
A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: Examples of Good Practice

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1.0 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

By Emmy Nelissen and Francesca Froy (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.1 Scouting Gelderland (The Netherlands)

1.1.1 Introduction

This case-study provides a description of a portfolio based model for validating informal learning gained during voluntary activity for scouting groups in Gelderland.

Scouting Gelderland is one of the regional offices for the support of Scouting and Guiding in the Netherlands, based in the province of Gelderland. Overall, 30 000 volunteers work for the Scouting in the Netherlands. The portfolio receives subsidies of the Province of Gelderland and additional funding for the CITO project by the Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning (Kenniscentrum EVC).

The profolio model has been developed and supported by a large partnership from Public/State bodies, private organisations and Third Sector organisations, as summarised on the Table below.

Table 33.1 Partnership Scouting Gederland Validation initiatives

Sector	Names of organisation
Public/state bodies	Province of Gelderland, Civiq (used to be SVM), EVC Knowledge Centre, CITO (educational), OVDB (educational), CINOP, European Youth Programme
Private organisations	Institutions for vocational education
Voluntary organisations/NGOs/ other civil society organisations	Other volunteer organisations like the Red Cross, LAVA and Spectrum

1.1.2 Aims and objectives

There are four main reasons why Scouting Gelderland became involved in an initiative to validate non-formal learning:

1. Many Scouting Volunteers experience difficulties in achieving recognition for the experience they acquire during their volunteer work. Scouting Gelderland therefore wanted to recognise competences acquired by their volunteers in order to acknowledge their efforts;
2. It was felt that validation initiatives might make the volunteer work within the organisation more attractive for young people;
3. Scouting Gelderland also wanted to increase recognition not only of the work and efforts of individual volunteers, but also of the entire Scouting organisation. Because

of their validation initiative, the Scouting organisation is now taken much more seriously by education institutions for example.

4. There was a desire within the organisation to properly establish and document the skills expected from group leaders, taking into account the needs of their team members.

1.1.3 How was the project developed?

In 1998, the Scouting organisation in Gelderland decided to address the issue that their many volunteers were not given adequate recognition for the experience and expertise they gained while volunteering. Consequently, Scouting Gelderland worked together with SVM (Stichting Vrijwilligers Management), a national organisation for the support of volunteer work, to identify appropriate validation mechanisms. Due to a lack of time and resources, the project developed relatively slowly until 2003 when the project received funding from the province of Gelderland to develop a set of validation instruments. The aim was to develop instruments which could be easily transferred to other volunteer organisations and recognized in other sectors. At the same time the Civiq (Instituut vrijwillige inzet, which used to be SVM) received a subsidy from the Ministry of Health and Sports to set up a parallel project examining general competency profiles together with NIZW (Innovatie partner in zorg en welzijn). The two organisations now regularly have contact with Scouting Gelderland through feedback meetings, workshops and other meetings.

1.1.4 Policy background

In the Netherlands, there is a substantial amount of best practice in the area of the validation of informal and non-formal learning, but no ‘common practice’. The validation of informal learning is being more rapidly developed for people with high skills (university entry systems) and with very low skills (disadvantaged groups) and less developed for individuals with middle range skill levels. It was suggested that this policy area could benefit from greater support from the Dutch government, particularly as it was felt that the Netherlands had fallen behind in comparison to other European countries with respect to government initiatives in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

1.1.5 Activities

The project of Scouting Gelderland involves the following activities:

1) *Setting up of profiles*

The organisation has developed three different competency profiles for volunteers – one for ‘leaders’, one for ‘team leaders’ and one for ‘group guides’. Profiles were built up through looking at the competencies held by current leaders, and discussions with volunteers about what support they would ideally like from a leader.

2) *Providing training*

Volunteers are not always aware of the extent of their skills and knowledge when building their profiles. Scouting Gelderland therefore uses training to raise awareness of these

competencies. A Swiss model ‘the CH-Q (<http://www.ch-q.ch/>)’ has been used to develop this training. Scouting Gelderland found about this model through the Knowledge-centre, and adapted it to the Dutch context. The training consists of three steps:

- what am I good in?
- how should I formulate my expertise?
- where can I actually use it?

Training methods included work with the ‘Star’ methodology (looking at Situations, Tasks, types of Action and Results), and ‘quality cards’ which help people to establish what kind of qualities they have, and what qualities are needed in various professions.

3) *Developing the Portfolios*

Each volunteer receives a portfolio describing the tasks and competencies required for their position, and appropriate competencies to aspire towards in the future. The portfolio gives the volunteer the opportunity to provide evidence for all the skills that they have learnt, and encourages volunteers to describe their skills using terms which will be understandable by future employers and educational institutions.

4) *Becoming acknowledged as a “learn firm” (Erkenning van leerbedrijf) in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, institutions of professional education (beroepsopleiding) are able to send their students to ‘learning firms’ (see www.ovdb.nl) to continue their learning in different settings. Through their involvement in the validation of learning, many scouting groups in Gelderland have now become officially registered as ‘learning firms’ for students who need to gain experience with working with youngsters. This opens many doors for Scouting Gelderland for more cooperation with educational institutions in the future.

1.1.6 How is learning assessed?

The Scouting Gelderland initiative is centered around on a ‘portfolio based model’ which is currently being actively promoted by the Kenniscentrum EVC (Dutch Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning). The focus is on individuals – learners, job seekers, volunteers, citizens- as it is the Centres belief that you cannot have a dynamic field of life-long learning if individuals are not part of the process. This represents a shift from a policy focus on institutions and the relationships between them (governments, social partners, education institutes/private public learning centres) towards one based on individual needs and learning plans. The centre believes that with the right support people can develop their own learning models, and learning careers based on identifying current competencies and future competencies they would like to develop. The centre advocates the right for every individual to have a personal portfolio, and a biannual update of such a portfolio with an advisor if needed.

The centre feels that if you start with an individual based portfolio methodology, the rest of the learning process will follow automatically as individuals seek out training to build on their identified needs.

The key steps to building up a portfolio are:

- 1) Finding out what the individual would like to do with their life: identifying goals and setting ambitions
- 2) Offering competence descriptions for tasks the individual is already carrying out
- 3) Adding descriptions of competencies which are 'in the neighborhood' of these tasks and which relate to the individuals future aspirations. This is the phase where teachers, trainers, career guiders come in to identify the potential for development of each individual. The aim is to empower people rather than exclude them from progressing further, and sensitive assessment mechanisms are used to keep people in the learning system

Kenniscentrum EVC takes the view that assessment should be flexible, and based on criteria related interviews, tests and analysis of portfolios by third parties. They recognize however, that this can make it more difficult for portfolios to be recognized by other organisations and institutions, and that the current 'bottom up' development of methods of validation of informal learning in Netherlands could undermine the transferability of such forms of certification.

EVC see individual portfolios as a bridge between personal ambitions and competencies and the work floor. They feel that in many countries, training provision is perhaps adapting too much to the demands of employers rather than the demands of individuals whereas educational supply should make a match between the needs identified in individual portfolios and the demands of employers.

1.1.7 How was the project managed and monitored?

The project was managed by Scouting Gelderland, with various theme groups being set up for the daily management of activities, supervised by the staff of Scouting Gelderland (of which Jo Peeters is a member). Volunteers are also highly involved in the design and implementation of the activities. The monitoring committee consists of members of the Civic Knowledge Centre, Province of Gelderland, Colleague volunteer organisations, and two people from the education sector (OVDB- Knowledge Centre for learning in practise in health, welfare, sports and service and professional education institute).

There is relatively little quantitative information about take-up of these initiatives as yet, however:

- Tests have been undertaken involving 10 to 20 volunteers;
- 50 of the 200 Scouting Groups in the Province of Gelderland are in the process of becoming acknowledged as 'learning firms';
- approximately 30 students are currently gaining experience through Scouting volunteer work in Gelderland. On a national level, many more students are making use of it and many more Scouting Groups are involved because the Scouting organisations in the provinces of Overijssel, Zuid-Holland en Limburg are also involved in similar activities.

1.1.8 Working in partnership

Scouting Gelderland approached CITO (the Institute responsible for setting up exam procedures in professional/vocational education) to establish how to use 'educational terminology' in the setting up of the competence profile. The aim was to achieve a degree of objectivity when describing skills in order to escape 'scouting jargon' and ensure the transferability of competency profiles to other organisations and sectors. Funding for this cooperation was provided by the Knowledge-centre for the Acknowledgement of acquired competences (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties Kenniscentrum). Each year they subsidise programs after a selection procedure. Scouting Gelderland delivers competence documentation to CITO who in cooperation with volunteers through response groups translate the language into educational terminology. Scouting Gelderlands work with CITO has been funded by the Kenniscentrum EVC¹, the Dutch Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning.

1.1.9 Drawing from other European experience

Before developing their volunteer profile, Scouting Gederland used their existing partnerships and networks to identify good practice and transferable activities from elsewhere in Europe. For example, the original idea for the 'competency profile' had already been implemented in the UK, Norway and Switzerland. The CH-Q model had already been piloted in Switzerland. Learning from elsewhere in Europe has helped to save 'reinventing the wheel', although it has been important to adapt tools to the specific national context. It was felt, for example, that the UK model for establishing competencies and acquiring promotions was too rigid to be used in the Netherlands.

1.1.10 Outcomes

- ***For the individuals***

There are many short term benefits for individuals who have done competency assessments whilst they are volunteering for Scouting Gelderland. For example, volunteers who have had their prior learning validated can be exempted from following certain formal training courses (formal training is required in particular in relation to working safely with children, dealing with disabilities, communication skills). It was also pointed out that having their skills validated had substantially increased the personal confidence of some volunteers.

When leaving Scouting, the volunteers mostly use their competency profiles to flow into education due to their overall young age profile.

We interviewed a volunteer who had had the following competencies validated through their work at Scouting Gelderland:

¹ Kenniscentrum EVC has a mission to work with government, independent and non-profit making organisations to support the development of bottom up life long learning practices through the valuation of prior learning. The centre employs 7.5 FTE people (15 people in total) in addition to extra staff funding through Leonardo and ESF projects.

- a) Seminar organisation
- b) Leadership skills for working with children
- c) Programming/planning/flexibility/being creative
- d) Budgeting

She identified that having her learning validated had increased her motivation during her volunteering and other professional activities. She had been able to transfer the competence profiling technique to her other work as a social worker. In this context, the profiling of social worker competencies had allowed them to establish new dialogue with their manager in relation to the provision of training/education.

- ***For the organisation***

The general profile of Scouting in the Netherlands has been raised, with wider recognition of the efforts made, and skills and knowledge of volunteers. The establishment of scouting groups as 'learning firms' has also given these groups a higher profile and greater recognition by educational institutions.

1.1.11 Sustainability

Once funding for the current project has finished, Scouting Gelderland will continue to disseminate and implement the project ideas. In addition, Scouting Gelderland has been approved for the pre-proposal stage of a Leonardo da Vinci (Brussels) project to continue their activities.

1.1.12 Transferability

Scouting Gelderland has successfully transferred its validation models to other organisations through cooperation with external organisations. This has been achieved through:

- cooperation with the members of the monitor committee of the project
- presentation of their project ideas to different conferences (for example educational conferences through the OVDB).
- the involvement of CINOP (Centre for the Innovation of Studies) in discussions concerning the development of the portfolios and related training
- volunteers spreading the model in other areas of their life²

² The volunteer we interviewed had been able to successfully transfer the competency portfolio technique to the social services organisation she works with.

