their competences needs improving, and secondly it is an essential part of their professionalisation. They have to know how to promote, optimise and validate non-formal learning to be able to optimise their abilities as teachers or trainers in formal learning settings. For only if formal learning has the character of interim input stations geared to the stream of every day non-formal learning will the idea of lifelong learning be realised.