Validation of Prior Learning for
Education and the Labour Market

MAKING
POLICY WORK

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BertelsmannStiftung

VPL

United Nations
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3RD VPLBIENNALE

Colofon

That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way.
⸺ Doris Lessing

Living is learning and learning is about trying to live better. We must accept that education and working are both parts of living and should continue from birth until we die.
⸺ Julius Nyerere

Preface

The VPL Biennale is a global conference series about systems and practices of Validation of Prior Learning-(VPL) for lifelong learning, working and living. VPL provides visibility and adds value to all forms of learning. VPL seeks to uncover and unlock talent in the workforce and in society. The VPL Biennale is about sharing experiences, information, knowledge, ideas and visions on VPL as an essential part of lifelong learning. And it is about the creative process of recognizing each other's successes, problems and solutions in 'the international VPL-community'.

Across the globe, working and learning systems face big challenges. Much policymaking, piloting and evolution has been done and is continuing on the added value of the learning outcomes approach in National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), the effectiveness of Human Resources Management-systems (HRM) and the methods for Validation of Prior Learning. The initiative of **the Global VPL Biennale** tunes in to these challenges by focusing on the problem-solving potential of Validation of Prior Learning. The VPL Biennales are about sharing information, knowledge, ideas and visions on VPL and about the creative and inspiring process of learning from each other's successes, problems and solutions in 'the VPL-world'.

The VPL-Biennale concept was designed and initiated by the *Foundation European Centre Valuation Prior Learning (EC-VPL)* for the Erasmus+ project *ALLinHE* in 2012. Its focus was on social inclusion for all in learning and working environments by developing VPL-approaches to link target groups to learning opportunities. The focus on *accessible, affordable and feasible learning for all* remains the leading principle of the VPL-Biennale concept. This concept is based on the idea of a two-yearly manifestation and congress on proceedings and state of the art in VPL practices, knowledge base, instruments and methodologies, best practices and implementation-strategies for target groups.

After Rotterdam in 2014 and Aarhus in 2017, the 3rd VPL Biennale was hosted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Berlin in May 2019. This 3rd Biennale aimed at strengthening the global platform for policy makers, practitioners, users, researchers and other stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of Validation of Prior Learning in learning and working processes. The 4th Biennale is – due to Covid-19 – expected in 2022. Further announcements will be made through *https://vplbiennale.org*.

The VPL-Biennale since 2014			
1st	2014	Rotterdam, NL	*The Power of VPL*	EC-VPL
2nd	2017	Aarhus, DK	*The Learner in the Centre*	NVR
3rd	2019	Berlin, DE	*Making policy work*	Bertelsmann Stiftung
4th	2022		See: *https://vplbiennale.org*	

The **main theme** of the 3rd VPL Biennale in 2019 was "*Making Policy Work – Validation of Prior Learning for education and the labour market*".

The **mission** of *the 3rd VPL Biennale* therewith was - and still is - to share information, knowledge, ideas and visions on VPL, learning from each other's experiences and creating viable solutions in the 'VPL world'.

The following questions were central to the conference and its work sessions, in which 300 experts from 40 countries participated:
- How can bridges be built among stakeholders from the worlds of business, volunteering, and education in order for VPL results to have value?
- What forms of financing have to be in place in order to make VPL accessible to all learners?
- What kinds of procedures and instruments provide valid results and can cater for a large number of candidates?
- What support structures have to be available in order to reach disadvantaged learners?
- What follow-up measures are required for validation to facilitate further learning and enhanced career paths?
- What issues need to be addressed by laws and regulations for VPL to be effective?

This seventh volume of *the Series VPL Biennale* reports on relevant experiences as well as good practices and good policies presented at the 3rd VPL Biennale. It provides more insight in the many ways learners have at their disposal when it comes to making use of their personal learning experiences.

Finally, as a disclaimer, the reader should be aware that the English in this publication might be formulated in American-, Euro-, Latin- or UK-English, depending on the authors of the respective chapters.