1.1.13 Dissemination

The Scouting Gelderland project has been particularly strong at disseminating their activities within Europe. The organisation received funding through the European Programme Youth for a seminar that took place from the 20th until the 23rd of January in the Netherlands. Scouting and youth groups attended from Iceland, Norway, Hungary, Greece, Romania, Malta, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, UK, Denmark, Switzerland among others. This seminar involved sharing project results, explaining the instruments that had been developed and discussion and debate with international scouting groups. At the same time, Scouting Gelderland effectively linked up with a parallel seminar, “Bridges of Recognition” in Leuven in Belgium. The idea was developed to place a webcam and an internet access (video-conferencing) in the two seminars so that participants could communicate and build new contacts. Scouting Gelderland is also part of a European network for the exchange of experience also funded by the European Youth Programme. The countries involved are Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, Slovenia, Estonia and the UK.

Scouting Europe organises a European Conference every three years to develop a new European action plan. This conference took place last summer in Iceland and one of the priorities of the new action plan set up was the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

1.1.14 Success factors and barriers to be overcome

It was felt that the following factors have led to the success of the project:

- Cooperation with external organisations
- The involvement of the volunteers
- Good PR through the organisation of seminars, attending conferences and publishing in professional booklets (vakbladen)

Whereas the following four barriers were identified as preventing people from taking up the validation on offer by Scouting Gelderland:

1. Experience gained through Scouting is often not taken seriously. However this is currently changing because of the cooperation with CITO. The CITO logo on Scouting documentation has already made an important change.
2. Scouting still has an old-fashioned image and consequently does not attract many students to gain experience. However, as students become more enthusiastic about their internship within a Scouting group, they will attract new students;
3. It was felt that the Dutch government is not pushing the validation issue high enough on their agenda.
4. Many employers look negatively at scouting experience put on a CV. It will be important in the future for more networks to be built up with employers to show them the added value of experience acquired in volunteer organisations.

1.1.15 *Looking to the future*

When looking towards the future it was felt that the following factors could help support the further development of this type of activity:

At project level

1. More focus should be put on cooperation with employers
2. More assistance should be given to help volunteers how to put their Scouting experience on their CV. For example, the Scouting organisation in the UK has put a CV translator on their website. Netherlands should do the same. (See <http://www.scouts.org.uk/wps/portal/.cmd/ad/.ps/X/.c/720/.ce/3307/.p/2907#3307> under Network)

At national policy level

1. More involvement of the Dutch government would improve dissemination.
2. Greater identification at the national level of which competencies are required in which sectors and on which levels.
3. More support for individuals to design a portfolio model to meet their own needs. Advice for portfolios, payment for external assessors etc. Advice on who should take different responsibilities.
4. It would be useful to have extra funding to support subsidies for the costs of infrastructural change which is required by companies and organizations introducing the validation of informal learning
5. More cooperation between the government and social partners in this policy area;
6. More cooperation between different educational levels within the system: there are currently barriers between different educational levels which prevent this type of activity from developing further. For example translating normal secondary school diplomas into competencies is difficult, particularly due to the lack of communication between the initial education system and the post/training system. Building communications mechanisms is a slow process, as it requires cultural change.

At EU policy level

1. EU policy makers should make instruments like EUROPASS more practical – an instrument that could be better adapted to national circumstances
2. There should be more support for a European knowledge network to communicate and transfer examples of practice between different learning cultures.

In conclusion, Scouting Gelderland has taken important first steps to obtain validation of the competences of their volunteers. They have organised large-scale activities and have been successful in finding appropriate partners to address the issue of validation and disseminated their work widely throughout Europe.

In the future, Scouting Gelderland is keen to continue their validation work. With respect to the issue of proportionality, it is important that Scouting Gelderland ensures that their validation activities do not only benefit a limited group of people –their volunteers- but also a wider range of people. It is too early to evaluate at this stage the overall effect of their

activities, but the scale of their activities, their success in transferring their validation model to other organisations and the large scale dissemination of their activities, does indicate in the direction that their activities will have –in the longer term- a positive effect on the whole organisation and other volunteer organisations. It is crucial that in the near future, Scouting Gelderland monitors whether their validation activities make volunteer work for Scouting Gelderland more attractive and whether the entire organisation and other volunteer organisations receive greater recognition as learning settings and in their activities in general. If this is the case, the work of Scouting Gelderland will have a long lasting effect on the validation of volunteer work.

1.2 Corus Group

By James Winter and Emmy Nelissen (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.2.1 Introduction

Corus is an international steel and aluminium manufacturing and services company with an annual turnover of 11.5 billion euros and operating in over 40 countries worldwide. The Netherlands division of the company employs a workforce of 11,000 people. The Corus Training Centre, based in IJmuiden, North West of Amsterdam, is the training arm of the company in the Netherlands, and is responsible for the development of the validation programme (or, in Dutch, ‘*Elders Werworen Competenties*’ – EVC) within Corus.

1.2.2 Nature of activity

A portfolio based model of validating learning which has occurred in the workplace by non-formal means. The beneficiaries are awarded nationally recognised diplomas; MBOs, or ‘*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*’ (secondary vocational training), of which there are 4 levels. The validation process takes place following a request from the person’s line manager, based on the demand within the company for the recognition of the skills which the person has. The aim is to bring individual employees’ qualification levels to the appropriate level for the type of work they are doing. Corus’ training and EVC obligations are formalised through a labour agreement with the trade unions. The initiative is completely funded by the Corus Group.

1.2.3 Partners

The profolio initiative has been developed and supported by a partnership of Public/ State bodies, private organisations, including Corus, amongst others.

Table 33.2 Partnership Corus validation initiatives

Sector	Names of organisation
Public/state bodies	ROC – Regional Training Centre (<i>Regionaal Opleidingen Centrum</i>). These regional colleges for secondary vocational training are used to provide the validation for qualifications at Level 4. For level 5 qualifications – high schools (<i>hogescholen</i>), which offer professional higher education, are used as partners.
Private organisations	Vigor Transitions – an organisation that provides a link between Novacollege (a regional training centre/ROC) and the Corus Training Centre. The EVC process for Corus employees has 2 parts – the technical side and the assessment of the person’s potential to learn more. Vigor Transitions is involved in the assessment of this potential.

1.2.4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the EVC (validation) activity being undertaken by Corus Training Centre is threefold:

- For a company of Corus' type, it is difficult to find and maintain the right staff. EVC is a tool by which Corus can increase the flexibility of the workforce. It also helps ensure that employees are allocated the most appropriate work to their skills and abilities. It is recognised that most employees will not be able to undertake the same type of work throughout their career; therefore EVC provides a system allowing staff to make transitions from one area of working to another.
- Cost advantages – EVC offers Corus considerable savings in terms of training staff. A cost benefit analysis (see Annex 1) undertaken by the company demonstrated that validating previously acquired staff skills via EVC was much cheaper than training staff through traditional means. Traditional methods for training imply that a given employee will be away from the workplace for a considerable length of time, which often means the company has to pay for a replacement in the meantime. On the other hand, EVC minimises the impact on the individual's productivity within the company.

1.2.5 Project development

The project started around 2 years ago, when the Corus Training Centre began looking into alternative ways of training staff. The first EVC pilot within Corus emerged at around the same time as the Dutch government began developing the basis for EVC at the national level. At the end of the first pilot, the process and results were evaluated, and it was modified and re-initiated in the form of a second pilot. After this second pilot, the board of the Training Centre was asked to approve it, and EVC became an official training programme within Corus.

1.2.6 Policy background

During the past few years, the Dutch government has been increasingly concerned about the number of younger people leaving school with few or no diplomas. They drafted a programme to bring people's qualifications up to level 2 within the national system. EVC was the tool developed to achieve this aim. As mentioned above, the development of the Corus initiatives coincided with the government's development of EVC.

1.2.7 Activities

The EVC programme run by the Corus Training Centre involves the following activities:

1) 'Intake' phase and initial assessment

A flow chart was created (see Annex section of this report) to help manage the EVC process; the chart is the central reference point for the validation process of all individuals within Corus NL. Individual staff members cannot request EVC themselves; rather they

have to be recommended for it by their line managers. This ensures that the validation process is relevant to the company's needs. The process starts with an 'intake' of people aiming for the same qualification. Assessments are made of their educational and professional background to see if this provides a suitable platform via which they can gain the qualification. Validation is only provided for the next level up on the national qualification system – for example, if someone already has level 2 MBO qualifications, he/she can only undergo validation with a view to achieving level 3 qualifications.

2) *Portfolio preparation*

Following this initial assessment, the person is then shadowed at their workplace by an assessor; photographs are taken, working practices are assessed and a portfolio is created³. The work that is assessed has to be appropriate to the level of qualification that the person is aiming for. The findings of this assessment are then discussed with the line manager, a senior manager and the employee. Everyone has to agree with the assessment rating given before the process can move on to the next stage. Vigor Transitions is then asked if it can undertake an assessment of the learning potential for the individual in question. A starting date for the training process is then arranged.

3) *Vigor Transitions –evaluating the candidates' potential*

Vigor Transitions is a partner organisation working with Corus Training Centre in the running of their EVC programme. Created in 2001, and working with Corus for the past 2 years, their role is to assist in the portfolio development of the candidates. They evaluate the general personal competences of each candidate undergoing EVC before they proceed onto the technical assessment stage. Vigor transitions also work in collaboration with Nova College and the *Hogeschool* of Amsterdam. One of the grounding principles of Vigor Transitions is that the workplace is a richer learning environment than that of formalised education. This is why the organisation sends educational assessors to the workplace and not vice-versa. Furthermore, the concept of 'competence' as defined by Vigor Transitions is defined in terms of work that other people (managers etc.) trust you to undertake. This is why the EVC process in Corus includes consultation with the managers, peers and subordinates that work with each candidate in order to establish what their competences are.

Vigor Transitions recognise the importance of legitimacy in any assessment activity of this nature, and aim to implement standards which are in fact higher than that of the traditional routeways for qualification. They are currently working with the Ministry of Education to establish a system for accreditation to further enhance the legitimacy of their activities.

³ In some countries this may be considered against the protection of privacy of the individuals. This case can also raise some ethical issues reflected in the European Common Principles on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4) 'Filling the gap' between competencies and qualification aimed for

Following this, the Vigor Transitions report is then passed on to the Regional Training Centre (ROC), and they are asked to take on the technical part of the training process. The training centre then assesses the 'gap' that remains (if any) between the competences the candidate has, and the competences required in order to achieve the qualification. When a gap is identified, the school then takes on the task of completing the candidates training. This training has to take place within the candidate's workplace. Materials and equipment used are also those that the candidate uses within the workplace.

5) Certification

Finally, at the end of the process, if the candidate has been successful, the ROC provides them with a certificate stating the MBO qualification achieved.

1.2.8 Project management and monitoring

As mentioned above, the project has been developed following pilot projects, which allowed the team responsible for the EVC programme to identify weaknesses and accordingly make improvements. For example, after the first pilot, it was observed that communication for EVC was relatively poor; the communication aspects of the programme were assessed and improved, and 6 months later the pilot was restarted. A cost-benefit analysis completed relating to the EVC programme within the Corus group also demonstrated the added-value of the activities and showed how it helped the company make considerable savings on training and staff development.

EVC team:

Within the Corus Training Centre there are 3 members of staff responsible for the EVC programme within the company. They hire around 20 people to undertake the assessments from outside the Corus Training Centre.

Take-up numbers:

To date, around 400 people have been recommended to go through the EVC process developed by the Corus Training Centre. Of those, around 30% are not deemed to be suitably experienced or have suitable potential to continue with the EVC process. These employees are sent through the traditional training pathway (again, funded by Corus) for gaining higher qualifications.

Profiles of EVC candidates:

There is no one single job type for which EVC is applied within Corus, indeed, the model is flexible enough to be applied to any area of work within Corus NL. Job types for which EVC is applied include steelmakers, maintenance technicians, processing workers, photographers, office staff and fire safety workers.

1.2.9 *Outcomes*

- ***For the individuals***

From the individual's point of view, the main benefit of the EVC programme is that it allows them to gain higher level qualifications via their employer without the need to give up their job. EVC is often a vehicle for individuals to make progress within the company and gain promotions. Staff can pass through the EVC process multiple times, with a mandatory gap of 3 years between assessment periods (to allow the individual to gain enough experience on the job to pass through the next level of EVC).

It has also been observed that employees who have successfully completed an EVC cycle through Corus return to work with a greater self-esteem; which is not surprising considering that some of the candidates are people who have been on the labour market for several decades, and previously had no formal qualifications. This in turn helps improve motivation and morale in the workplace.

- ***For the organisation***

For the organisation, one of the benefits is customer satisfaction – Corus Netherlands has many high profile and prestigious customers, such as Ford, Volkswagen and Audi. These customers have exacting demands regarding quality and require that the people producing the material used in their manufacturing processes have a certain level of qualifications. For the company, the practice is aimed at maximising the potential of the workforce. The EVC process allows Corus to develop the qualifications of its staff to a higher level, while minimising the costs of so doing. Furthermore, EVC leads to the interlinked results of greater retention of staff and employee satisfaction. This saves the company having to continually look for and train staff from outside the company in order to meet production demands.

1.2.10 *Sustainability*

Validation of prior learning is viewed by the EVC team at the Corus Training Centre as a practice that is set to stay in the Netherlands. It is becoming an increasing normal way to train/educate people, and is likely to continue to do so.

1.2.11 *Transferability*

The model for EVC developed by the Corus Training Centre is highly transferable; as it can be applied to many different types of work (see above). This transferability is demonstrable by the fact that Corus asked another company, Nuon, an electricity generating company to test its model. For the individual, the validation practice utilised by Corus also has a strong transferable element – it is company policy to ensure that validation achieved for an individual in one factory is recognised in all Corus factories within the Netherlands – further enhancing the mobility of the workforce.

1.2.12 Dissemination and networking

All the EVC courses provided for Corus staff are fully documented and the procedures for obtaining the diploma are fully explained. When an EVC course reaches the examination stage, the EVC unit asks the examining board to go inside the factory to obtain feedback on implementation.

Regarding networks, Corus Training Centre is well connected with validation related networks in the Netherlands. The head of the EVC unit within the organisation has been involved in various commissions dealing with the subject. There are also links with the KVC (Knowledge Centre for Validation of Competences), high schools, government and other organisations that use EVC.

1.2.13 Barriers to be overcome

There are no barriers to take-up as such, although, as mentioned above, an employee can only be recommended to undertake an EVC programme by their line manager, to ensure that the validation will meet a real need within the company.

1.2.14 Looking to the future

At project level

One of the future innovations planned for the use of EVC within the Corus group is planned for employees who are unable to work due to illness/injury. EVC has been tested as a tool to enable them to return to the workplace, although not necessarily to the same type of work. Naturally, when someone is ill, it is not possible to assess their work competences, however, the compilation of their personal portfolio can be initiated. This can help start the process towards conversion from one working area to another, since the EVC programme not only assesses an individual's competences acquired, but also their *potential* for further training (the EVC team believe that all jobs have a technical component and an intellectual component – it is the latter that is dealt with when initiating EVC with people who are off work due to sickness). For example, this process has led in the case of one employee to convert from the steel production process to logistics work within the company hospital.

At national policy level

At the national level, EVC continues to gain importance, and further changes are planned for the EVC programme. The State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science, Mark Rutte is proposing a bill to modify the first law on EVC which was initiated in 1999. The new legislation is due to come into effect in January 2006.

At EU policy level

In spite of a number of recent encouraging developments validation at the European level is still very much in its infancy; therefore, it is a little early for Corus to make definitive

comments on developments. However, the company recognises the importance of validation at the European level, and is involved in exchange of information in this area. For example, the director of the EVC team in the Corus Training Centre will be attending and speaking at a conference on validation of informal and non-formal learning in Brussels in April 2005.

1.3 Record book for young people: Slovenia

By Papiya Chatterjee (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.3.1 Introduction

The Youth Academy project in Slovenia got interested and active in the validation of non-formal and informal learning as they felt it was an important issue as they ran training and workshops but found it frustrating that there was no recognition of this.

1.3.2 Description of the initiative

Validation of non-formal learning in the organisation takes place under a project called NEFIKS, and also through the Youth Academy project. Members of the organisation are asked to keep a record book, so that the following areas of their learning can be validated:

- Getting knowledge through work (so far this has been their studies, but it can be applied to work they get with employers)
- Active citizenship and responsible work projects
- Organised non-formal education such as ICT and project management skills
- Gaining knowledge at youth camps and voluntary work
- English language communication skills gained through experience abroad
- Other ways of getting knowledge e.g. through hobbies such as learning a musical instrument

The record book is used to collect traces of activity. Also personal achievement is observed 'post hoc' by the programme leader. The non-formal learning is assessed by both internal assessors and external assessors from youth centres nationwide.

The competence levels that can be validated within the organisation are different categories of youth working progressing from volunteer to youth leader to trainer. The competence levels are linked to the National Youth Council system of non-formal learning because this organisation devised this! The validation does lead to an internal certificate but this is recognised nationally.

The barriers to recognising learning gained outside formal education, are that it is not recognised as being necessary by the influential policy makers as they themselves do not have non-formal learning competences, and value the formal learning over non-formal.

1.3.3 Take-up and outcomes

Take-up of validation initiatives has been good – 1,000 people in the last year have used the record book for non-formal parts of their learning. The benefits are two-fold: volunteers can benefit from career progression to become youth leaders, and secondly members of the organisation can learn skills that are transferable outside the NGO sector such as ICT, and project management.

The main outcomes of validating non-formal/informal learning in the organisation are more structured career progression and greater equality, increased staff motivation through more involvement in the project, better fulfilment of the skill needs of the organisation, and the organisation as a whole gets a higher profile as a training centre.

The organisation would be helped in this initiative through more EU funding, changing the mindset of national policy makers, partnering with other businesses such as Addeco or Manpower to help their growth, and more effective validation would also be achieved through having a dedicated project manager who could just focus on the NEFIKS project.

1.3.4 Benefits and Outcomes⁴

Alenka has been a youth volunteer with the NGO for about two years, has recently been a beneficiary of the log-book. She is currently undertaking a degree in Sociology and Pedagogy which has some relevance to the post. She has undertaken several non-formal training courses to help her deliver her work, which have included sessions on motivation, project management, and planning your career. These courses have been certified and a record is kept in the NEFIKS log book. The main benefits of validation of non-formal learning are seen to be improving access to training courses, and access to promotion. More generally, the benefits are seen as increasing motivation and commitment to work for the organisation, and also helping considerably in planning one's future career path.

She, however, was of the opinion that the certification would not necessarily have value outside the organisation as in general formal learning is prioritised above non-formal learning in most of Slovenia.

Overall, she felt that validation of non-formal learning had been most instrumental in giving a clearer idea of personal skills and future career planning. She found that it really helped in terms of gaining practical experience and was more useful than formal education in terms of finding out what her skills and abilities are which are relevant to her future career, and hence is able to plan her career path more productively. She did not find any negative aspects relating to her involvement in validation initiatives.

⁴ Based on an interview with Alenka Petek, beneficiary.

1.4 Education and Training Service Centre, Iceland

By Papiya Chatterjee (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.4.1 Introduction

The Education and Training Services Centre became involved in the validation initiatives as the Ministry of Education designated it as a leading body to develop validation tools in Iceland. Funding of the validation initiatives takes place through the Ministry of Education.

1.4.2 Description of the initiative

The organisation works on several validation initiatives, but the best example of these initiatives is the Telecoms Project - Joint development project between Iceland Telecom, Efling Trade Union, Starfsafl (fund for the educational support of untrained workers in the greater Reykjavik area), Reykjavik Technical School and the Education and Training Service Centre. The project aims to develop methods of assessing and validating the competence of unskilled employees at Iceland Telecom for them to shorten the formal telecommunication technician study path at the Reykjavik Technical School. As a part of this project, special focus is placed on developing methods for the employer to verify the workers' job related skills.

This project focuses on work-related competencies (practical) acquired in the workplace; namely – measurement, technical, planning, material use and connections (technical). The methods of validation that are used in the project include self-evaluation, formal tests, simulation, and observation. A committee of internal assessors (in-house teachers), external assessors (careers counsellor + external teachers) and supervisors assess the non-formal learning which is validated in the project. The workers have a say in the identification of competences to be validated and the methods for validation as it is important that they are happy about what they are being assessed on and how they are being assessed, so it is very much a two-way process based on consultation with the employees about the validation methods that suit them. This method of self-evaluation followed by interviewing with the committee proved to be very successful as it has both enabled the employer to verify the employees' work related skills and abilities; and enabled the employees to achieve greater success in the formal education part of their learning as well. The next step for the committee is to formulate a plan of what to assess and how to assess it so that this guide can be used in the future with other employees.

The competence levels which can be validated within the organisations are at two levels – basic and higher. These competence levels are related to the secondary school curriculum (101 and 102). The validation does not lead to a certificate directly but the outputs of the validation process are that the individual can shorten their education by skipping formal courses, and therefore gain their formal qualification more quickly. In other words, the beneficiaries can skip parts of the formal education because their non-formal learning (on-the-job skills) can be used as credits towards their formal qualification (which leads to a certificate).

The barriers to recognising learning gained outside formal education are perceived as:

- difficulty in measurement i.e. areas of non-formal learning are more difficult to measure as they are not necessarily assessed through formal examination
- difficulty in comparison between formal learning and non-formal learning because of the measurement problems so formal learning is often perceived as being superior to non-formal learning
- attitudinal barriers which stem from the above two points and it will take time to recognise that individuals can learn outside a school/academic and in a more practical environment.

1.4.3 Outcomes and take-up

This project has worked particularly well because all the partners are committed to the idea of validation of non-formal learning, and realise that it is a process which takes time to achieve success (partly due to the aforementioned barriers). The organisation does feel it could do more in this area, but will have to approach it incrementally, as changes in deep-seated attitudes take time. This is also a political issue and in order to do more about promoting non-formal learning initiatives, it needs funding and therefore needs to get buy-in from all stakeholders. The specific support that the organisation needs to get involved in validation initiatives more effectively is mainly to learn from practical examples from other countries (it has already done this partly through attending EU-level conferences). Also workers who have been through the validation process should share their success stories in order to convince funding bodies that there is a need there. Exact needs should be identified through a skills mapping process between company needs and individual skill needs to establish exactly what needs funding. The organisation needs support from businesses at a sectoral level, which again requires a more positive attitude towards non-formal learning to begin with.