Biennale Committee 2019
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Content

Introduction

Making Policy Work

Ruud Duvekot, Anni Karttunen, Martin Noack & Lieve Van den Brande

A broad view of the phenomenon of 'Validation of Prior Learning' embraces all learning that takes place consciously and unconsciously, informally, formally and non-formally and above all continuously. Learning can be seen as an individual activity within social processes. Such processes encompass all possible learning, work and living situations and are not necessarily intentional but always - consciously or unconsciously - enrich a person's knowledge, skills and insights. Claxton indicates that learning *"comes in many different shapes and sizes. And these start to kick in at different stages of development. [-] learning is a much wider, richer concept than is captured within current models of education and training"*.[1] It also includes implicit and nonintentional learning in its holistic approach:

> *Learning is what one does to transmute incompetence into competence, ignorance into knowledge. By definition, learning starts in the zone of the unknown, and attempts, via a whole variety of activities, mental and physical, to discover comprehension and expertise.*[2]

This definition supports a social constructivist, broad and social interpretation of learning and encompasses both the width and depth of learning. Jarvis defines such learning as a lifelong activity in which people's continuous learning experiences can be validated and actively exploited for the various purposes for which learning takes place:

> *Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person - body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) - experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.*[3]

The definition of Jarvis can be used as a basis for a model of dialogical validation with the aim of making visible and giving value to learning outcomes for example when it comes to linking an individual's learning experiences with the standards of NQFs and/or human resources management-systems. After all, people learn, also determined by their personality, in different ways, by reflecting on the experiences they have gained and internalizing them, within a given context and by processing theoretical information. People learn consciously

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1   Claxton, G. (1999). *Wise up: the challenge of lifelong learning.* New York/London, Bloomsbury, p.5.
2   Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. & Wallace, M. (Eds.) (1996). *Liberating the Learner: Lessons for Professional Development in Education.* London, Routledge, p. 47.
3   Jarvis, P. (2009). *Learning to be a person in society*. London, Routledge, p.25.

and unconsciously in all phases and areas of life. Every person is a learning person - *it is the whole person who learns[4]* - with their own learning style, motivation, experiences and ambition. Dialogical validation is a valuable way to connect to these unique, individual learning experiences and make the connection(s) between a person's personality, the individual context and the personal enrichment that can be achieved at a qualification-, skill- and/or personal level.

This broad vison of 'learning' fits perfectly in the concept of 'the learning society'.[5] The learning society can best be described as a society in which learning is important and valuable for everyone, in which people are encouraged to continue learning throughout their lives and in which the opportunities to learn are accessible to all. In such a learning society, continuous learning is important for both the individual as well as for society and its organisations and agencies. Important in this context is to understand that learning isn't a process that is mainly driven by the learning system or the social system, but one that also requires people to play an active and engaged role.

The International Commission on the Development of Education, chaired by Edgar Faure and established by UNESCO in 1971, set the tone in the debate on creating such a learning society in which the learner is central and in connection with other partners in society wants, can and is allowed to develop throughout life:

> *If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of <u>a learning society</u>. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future.[6]*

Whereas the vision of Faure, *et al* was far from feasible, in the year 2020 essential preconditions for realizing such a learning society have finally been met: (1) it is an accepted reality that a learner is able to take account of her/his learning history and thus prevent unnecessary learning, (2) the learning process can be organized in a learning-pathway independent manner and (3) the social function of learning is super accessible by making each learner co-owner of their own learning process.

The pillars of Faure's vision on learning from the 1970s that come to life in the present day are (a) validating prior learning for further learning purposes, (b) facilitating learning pathway-independent learning opportunities and (c) putting the learner truly at the centre. In this sense, the 3rd VPL Biennale takes stock of an unfolding reality in which the learner himself is the protagonist of lifelong learning. The extent to which policy contributes to this reality is the central theme of this 3rd Biennale.