There has been about 50% take-up of the validation initiatives in this project. This means that of all the employees who were offered validation methods within the framework of this project (including self-evaluation, formal tests, simulation, and observation), about half chose to take them up. The benefits that the beneficiaries have gained as a result of the validation initiatives include:

- increased motivation at work as they are happier at work through having their skills recognised
- increased job security as a result of gaining qualifications
- increased confidence
- increased motivation to study as they are part of a group and not on their own
- fairer career progression as the employees are on a more level playing field with those who have formal qualifications gained through school

The benefits for the telecoms company are:

- increased staff motivation means that they are more likely to stay with the company because they realise that the company values their contributions
- the skill needs of the organisation and the employees are more closely aligned
- the employees project a more positive image of the company to customers as a result of their more positive attitude towards working for the company.

1.5 E.E.D.E., Greece

Anne-Marie Nevala (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.5.1 Introduction

E.E.D.E. is a major Greek not-for-profit organisation. Organisation offers a number of different post-graduate programmes, among other shorter courses and seminars. The Association itself is partly funded by the Government and partly by the private sector partners and looks after education and training needs of the Greek business sector.

E.E.D.E. developed a self-standing validation method to validate informal and non-formal learning of those with extensive commercial work experience (mainly in management or marketing).

1.5.2 Description of the initiative

Rationale and funding

The organisation developed the system because there was a clear market demand for it. At the end 1980s the Greek private sector complained that there was a lack of high quality training for highly positioned business executives and entrepreneurs. Many held years of managerial experience but did not have any relevant qualifications. They were keen to develop theoretical understanding of management practices as well as improving competitiveness in an increasingly competitive and changing market place.

The initiative is mainly funded by tuition fees. Development work of the programmes was co-financed by partner / member organisations of E.E.D.E.

E.E.D.E.

E.E.D.E. offers four different post-graduate certificates:

- Post-Graduate Programme on Business Administration
- Executive MBA with Bath University, UK
- Post-Graduate Certificate on Marketing from Chartered Institute of Marketing
- Quality Management

These programmes recognise prior learning, both informal and non-formal, since they are open to individuals who have a university degree *or* possess relevant work experience.

Organisation of learning

Relevant university qualifications offer an automatic access to these courses. However, those with relevant work experience can also apply. Their informal and non-formal learning is assessed mainly through face-to-face interviews with programme managers from E.E.D.A.

Assessment of prior learning

All the promotional material clearly states who are able to apply on the courses. The assessment process is not strictly regulated, decisions are case-by-case decisions based on interviews. All applicants need to carry out an interview with two members of E.E.D.A staff who are normally either directors of studies, programme co-ordinators and/or academic advisors.

Interview is based on finding the following:

- Current job description: position and role
- Possible previous work experience
- Career aspirations
- Age (young persons can not access Executive MBA course as it is aimed at those with considerable work experience)
- Reasons for wanting to do the course
- Personal capability and motivation to complete the course
- Personal qualities
- Hobbies

Interview language depends on the language of studies. If the course will be in English, the interview will be carried out in English too. This is done to assess the language capability of applicants.

Training

Programmes last for one year and there are 4 thematic cycles which all end in examinations. Every student also needs to submit a dissertation at the end of the course.

Students may obtain some exemptions if they hold relevant qualifications. In these cases students need to provide E.E.D.A with relevant transcripts. Those who accessed the course on the basis of their work experience can not be exempted from any further courses.

Certificates

Certificates are granted for those who successfully pass all exams and dissertation. They are recognised as individuals 'possessing extraordinary management knowledge and ability'. These post-graduate diplomas are compatible with university master's degrees. But the certificates themselves do not form a part of Greek national education system but enjoy recognition from employers in Greece. E.E.D.A itself is well known institute among the private sector in Greece who have a long history providing high-quality non-formal training for the Greek business life.

Some of the certificates also enjoy social recognition internationally as the qualification frameworks of the MBA programme and marketing diploma were originally developed in the UK.

Validity

The certification system is not part of any formal validation system, but E.E.D.A. have developed their independent method to assess applicants' prior learning. Their validity is widely recognised by employers.

Students are constantly consulted about the validation process. Every student on the course is encouraged to fill in evaluation sheets and give feedback to the programme management.

1.5.3 Outcomes and benefits

Approximately 2000 individuals have obtained one of the E.E.D.E. certificates since 1989.

Benefits for individuals

Those with work experience can immediately access high quality education, rather than having to spend years going through basic training.

Benefits for companies

Most participants are paid by their employers. For employers this validation methodology offers quick and cost-efficient method to up-skill their employees. In the long term it improves effectiveness, motivation and capability of their key employees.

1.5.4 Barriers met and future support needs

Our interviews highlighted as barriers and future support needs the following:

Barriers

- Greece is a small country where only a few institutes have resources to set up similar initiatives.
- Qualifications from abroad are increasingly popular.

Supportive policy frameworks

- More joint, European wide programmes on validation of informal and non-formal learning.
- More direct funding from the national level for development of validation schemes.

1.5.5 Best practice and conclusions

This methodology offers a non-bureaucratic process to validate informal and non-formal learning of business managers and in essence provide them with an access to master's level education on the basis of their work experience. The method was developed to take into consideration needs and demands of the private sector. It is cost-effective method for both businesses who sponsor their employee to undertake this training and for participant themselves who want to expand their knowledge on management or marketing.

1.6 Cork Institute of Technology

By Ray Coughlan, Cork Institute of Technology

1.6.1 Introduction

The Department of Education Development (DEIS) was established by the Institute in July 1996 with a mission to innovate in education for quality and access. It operates generally to assist the Institute in developing its education/training provision to meet the changing needs of various client groups and in making this provision available to an increasing range of clients. In pursuing its mission, DEIS has engaged in developing, piloting and evaluating innovative interventions in education and in the subsequent integration into mainstream of those deemed to have been successful and appropriate.

This has resulted in five main areas of activity:

- Research/Development in Education
- Course Design/Development as a partnership process with a range of client groups
- Development of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy/practice and the provision of support for the RPL process
- Development of e-learning provision and support for this provision on an Institute-wide basis.
- Course development and delivery in the field of Community Education and Development

1.6.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Within the context of the National Framework of Qualifications the Institute has developed a comprehensive policy on RPL, which has been recommended by the Academic Council and agreed by the Governing Body (see below). The RPL process is based on the assessment of learning evidenced within a learning portfolio and measured against particular learning outcomes for the award of specific credit and/or grades - as outlined below.

Portfolio completion by the learner is supported by a mentoring process provided by dedicated academic staff of the Department of Education Development (DEIS). Staff development and support in the area of RPL for the institute academic staff is also provided by DEIS. A course in RPL mentoring and assessment is currently being uploaded to the WebCT Learning Management System. A website dealing with current and future development in RPL is currently under construction and will be maintained by DEIS on a continuing basis.

To date within the Institute over 1000 students across twelve academic departments have been awarded credit within the National Framework of Qualification at levels 6,7 and 8. It is anticipated that in excess of 250 students will be similarly recognised within the current academic year (2004/5).

Current research work within DEIS in the area RPL relates particularly to recognition of work-based and community-based learning using authentic assessment methods and to the use of rubrics in the assessment process.

1.6.3 RPL Policy at Cork Institute of Technology

Introduction

RPL:

Recognition of Prior Learning is the generic term for systems such as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Advanced Academic Standing which are used within Higher Education to describe the awarding of credit to students on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission. The philosophy underlying RPL is to enable and encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education, leading to qualifications, by awarding or recognising credit for what they already know from the course curriculum. The onus is on the student to demonstrate the prior learning, by preparing and submitting adequate evidence, under the guidance and advice of the institution.

There are two main categories within RPL:

- Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APEL): the awarding of credit for uncertificated learning gained from experience. It should be noted that academic credit can be awarded only for achievement of learning outcomes, not experience per se.
- Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): the recognition of formal learning for which certification has been awarded through a bona-fide educational institution or other education/training provider. Under the principle that such credit should only be awarded once, such prior learning requires recognition rather than accreditation.

Basic Principles

- The generic issue addressed in this document is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which includes Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL);
- Prior Learning refers to learning which occurs before admission to a course or to the relevant stage of a course;
- Prior Learning includes both experiential and certificated learning;
- Exemption from subjects or modules may be granted at the non-award stages of a course on the basis of recognising prior learning, according to the rules and processes stated in Sections 2 and 3;
- Exemptions are granted at the commencement or during the operation of a stage of a course and are recorded at the relevant Examinations Board Meeting;
 - Where the prior learning has not previously attracted credit under the ECTS framework or under a framework articulating with it, credits may be awarded for that learning in the context of the relevant course schedule and according to the rules set out below;
 - Credits and exemptions are awarded on the recommendation of the Academic Council;

- Exemptions are not allowed at the award stage or for elements of a course contributing to the award. However, for students with relevant prior learning, arrangements can be made for the consideration and recognition of this learning as indicated in Section 1.3.

Recognition of Learning at Award Stages, including Contributing Elements:

- Where students have substantial, relevant prior learning they may submit a learning portfolio, detailing their prior and current learning, including any additional information that may be specified;
- This portfolio will be assessed and credits and/or marks/grades may be awarded. Any marks/grades awarded will contribute to the overall classification of the award;
- In the case where the prior learning has been certificated and credits given under the ECTS framework or under a framework articulating with it, no further credits will be awarded, but such credits can be recognised and transferred.

Criteria

The following standard criteria for the implementation of RPL apply to all courses. However, a course may operate outside the criteria but all such cases should be specified in the approved course documentation.

RPL in Non-Award Stages:

Recognition or accreditation will only be given:

- for complete modules/subjects;
- where a minimum of 50% of the learning outcomes for the module/subject have been achieved;
- for a maximum of 50% of the modules/subjects for the stage;
- up to a maximum of 50% of the total credits for the stage;

Marks/grades will not be awarded at non-award stages. Where an end of year classification is to be calculated, such calculations will be based entirely on the modules/subjects that have been examined.

RPL in Award Stage(s)

Any stage which has an input to the overall classification of an award is deemed to be an award stage for the purposes of this document.

Recognition or accreditation will only be given:

- for complete modules/subjects;
- where a minimum of 50% of the learning outcomes for the module/subject have been achieved;
- for a maximum of 35% of the subjects/modules for the stage;
- up to a maximum of 35% of the total credits for the stage.

Subject exemptions are not granted at the award stage and, instead, marks/grades are awarded, as indicated in Section 1.3.

Component Subjects

Where an examination subject comprises component subjects, and the criteria for RPL have been met by the student for some but not all of the component subjects, recognition or accreditation can be given through a Section 1.3 process, with the marks/grades awarded being combined from those of the examined component subjects to give an overall mark/grade for the examination subject.

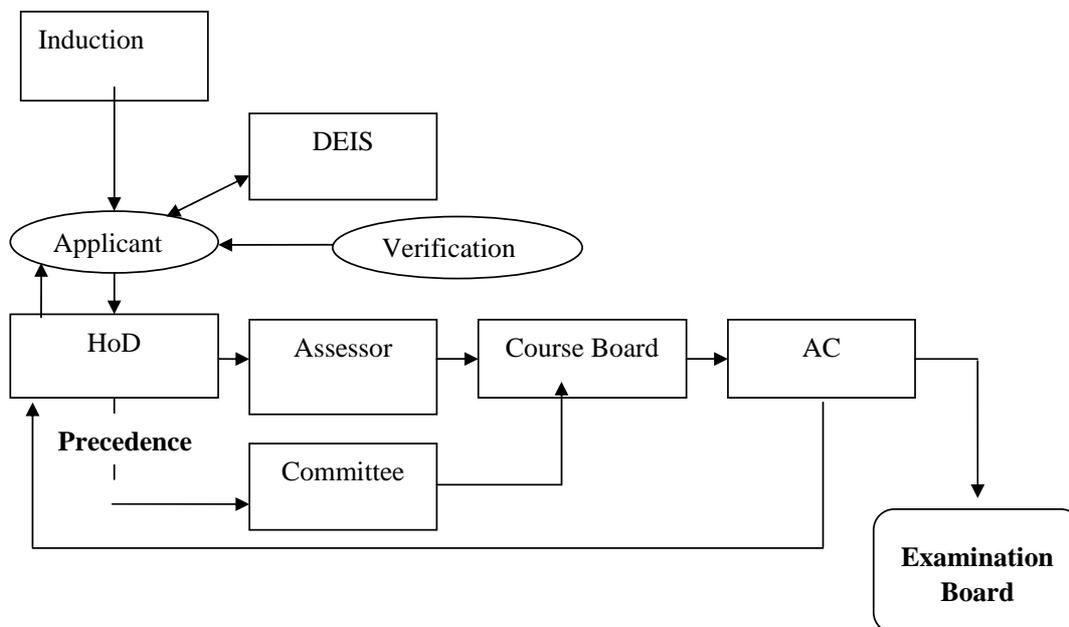
RPL Process

- The relevant Department informs all new students about Recognition of Prior Learning, including the granting of credits and/or exemptions, as part of the induction process.
- The application for RPL is a rolling process. However, applications for RPL in a subject are not accepted after the first examination sitting for that subject.
- The student is required to initiate the process by applying in writing to the relevant Head of Department, providing all appropriate documentation in support of their application. The Department will advise and assist the student regarding the documentation needed and presentation of their case.
- Where prior certificated learning is the basis of the case, the student is required to provide the relevant syllabus, the examination paper and a transcript of results. Where experiential learning is involved, the student is required to provide a learning portfolio for assessment. All such information must be independently verified.
- The Course Board has responsibility for assessing the application and making a recommendation for the granting, or otherwise, of credits and/or exemptions to the Academic Council.
- Where no precedence exists or where experiential learning is involved, an assessor appointed by the Head of Department, normally the subject lecturer, will evaluate the information and make a recommendation for each subject. The opinion of the assessor is then forwarded by the Head of Department to the Course Board, along with all relevant documentation.
- Where precedence exists, the Course Board may delegate the decision to a committee including the Head of Department and Chair of the Course Board or Course Co-ordinator. All decisions of this committee, together with the relevant documentation will be communicated to the Course Board for its next scheduled meeting;
- The Course Board may recommend or reject the request for RPL, or seek further input from the student. This could take the form of a written submission or interview or other methodology, as appropriate.
- In reaching its decision, the Course Board must satisfy itself that the student has presented learning of an appropriate standard.
- The recommendation of the Course Board is submitted to the Academic Council for final decision. A copy of the supporting documentation is provided along with the

recommendation, the original documentation being retained by the Department. All relevant documentation is available to extern examiners.

- Once a decision is made by the Academic Council, the Head of Department informs the student in writing of the outcome and copy the letter to the Course Co-ordinator, subject lecturer and year co-ordinator, if applicable.
- The various stages of the RPL process are shown on the flow chart in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flow-chart of RPL Process



Implementation

- The provisions of this document will be implemented initially for a pilot period of two years;
- It will be subject to review by the Academic Council after the pilot period;
- An advisory group will be appointed by the Academic Council to facilitate the implementation of the RPL scheme during the pilot period. The Advisory Group will provide guidance and assistance to Course Boards and Academic Council.

1.7 ELBUS, Norway

Anne-Marie Nevala (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.7.1 Introduction

The lead organisation, ELBUS, is the National Centre for Electro technical vocational post education in Norway. It is a not-for-profit organisation owned by NELFO (The Electro technical Contractors' Association) and EL & IT (The Norwegian Electro technical Workers' Union). ELBUS together with other partners from Norway and 4 other countries developed a methodology to map key competences and skills in electro-technology companies in order to be able to better match the business development strategies with professional competences, skills and aspirations of employees and potential employees. A fundamental element of this methodology was development of a process to identify, document and assess professional and social skills of employees and potential employees. In general terms, this means highlighting visibility of learning taken place outside of formal training and education system.

Project target groups are employees and human resource managers in the electro-technical industry.

1.7.2 Description of the initiative

Rationale

The project developed pan-European methodological tool for documenting and assessing accumulated professional and social knowledge and skills of employees / potential employees in the electro-technology sector. Accumulated knowledge and skills here refer to learning acquired outside of formal education and training.

Working in partnership

The methodology was developed by the leading partner ELBUS together with national bodies, sectoral associations and vocational training centres from Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, Norway, and Greece. The methodology has been piloted and tested (this process is still on-going today) by electro-technology companies in each partner country.

Motivation

The driving forces for the development of the methodology for ELBUS were:

- Difficult situation in the electro-technology market – need to increase competitiveness of businesses in the sector.
- Unemployment in the sector was very low and staff turnover levels had grown rapidly in recent years (especially in Norway, Sweden and Denmark). These factors caused serious concern in the industry and rapid action was required to improve job retention in the sector.

- Increasing international workforce mobility. Gradually more and more electricians in Norway had expressed an interest to work abroad, while immigration to Norway was also in increase. A complete lack of validation initiatives in the sector and inability to transfer electrician qualifications from country to country in Europe due to legal restrictions were the key incentives to develop a system to record and compare competences and skills.
- Professional development of electricians – the methodology would also allow to identify *desired* competences and professional aspirations of employees and therefore offer more transparent personal development routes.

One of the companies which has implemented the methodology is Dalhaug AB - one of the leading Norwegian companies in the electro-technology sector. The company employs some 100 persons and 90 per cent of the employees are currently going through the process to validate their informal and non-formal learning.

Dalhaug AB got involved in the initiative for three key reasons:

- Firstly, the company requires increasingly educated and highly skilled staff in the future.
- Secondly, the company wanted to screen and map the competences of its workforce to ensure they have right skills in-house to meet the strategic objectives of the company.
- Finally, the process offers better career progression routes and more room for personal development and growth for those who are motivated/capable to move forward in the company.

Validation activities in the sector

Adoption of initiatives to validate skills and competences of employees in the electro-technology sector is not very common because the sector is characterised by small businesses with approximately 15 employees. Such small businesses in this sector have very little expertise or resources to set up such initiatives.

Furthermore, anyone working in the sector in Europe must hold an official certificate to legally work in the sector. And these certificates can only be obtained from a formal education institute. This has partly reduced companies interest to recognise informal and non-formal learning of their employees.

Project funding

Project was funded by the project partners with assistance from the European Commission, Leonardo da Vinci programme.

Companies implementing the methodology have not contributed to the development of the tool but allocate time and staff resources for the implementation.

How is learning assessed?

The process consists of four different elements:

CV

The first part of the assessment is focussed on gathering information about skills, knowledge, expertise, competences and other attributes that employee/potential employee possess – attributes that can be of value in their work. A three-part CV is used to record this information in a systematic manner. The CV covers information on personal details, professional skills and general skills:

- Personal details
- Official qualifications
- Education and courses
- Social skills (family life, social activities, interests)
- Local community and voluntary activities (memberships in different commissions/councils/societies, voluntary work experience)
- Hobbies
- Professional skills, work experience
- Desires, motivation and intentions with regards to their career progression.

Professional competences and experience are categorised to 30-40 subjects and each ranked according to three standards:

- Theoretical understanding of the process/task.
- Ability to carry out the task, but not without supervision.
- Ability to carry out the task alone without any help or support.

CV is available electronically to all employees.

Ability to Take Action - questionnaire

The final step of the process for employees is a discussion with their employer about future, development, training and aspirations. To aid the development of dialogue with employer and employee, the project has developed an 'Ability to take action' questionnaire. The questionnaire refers to issues such as ability and motivation to learn and train further, career aspirations, team working and analytical skills and communication capabilities. The questionnaire is available in an electronic format to all employees.

Personal Development Plan

Finally a discussion with an employer will be held, based on what the individual has recorded about him/herself on the CV and Ability to take action – questionnaire. The discussion follows defined guidelines and is strictly confidential between individual and employer. Discussion will lead to a personal development plan for each individual employee and different personal development measures (such as in-house or formal training courses) are discussed.

Skills gap analysis can be carried out after the skills and competences of employees are recorded on the system. Mapping tool is used to carry out the analysis.

Mapping tool

The mapping tool is a web-based programme of which content is based on the information recorded by employees about their skills, expertise, competences and aspirations. The tool was originally developed as a part of another project by AOF – Norwegian national training organisation. Only some adjustments to the tool were required, and this saved a significant amount of time and financial resources.

The tool mainly functions as a instrument for better human resource management and strategic planning. The aim of the tool is to identify skills gaps in an organisation and allow those with motivation and capabilities to move forward in the company. The mapping analysis allows the company also see whether relevant skills can be found in-house, for example, for development of new markets.

The mapping tool can be found at:

<http://komptest.prodoc.no> (password protected)

1.7.3 Outcomes and benefits

The process has brought mutual benefits for individuals, enterprises and industry in general and increased awareness of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the sector. The following benefits have been experienced by nearly all project partners in different European countries:

For the individuals

The interests of individual employees are central to this project. The key benefit for employees is creation of personal development plan that improves employees' training and career progression opportunities. And perhaps most importantly, employees feel more valued.

For the company

Identification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning has improved effectiveness of companies' human resource policies and management; the process enables companies more effectively allocate their human resources. By better understanding resources of their workforce companies can improve their strategic planning and adaptability to the changing market needs. And most importantly, the experience so far has demonstrated that the implementation of the tool has increased motivation and commitment of their staff. Personal development plan and more meaningful dialogue between employer and employee make employees feel more valued and in the longer run this is expected to increase productivity of the company (through lower staff turnover levels etc.). Validation of informal and non-formal learning is also good for the reputation and marketing of the company. In the long term, this type of validation activity may also help the enterprise to establish itself abroad as the tool enables the company to identify and compare knowledge and skills of employees regardless of their country of origin.

Experience from Dalhaug AB

Although the company is only now going through the implementation process (90 per cent of employees have recorded their skills and competences and personal development plans are being developed), clear benefits have already been identified. Employees feel more valued than before. The project has also enabled the management to discover specific training needs and offer employees short term and/or part time training. The process has also allowed the management to recognise individuals who have potential or skills to take up further responsibilities or further develop new business areas.

The company views this as an initial step towards long term process of further promoting lifelong learning and recognising informal and non-formal learning.

Wider impact

Experiences from five European countries have shown that the European electro-technical industry will benefit from harmonised documentation procedure to aid identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The tool addresses difficulties encountered by those hoping to work in the sector in another European country - it offers more accurate and rapid assessment and validation of skills and competences of foreign workers, refugees and other immigrants.

Electro-technical companies have traditionally valued their workforce mainly as a static mechanism for income - which up to now has proved successful. But this has meant that they have not kept up with the increasing need to nurture continued learning among their workforce; younger generation has an increasing capability and motivation to change, adapt and face up new challenges. At the same time companies have to become increasingly adaptable and possess higher levels of skills and expertise in order to remain competitive. The project makes a significant contribution to this goal by offering a methodology to assess informal and non-formal learning of employees.

1.7.4 Sustainability and transferability

The project's documentation procedure and associated tool were developed to take into account differences in different national contexts. The tool has been tested in five different European electro-technical companies and therefore has demonstrated that the tool and methodology does work in different countries and contexts.

The project is viewed as an example of good practice in validation of informal and non-formal learning. The project methodology was one of three to receive the first ever Leonardo da Vinci award launched by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

The project meets a real demand in the electro-technical sector. Both the process and the method in general are transferable and adaptable to related industries and other organisations. The transfer only requires small adjustments to the web tool. It may also be possible to make the process, the method and the web-based tool and supported tools (questionnaire and CV) commercially available.

The future of the project and tool is slightly uncertain at the very moment because ELBUS, the R&D branch of the Norwegian employer organisation, was recently shut down. But ELBUS employees who are still working for the same owner organisations (employer organisation / trade union) are determined to take the project forward.

1.7.5 Barriers

The project has shown that it is possible to record, compare and assess skills and competences of electricians from different countries. At the moment, however, there is no way of comparing electrician qualifications from different countries or formally validate work experience; currently electricians in all European countries have to attend formal education to obtain licence to work as a qualified electrician.

Another barrier for companies in the sector to get involved in validation activities is the general small size of companies, most companies in the electro-technology sector are small and medium size businesses. These companies find it difficult to find time to get involved in such schemes. The project partnership for example found it quite difficult to find companies to participate the project as pilot companies. SME managers in the sector also do not have as comprehensive understanding of validation initiatives and their benefits as HR departments of larger companies in which in-house training and validation schemes are often a lot more established.

In relation to these points, some employers in the sector do not yet view training, recognition of wider set of skills and expertise and personal development of their staff as a priority matter as all their electricians already hold a formal certificate. But this is likely to change in the future.

1.7.6 Supportive policy frameworks

The last few years have seen a record-breaking increase in both mobility of workforce between European countries and immigration in a wider sense as well. At the same time staff turnover levels in the electro-technical industry have grown rapidly. Consequently the need to be able to accurately and efficiently assess knowledge and skills of potential (and existing employees) is all the time more important. Consequently, companies in the sector hope more direct support (human resources, guidance or funding) from the national governments.

1.7.7 Conclusions

This case study demonstrates particularly effective and comprehensive practice in the way it identifies and assesses informal and non-formal learning. The way the methodology also takes

into consideration 'soft-skills', hobbies, interests, motivation for career progression is quite unique.

The project outcome is not something tangible, certificate for example, which would be nationally recognised but is something which offers better career progression route for employees in the industry that is traditionally very much focussed on formal education.

The methodological concept was designed longer term sustainability and transferability to different countries and sectors in mind.

1.8 Koskisen Oy, Finland

Anne-Marie Nevala (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.8.1 Introduction

Koskisen Oy is a wood production company in Finland with 1,076 employees producing veneer and other products refined from wood. A system to validate informal and non-formal learning was developed already in 1994 by the company HR department and funded by the company itself. The validation system is based on recognition of skills and expertise acquired at work and is complemented by an in-house practical and theoretical training scheme. Every employee of the company is provided with an opportunity to validate their competences; the process has been designed to take into consideration different skill levels.

1.8.2 Description of the initiative

Motivation

The company originally developed the system for three key reasons. In the 1980s the company was faced with a situation where staff turnover levels were in increase and at the same time the work in the industry became more demanding. They were also finding it hard to recruit new employees. Action had to be taken to improve the situation.

As a response the company wanted to develop a system which would allow employees to carry out a wider variety of tasks as a way of enriching their work routines and creating better jobs. As working in the factory was also becoming more demanding and the national qualification system did not offer relevant qualifications for low skilled production workers, the validation scheme was also designed to address this gap in the national / regional training provision.

Working in partnership

The system was developed by HR manager of the company with support from the management. Lecturer from a local vocational education institute also provided some expert advice on the development process, particularly on the theoretical training and assessment process. Furthermore, employees were consulted about the project and assessment procedures; trade union representative from the company was involved in the development process from the very start and still attends all the meetings which are related to this project.

The company practice receives significant support and recognition from the sectoral trade union, the Wood and Allied Workers' Union.

Validation activities in the sector

The company operates in the mechanical wood manufacturing sector – a sector in which validation of informal and non-formal learning traditionally has not played important role.

This is partly because the sector has not been particularly popular and traditionally employment in the sector has not demanded high skills or qualifications.

Situation has, however, changed in the last few years and some of the largest Finnish companies in the sector (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) have introduced similar procedures.

Project funding

The methodology, training programme and certification system was solely developed and funded by the company itself. These days the Finnish government subsidises one third of training costs of each individual employee that goes through the programme, as a part of national apprentice funding programme.

All employees who have their competences validated and who obtain one of the certificates, receive a grant from the company together with an automatic pay increase. Furthermore, those over thirty receive also receive an additional adult education training grant from the Finnish government.

Five different types of competences can be validated at Koskisen Oy, of which three are focussed on validating skills relating to the factory's production work and two for management (people and production) skills. Originally the validation methodology was developed for production workers, a mechanism to recognise management skills was developed at a later date. Having increasingly well trained, multi-skilled staff created pressure to support managers at different levels. The HR department realised there was a need for similar procedure for people in management positions.

Training

The process to validate skills of production workers starts off by expanding the tasks she/he carries out every day. It is the core of the company culture that more experienced members of staff teach new processes for new members of staff. So the participants are trained by their senior colleagues to carry out all activities relevant to the production stage in which they are involved in. Furthermore, participants received 2 hours of theoretical training every week. This process takes 1-1.5 years after which their skills are formally assessed and recognised.

Those in management positions in the company, from team leader level to director, can have their management skills assessed and validated. They are also given an opportunity to go through 1 year informal training scheme. The scheme includes 4-5 all-day training events, different exercises ranging from managing and chairing meetings, individual and group exercises to short, written assignments. The complexity of training activities varies according to the management level of each employee.

All in-house training is tailored to match exact needs of the company and the sector.

The company also supports some employees to continue their further studies in a university or technical higher education institute if the employee has motivation to do so and skills are required in the company.

Organsation of learning

Validation of competencies in Koskisen Oy mainly covers skills acquired at work. However, some other competencies which have been acquired outside of work are recognised in some instances, for instance, First Aid and health & safety. But no formal validation mechanism has been developed to recognise these skills. Nevertheless, validation of management skills indirectly recognises skills gained outside of work as management and organisation skills can be learnt in hobbies, committees, politics etc. Customer and people friendly management style and language skills are particularly highly regarded by the company.

Assessment procedures are different for production workers and those in the leadership positions:

Assessing skills of production workers

Competences are assessed through 4 practical competence tests and 4 written, more theoretical examinations. Employees have an option to replace written tests with oral ones if they prefer so. Theory tests weigh significantly less than the practical exams.

In practical examination the assessment team observes the employee for three hours and pays particular attention to work safety matters. Assessment is carried out by one company manager, trade union representative and colleague of an employee. Theoretical tests are assessed by an external expert (teacher).

Assessing leadership skills of employees in management positions

Assessment of managers is an on-going process. Participants are assessed in the way in which they conduct the exercises (chairing meetings, written exercises etc.) and some elements of their everyday work. The assessment process ends with presentation and essay (topic is usually - Managing Change).

The approach of the company is that no matter how good qualifications some of the skilled workers of the company have, they still do have to demonstrate their leadership and people management skills.

Certificates

As mentioned, the validation methodology allows recognition of five different types of learning. Those who pass the formal assessment receive one of the five in-house certificates:

Production workers:

- Certificate for general production/process workers (veneer production)
-

- Certificate for saw process workers
- Certificate for mechanical maintenance workers

Management skills:

- Team leader certificate
 - Leadership certificate for different levels of managers
-

Certificates can be compared to some of the national qualifications. Certificates for production workers match qualifications from vocational colleges, however, are more highly regarded by the company itself because of the extensive practical knowledge base. Management training is not directly related to any national qualifications. Certificates are recognised by a number of educational institutes across the country and provide exemptions from certain courses. But at the moment these are case-by-case decisions, although the company and trade union are working to disseminate experience through national committees etc.

Validity and reliability

The reliability of the validation process is secured by the fact that the assessment is carried out by a team of assessors, each from different background. It is always made sure that another colleague is a member of the assessment team as they are the ones with thorough understanding of the work tasks. The validity of written examinations is ensured by an external expert; lecturer from a relevant vocational education institute helped to design the theoretical training and assessment.

Training programme and certification system also meet the public requirements and are recognised by the government as they cover third of the training costs, and also provide grant for mature participants.

Employees have also been consulted about the validation methodology and employee's representative has been involved in the development process from the start. The base for the whole methodology is that the assessment system is viewed both comprehensive and fair by employees.

1.8.3 Outcomes and benefits

For the individuals

400 employees have validated their skills accounting some 37 per cent of all employees.

Employees who have participated this process have benefited in many ways:

- Better self-confidence
- Better quality job
- Broadened and improved skills-base which enables employees to undertake a greater variety of tasks
- Greater understanding of work processes and tasks
- Training grant
- Salary increase
- Improved access to training courses
- Better access to promotions
- Certificates which are recognised by companies in the same sector
- Course exemptions in colleges
- Farer career progression route.

For the company

Outcomes for the company from recognising informal/non-formal learning are multifaceted:

- Their employees are multi-skilled and more motivated, committed and adaptable employees than before.
- Validation initiative has helped the company to transform itself from a basic manufacturing enterprise into high value-added production company – thanks to the highly skilled workforce.
- Team working culture has improved – staff members increasingly work together and are able to replace one and another during absences.
- Move towards more equal, less hierarchical employee structure due to increased skill levels.
- Company has received several national recognitions for its human resources policies (e.g. award for good employer, best apprenticeship scheme provider of the year, Best place to work 2004 ‘Suomen parhaat työnantajat 2004’ - 2nd position and the only awarded manufacturing company).
- Excellent working environment and low staff turnover levels (turnover levels have gone from 20-40% down just to 5%).
- Higher productivity: during the early training periods the productivity of each participating employee slightly falls but in the longer term significantly improves as a result of new skills and motivation.

Wider impact

The initiative has also had a wider industry level impact. The initiative has helped to raise the status and credibility of the wood production industry. These days a couple of largest companies in the same industry (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) have also introduced similar procedures.

1.8.4 Sustainability and transferability

Koskisen Oy recognises there is still more to do in this area and even more has to be done in this sector in the future. Companies in this industry will be hit extremely severely by staff shortages in a decade or so due to ageing population. Secondly, the industry requires increasingly higher skilled labour in the future.

1.8.5 Barriers and future support needs

Barriers for companies

Traditional way of thinking in the Finnish society is that educational institutes take care of education & training while companies focus on running their business and providing employment. Education institutes lose money if more companies provide their own training and validate their skills – therefore some colleges may not be as interested in collaborating in validation activities as hoped. This again has knock-on effects on companies as HR departments rarely have the theoretical expertise in place to develop training courses and assessment procedures.

Finally, many companies do not understand the potential benefits of validation initiatives yet and smaller companies rarely have resources to set up such initiatives.

Supportive policy frameworks

Support from different levels of policy makers and other actors could help more companies to get involved in validation initiatives. European and national level recognition for companies actively developing and delivering validation initiatives is of paramount importance.

National and European actors are also needed to increase appreciation for vocational work and vocational education and training. Currently too much focus is laid on university education, while majority of businesses are lacking skilled but less theoretically educated labour. It is also important to link education and training frameworks closer to the needs of business life.

Businesses taking up validation initiatives would like to receive more support from local and regional vocational colleges – flexibility from them to come and help companies to design and implement similar schemes.

1.8.6 Conclusions

This initiative demonstrates particularly good practice in the way in which it assesses and recognises skills acquired at work. The methodological validity of the development as well as the assessment is ensured by engaging different stakeholders, also employees themselves, in the process. Furthermore, external experts are also used to ensure theoretical validity of both training and assessment.

Recognition of skills and competences bring clear benefits for the employees of Koskisen Oy as well as for the company itself. Certificates are recognised by the industry and education institutes, and recognition also automatically leads into salary increase and improved access to training and promotions. Also very importantly, validation of skills in the company has created a fairer career progression system for all employees of the company.

The company adopts 'access for all' approach, everyone is allowed and encouraged to get their skills recognised.

1.9 Cockerill Sambre (Belgium)

Francesca Froy and James Winter (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.9.1 Introduction

Cockerill Sambre is a Wallonia-based steel making business, which, since 2002, has been part of the Arcelor Group, the world's biggest steel maker.

Group-wide restructuring means that Cockerill's blast-furnace activities will end in 2009 and the workforce will be cut by 25%. As part of the restructuring plan, the company's training department teamed up with researchers from the University of Liège (CRIFA) to develop a methodology for transferring the knowledge and skills of workers leaving on early retirement to other workers within the firm. The project involved:

- identification of skills profiles and key individuals to act as "trainers"
- development of training techniques and tools
- validation of these tools and desired outcomes within the firm (training centre and Human Resources department)
- implementation of training plan

The project was funded entirely by Cockerill Sambre. There was no centralised budget; instead each sector was allowed to set its own budget for the exercise.

The project partnership included CRIFA, University of Liege: Centre de Recherche sur l'instrumentation, la formation et l'apprentissage.

1.9.2 Project development

The project developed as part of a bottom up process. When Cockerill Sambre was forced to encourage early retirement to a percentage of their work force there were complaints from the work floor that a considerable amount of knowledge was being lost, and there were fears for the impact of this on the effectiveness and safety of production processes. The company's response to this was to attempt to transfer the knowledge of those taking early retirement to newer members of the work force through a validation and training procedure. Cockerill Sambre worked with CRIFA on the design of the validation and training process, whilst encouraging their staff to participate actively in the design of the tools and materials to be used, and in the training process itself. There were several negotiations with staff to ensure that they were happy with their involvement in the validation and training activities, and the resulting materials. These negotiations were successfully concluded so there was not a need for union involvement.

1.9.3 Policy background

In Belgium, there is still a tendency to give greater financial support to class room based learning because it is easier to quantify and understand than work based learning. This was felt to be a missed opportunity as real learning often happens 'on the job'.

1.9.4 Activities

The programme developed by Cockerill Sambre involves the following activities:

Developing competence profiles

Through working with employees, CRIFA has identified competency profiles for four different types of post:

- Foundry workers
- Network Managers (staff who maintain electricity, water and other systems)
- Agglomeration process workers
- Workers in the coke plant

For each different sector, CRIFA worked with an identified 'expert worker' (an experienced individual who was about to retire) to identify:

- The main tasks involved in delivering their work
- The sub-tasks of each main task
- The problems which could potentially arise in association with each sub-task
- The order in which the tasks (and any problem resolution) should be carried out
- How these tasks should be taught to others (by explanation, demonstration, models, videos, documentation, allowing staff to 'have a go' before being corrected if necessary)
- This information was stored in Excel worksheets so it could be easily updated

Developing fiches

For each type of activity or sub task, three fiches were drawn up using the above information:

- A description fiche
- A problem fiche
- An order of operations fiche

These fiches used clear and simple language, and a common system of graphics, offering a user friendly guide for each activity. Plastic covered copies were made available at each place of work. Each fiche was drawn up in Word so it could be easily updated and reprinted.

Developing manuals

Those workers responsible for maintaining the supporting infrastructure networks needed more in-depth supporting information due to the more technical nature of the tasks involved. However, the same principles were followed, and CRIFA worked with experienced individuals to translate the complex and sometimes confusing manuals previously used into user friendly guides using photos and graphics, based on a common presentational style.

Developing training tools

A practical model was built in one case to help demonstrate how to do a task, in other cases videos were developed to help in the training process.

Delivering training to tutors

Once the supporting materials were ready, CRIFA then trained up the 'experienced workers' as tutors who could pass on their knowledge to young members of staff. Roughly half of all the experienced workers who were about to leave the company agreed to act as tutors, mainly for one specific competency. Negotiations with the management ensured that tutors did not lose either salary or benefits through their involvement in the tutoring process, however the tutors still maintained all their other production related duties.

The tutors also received special training in pedagogical techniques, including advice on how people learn, and guidance on how to evaluate learning activities and double check that learning has actually taken place.

Delivering training to new workers

In order to prioritise the training to be delivered to the newer workers, each sub-task was given a rating according to how frequently it was carried out, and how important it was. Most of the training was delivered 'on the job' with only workers in the Coke plant receiving class

room instruction. Each worker has a training book which acts as a check list of competencies they have learnt, and are going to learn. Periodically, a 'validation committee' consisting of the tutor, worker and direct manager meet to agree the competencies the worker has acquired and award an appropriate salary increase .

1.9.5 Learning assessment

Turning 'tacit' knowledge into 'explicit' knowledge

The CRIFA approach is based on the understanding that it is crucial to transfer the implicit knowledge held by the more experienced older workers into explicit competencies and techniques which can then be taught to others. Previous to the validation activity, new people joined the company with no specific training, and frequently with little schooling (primary or lower secondary level). They then learnt the trade through watching older and more experienced workers over a number of years. In this way, they learnt how to deal with problems and difficulties as they arose. It is estimated that learning in this way at Cockerill Sambre took between 3-5 years, as this was the time it took for a worker to witness the majority of the problems which can develop on the job, and to learn how to deal with them.

By asking experienced workers to explicitly identify their competencies, and the problems which can arise during their work, Cockerill Sambre have managed to build up a system where most of the problems which occur in the workplace can be simulated, and thereby dealt with in a far shorter period of time. This has condensed the learning process, cutting the learning of many tasks down to a few months. An advantage of this type of training, as opposed to a class room based training exercise, is that workers learn from experienced workers how things are *really* done on the job as opposed to how they are ideally done in a text book situation. For this type of work the physical means of doing something is particularly important, and this is difficult to learn from a book. In addition, as many of the new people being trained had a negative experience of school, it was felt to be important to differentiate this training from classroom tuition in order to encourage participation.

Learning is assessed by a 'validation panel' (see above) using a retrospective analysis of what a worker has learnt over a period of time. The worker's training book, or checklist, is useful in supporting this process.

1.9.6 Project management and monitoring

No overall evaluation of the project has so far been carried out. There was an attempt to assess the cost of implementation in one sector, but given that there are so many costs which are difficult to quantify e.g. investment of staff time, it has been difficult to do a proper cost benefit analysis. One of the main benefits of the training will be avoidance of problems and dangerous situations, the benefits of which it is difficult to assess. The project has been unsuccessful in certain sectors, but it was felt that this is partly because the project was not so appropriate to these sectors, either because the transfer of knowledge was not felt to be so necessary, or because there were different claims on resources.

1.9.7 *Drawing from other European experience*

CRIFA have previously been involved in an ADAPT project and an ESF project in this field and has worked on a similar competency assessment exercise in the field of refuse collection and recycling in Luxembourg. They find validation methodologies to be particularly transferable between different sectors.

1.9.8 *Outcomes and benefits*

- ***For the individuals***

The main outcome for the new workers is that they now have more formalised training which allows them to learn quicker. In addition, they have their competencies recognised, which means that they achieve a salary increase. For the experienced workers, the main outcome is an appreciation of their own competencies, training in tutoring and the satisfaction of knowing that their skills are being passed on to a younger generation and their work will continue into the future.

- ***For the organisation***

Cockerill Sambre have reduced the significant loss of knowledge which can be associated with a large scale reduction in more experienced staff, in addition to improving knowledge management within the organisation, and integrating health and safety mechanisms into wider training.

1.9.9 *Sustainability*

This activity will continue while members of the workforce are being shed, until 2009 at least.

1.9.10 *Transferability & dissemination*

Cockerill Sambre have not yet disseminated information about their project very widely. This was partly because they felt that the project had been developed by their own workers in a way which was relevant to their own particular context. The involvement of staff in the development process is a key part of the activity, and Cockerill Sambre feel that the resulting fiches and paperwork would not be particularly useful to other companies/organisations, without their going through the same development process for themselves. However they acknowledge that they could disseminate the development model itself more widely and would be very happy to do so if people were interested.

1.9.11 Success factors and barriers to be overcome

Success factors

The following factors would seem to have led to the success of the project:

- Involvement and goodwill of the workers – at all levels of the hierarchy
- Development of clearly understandable training materials
- The emphasis on making implicit knowledge explicit
- Tutors have been well motivated
- Tutors employed had the right level of expertise to pass on the knowledge
- Each area of training adapted to suit the work practices it was dealing with
- Practice was based on proven theories:
 - knowledge management
 - Constructivism
 - Cognitivism
 - Applied teaching methods
 - Application of ‘made to measure’ toolsets (ergonomics etc.)

Barriers to take up

The following barriers were identified during the validation process:

- Developing a common vocabulary was a significant issue. There were a number of different buildings and sectors involved in the process and even groups working in similar sectors used a very different set of terms for similar tasks. This had to be rationalised when developing the task fiches and manuals;
- There was some resistance amongst some sectors due to the resources required
- There was some resistance amongst older more experienced workers who had been through several different restructuring processes and felt that this was expecting too much from them.

1.9.12 Looking to the future

When looking towards the future it was felt that the following factors could help support the further development of this type of activity:

At project level

- It was felt that an overall evaluation exercise would be useful, and Cockerill Sambre are interested in finding out more about the Corus Netherlands model for analysing the overall financial benefits of validation exercises.
- Another possible ‘next stage’ could be for the workers to receive certification for their competencies, but this would require a more outward looking approach to the exercise. At present, Cockerill Sambre is mainly looking inwards towards the needs of the organisation, rather than outwards towards the needs of individuals who have left the company.
- It was also discussed whether the experienced workers could be given a certificate for their training in tutoring skills. This was felt to be a relatively sensitive issue,

however, as it could lead to changing expectations by these workers in relation to their position within the company. The company was also slightly resistant to the idea of formal certification as this would require a greater level of external verification in order to ensure that the certification was fully valid and transferable outside of the organisation.

At national policy level

- More support for work based learning

At EU policy level

- Keep funding validation activities

1.10 Recreational Activity Study Book: Youth Academy, Finland

By Lauri Savisaari (State Provincial Office of Southern Finland, formerly Youth Academy, Finland)

1.10.1 Introduction: learning in voluntary activities – why recognition?

School is an important learning environment for young people. However, young people learn outside school, as well. Especially participation in voluntary and leisure activities offer good places for learning. Young people learn many valuable life skills in voluntary and leisure activities, i.e., co-operation and team skills, communication skills, goal-orientation and problem solving skills. These mentioned skills are also useful when a young persons attends further education or working life.

Learning in voluntary and leisure activities carries various names: it might be called "civic learning", "non-formal learning" or "informal learning". If a learning activity is defined to be "non-formal learning", the organising party should have a clear understanding of the learning that is supposed to take place in the activity. That implies at least some educational principles or an "educational program" behind the activity. One cannot argue a learning activity to be "non-formal" without a clear, well-defined understanding of the learning that takes place in activity. In addition, it is essential that both the learner and the educator are aware of the aims and methods of the supposed learning situation.⁵ Without these definitions, the learning is "informal" or "occasional" by nature. In this context, both non-formal and informal ways of learning things and acquiring competencies are dealt with, parallelly. Most organisations that deal with young people do have a clear educational role and many even have their own educational programs (for example the scout movement).

Formal education and non-formal or informal learning (that takes place for example in voluntary and leisure activities) support and complement each other. In line with the principles and aims of lifelong learning, the learning environment of young people should be approached as an entity, the ingredients of which are formal educational system, working life and free-time environments (such as home, leisure activities, family, peer groups, etc.). Integration of formal and non-formal learning implies actions and a change of traditional attitudes. Learning of young people in voluntary and leisure activities is usually observed from the point of view of formal education. When doing so, the essential concepts are a) identification, b) recognition, and c) validation of learning.

From the viewpoint of voluntary and leisure activities, it is important that the learning taking place in activities is recognised and appreciated in society. Thus, evaluation of non-formal or informal learning is also important. Through evaluation the learning environment produced by youth organisations can be further developed. Evaluation or measurement of informal learning is particularly difficult, though, since the learning outcomes are very difficult to place in a specific context, time or place. In addition, informal learning includes also non-

⁵ For example Sahlberg 1999, 10.

course-based activities like information, advice or guidance, which do not usually have an agreed curriculum⁶.

Accreditation of non-formal learning in voluntary and leisure activities can also carry risks: if, for example, a formal educational institution automatically credits a certain activity, the voluntary nature of the learning activity could be endangered. In addition, the formal educational system is relatively equal (at least in the Nordic countries) in regard to place of residence, but possibilities to actively participate in voluntary and leisure activities vary a great deal, depending on which area or region of the country one happens to live in. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the learning experiences in voluntary and leisure activities always personally, case-sensitively and in regard to specific fields of formal education.

1.10.2 Recreational Activity Study Book

In Finland there has been a system called "Recreational Activity Study Book" since 1996. The system is developed by Youth Academy, which is a co-operation organisation for major Finnish youth & sports NGOs. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture supports the study book system. The study book is a non-formal and informal learning CV for young people. They can collect entries from all learning experiences in voluntary and leisure activities. There are over 70.000 study book owners in Finland (30.10.2004). The book serves young people as a tool for making all the experiences and learning – self-development, growth etc. - outside school visible. It is also an instrument for identifying and crediting non-formal learning when applying for a job or further education. Youth Academy has a written agreement with 250 formal educational institutions on how to value and credit the entries in the book. The study book is a feasible way to document and recognise the non-formal and informal learning of young people. The entries in the book can be collected either in Finnish, Swedish or English.

The Finnish study book system focuses strongly on the development of the individual learner – young people. Despite of the fact that some pathways towards formal education have been created as a part of the study book system, the idea is to cherish the very voluntary nature of the learning taking place in outside-school, voluntary and free-time surroundings. Therefore, there are neither any criteria for the measurement of learning outcomes or performance, nor any public examinations held to assess the competencies supposedly acquired.

The Recreational Activity Study Book system is feasible for the documentation – and recognition – of both qualifications and competencies acquired by participating in youth voluntary activities. More focus is, however, placed on the competencies. That has to do with the individual learner-centeredness of the study book system. In the study book, more emphasis is put on the development of each young person's personality rather than the actual qualifications of the skills required in particular job requirements.⁷ The underlying idea is that

⁶ McGivney 1999 & 2000, ref. Katus 2002, 124-125.

⁷ See Euler 2001, 197-198.

by participating in youth voluntary or recreational activities, young people do have a chance to acquire key competencies in regard to personal development, such as social, communicative etc. competencies.

The reasons for the openness and “non-measurability” of the Finnish study book system are several. First of all, as Bentley argues, subjective perceptions of learning outcomes or competencies acquired should not be of marginal validity, as they often are in systems depending on public examinations. According to Bentley, subjective perceptions are “central to the quality of learning, and the extent to which what has been learned will be retained and applied in other contexts”.⁸

The second reason for the openness and flexibility of the study book system is the already mentioned appreciation of the voluntary nature of youth informal and non-formal learning. By formalising the system, the basic motivation for participation in youth activities, i.e. the joy of being, doing and learning together, would be endangered. Youth Academy attempts to encourage the representatives of the formal education system to recognise and value the learning and competencies young people acquire outside school, as well as to do more co-operation with organisations offering young people meaningful learning environments. But the issue is always approached from an individual learner’s point of view, not the point of view of the formal educational system, for example.

The third reason for keeping the study book system informal and flexible is that by doing so, all young people can gain access to it and collect entries from various learning activities. The Recreational Activity Study Book is not only targeted to those young people which are active in one or another youth organisation. Competencies can be acquired and things can be learned in various situations and settings, even the non-organised ones⁹. Therefore, even though the study book system is developed by Youth Academy and its twelve member organisations (major Finnish youth and sports NGOs), it is open to all young people, and the content is designed in a way that all young people “fit” in to be able to make use of it.

The study book itself is divided into nine categories, according to the nature of the learning activity. The categories are:

1. Regular participation in leisure activities;
2. Holding positions of trust and responsibility within NGOs;
3. Activities as a leader, trainer or coach;
4. Participation in a project;
5. Courses;
6. International activities;
7. Workshop activities (apprenticeship);
8. Competitions; and
9. Other activities.

⁸ Bentley 1998, 147.

⁹ See Euler 2001, 198-202.

By looking at the categories, one can see that there are environments of both non-formal and informal learning present. The most formalised form of learning is the category “courses” which means organised and often hierarchical educational programs offered by various youth and sport NGOs and other learning providers. The eight other categories fall more or less under the umbrella of informal learning, in which the learning-by-doing approach is often the method for acquiring competencies and skills.

According to a survey carried out by Youth Academy in spring 2003 (690 informants), the most popular category is “Courses” (17,4 %). The categories “Activities as a leader, trainer or coach”, “Holding positions of trust and responsibility” and “Regular participation in leisure activities” are also quite popular (12 – 13 % each).

The following figure illustrates an example page of the Recreational Activity Study Book.

The Recreational Activity Study Book is distributed to young people mainly through youth and sports NGOs. Young people usually receive or purchase the study book during being involved in the activities of a particular NGO, for example when attending courses etc. Recently, more and more private companies have purchased a limited number of study books and given them to young people locally, either through schools or youth and sport organisations.

1.11 Strengths and weaknesses of the Recreational Activity Study Book

The Recreational Activity Study Book was originally developed by several experts from the member organisations of Youth Academy. The need for such a product was of a rather instrumental nature in the first place: how could those young people that are very active in the voluntary work of specific NGOs gain and benefit from their experiences and learning? The main focus was on the benefits rather than on the development of individual young people. A hidden agenda was also present: the NGOs behind Youth Academy felt the need for better recognition of their own activities and even existence.

The Recreational Activity Study Book was very effectively distributed to the young active members of the founding organisations in the first years (1996-1998). The organisations were strongly committed to the promotion of the Study Book, but less focus was put on the actual use of the book. Therefore, a lot of the Study Books distributed in the first years were given to the “right” young people, but after that there were hardly enough support measures to encourage young people to go on using the book and collecting entries in it.

Having learned important lessons from the first years with the Study Book, Youth Academy invested on supporting those young people that already had got or purchased the book. Youth Academy began to published a magazine for the Study Book owners. The magazine came out twice a year, and it included articles about different kind of organisations, voluntary activities, learning in leisure time, funding own projects, using the Study Book in formal education and job recruiting etc. The magazine was sent to those Study Book owners who had registred to Youth Academy.

At the same time, Youth Academy began to do biannual surveys on how the Study Book was actually used and how the product could be developed. The main results from the surveys have been that, although some young people actually have used the book when applying to further education or a job, most of the study book users are somewhat passive in using the book. The most important function for the Study Book users seems to be that the book is a black-on-white documentary for themselves on what actually has been going on in their years of youth.

The educational institutions involved in the Recreational Activity Study Book system have not always found it easy to use in recognition and valuing previous learning experiences of young people. This has mostly to do with the fact that the book is structured according to the nature of voluntary freetime activities rather than according to the curricula of different formal educational institutions. The book focuses on experiences of young people and the

learning in those experiences rather than on the skills and competencies actually acquired. A more competence-based approach would suit the educational institutions better, and probably some young people as well. However, it has been a strong strategic – and even ideological – decision by Youth Academy and its member organisations that the Recreational Activity Study Book has to be structured upon the activities, not the competencies. This has to do with the more general question in youth work and youth policy about to what extent can youth work focus on the employability of young people. The answer to that question has been – at least this far – that youth work focuses on the development of the individual, not merely on employability issues.

When writing this article, Youth Academy is a national partner in a European project called “REFINE – Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education”. Youth Academy participates with the Recreational Activity Study Book. Being a partner in the REFINE project has made it possible to test the suitability of the book in formal vocational education. At the moment, 30 young students are using the Study Book in In Jyväskylä Vocational Institute, in which there’s a project aiming at prevention of dropping out of vocational education. As a part of that project, the Institute organises free-time activities for the students. The students participating in those free-time activities are testing the Recreational Activity Study Book and they are promised to get study credits from the entries in the study book at the end of the term. Results from this pilot project are expected in spring 2005. Preliminary feedback has sent the message that the Study Book probably needs some “calibration” to be done in order to be able to serve the needs of formal education curricula.

1.11.1 Conclusion: Adaptation to the European mainstream?

The Recreational Activity Study Book system has raised positive interest on European level – it is also mentioned as a good practice in the European White Book on Youth Policy by the European Commission. The Finnish study book system could be one starting point in creating a European model for the recognition of youth non-formal and informal learning, bearing in mind the cultural and educational differences in different European countries.

There are several other European processes regarding the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Most of the work in those processes is carried out by experts in the field of formal education. From the point of view of voluntary civic activities, this is a bit problematic, since the approach towards recognition is almost always focused on skills and competencies rather than rewarding activity as such. Youth Academy has closely followed the on-going processes and is considering their possible effects on the future of the Recreational Activity Study Book. It is inevitable that for example “Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning” by the European Commission have to be taken into account when further developing the Study Book. Luckily, in most of the European processes regarding the theme, youth organisations and youth voluntary freetime activities have been – at least to some extent – treated and dealt with as important learning environments.

It may well be, that in the future the Recreational Activity Study Book will be restructured to meet the common European principles and standards better. But even when that happens, we

have to be careful not to sacrifice the most valuable asset of the Recreational Activity Study Book, namely the appreciation of voluntary activities and young people's engagement to voluntarily participate in different freetime activities.

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