Making Policy Work
Learners are owners of their learning history and are more and more allowed to capitalise on the personal richness that this history holds. That's what Validation of Prior Learning is about:

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4   Jarvis, P. (2006). *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning*. London, Routledge, p. 50.
5   Faure, E., Herrera, F., Kaddoura, A., Lopes, H., Petrovsky, A.V., Rahnema, M. & Champion Ward, F. (1972). *Learning to be. The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris, UNESCO.
6   Ibidem, p. xxxiii.

1. Ensuring a learner's awareness of her/his true potential for the sake of effectively reaching out to a learning objective: a certificate and qualification, employability or mobility, social inclusion and participation, empowerment and personal development.
2. Assisting in the articulation of the need for competences and skills on the labour market, in social systems, human resources management and civil services.
3. Linking a learner's value to a personalised learning strategy that fits in well with the demand for competences and skills in society.
4. Stimulating and affording an active role of the learner in lifelong strategies.

As the companion to the 3rd VPL Biennale in Berlin, Germany on May 7-8, 2019, this Biennale-book provides insight into the many ways for designing and applying VPL across the globe. Enriching articles were written for and presented at this Biennale, demonstrating the international diversity in utilisation of Validation of Prior Learning-systematics. It's a variety that spans a global learning culture of providing VPL-services for a diversity of purposes, enhancing UNESCO's kaleidoscope of initiatives on the role of validation and learning for social inclusion and participation, creating a learner-centred attitude in the European Union, the pursuit of lifelong learning strategies in Latin America, South Africa's push forward with a national strategy for the recognition of prior learning, Canada's further development of validation across jurisdictions, the next steps taken in personalising learning by integrating dialogical validation into learning strategies in the USA and the Netherlands, the many cases across the world focused on linking VPL to work-based learning, the Nordic cooperation on quality-assured linkages between the social and learning systems and the learner, and many other contributions.

The Berlin Declaration
To empower the further implementation of VPL, the global VPL community set out to formulate overarching principles for achieving a robust and effective VPL-system all over the world. The *Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning* holds six paragraphs, mirroring the six policy tracks in the programme of the 3rd VPL Biennale. The participants of the conference worked hard for a common goal: to give the VPL community a founding document. Being the product of a bottom-up process, the *Berlin Declaration* is meant to act as a grassroots push for stakeholders and policy makers to make validation policies bolder, more effective and more inclusive. It aspires to be an international benchmark for validation systems and thereby is meant to establish a common language and common goals among the practitioners, stakeholders and policy makers.

The keynotes
The 3rd Biennale provided a platform for various organizations and institutions that advocate lifelong learning strategies in general and VPL in particular. The keynotes of UNESCO, Cedefop and the Lifelong Learning Platform are featured in this book.

Borhene Chakroun (UNESCO) states that, notwithstanding the diversity of contexts across the globe, there is consensus on the need to promote *Recognition, Validation and Accreditation* of learning (RVA) to achieve the *Sustainable Development Goals (*SDG) 4 and 8 and more broadly the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations. SDG4 aims at *Quality Education* to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG8 targets *Decent Work and Economic Development* for promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Yet whilst RVA occupies an important place on policy agendas, the capacity of countries to develop at scale quality RVA systems and to respond to multiple and elevated demands is uneven, and in many countries often limited. There is a dearth of data on the scale, needs, beneficiaries, outcomes of RVA schemes which affect the capacity of actions of decision makers and the international community.

Furthermore, RVA is increasingly placed in the context of changing labour markets, the need to meet the 2020 Sustainable Development Agenda and the ideal of leaving no one behind. The author outlines major areas that should be considered to address these questions. The text starts by placing RVA in the context of the SDGs, then takes into consideration the implication of changes in the labour market. The last sections highlight the importance of evidence based RVA policies and schemes and offer a set of areas for actions. The concluding section sums up the key messages for making RVA-policy work.

Ernesto Villalba (Cedefop) presents an overview of the situation concerning validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. Validation in this context is about making all learning count. It is increasingly present in European and national policies, underpinned by two main principles: (a) all learning, irrespectively of how it has been acquired is valuable and (b) informal and non-formal learning complement formal learning. It is meant to add to and work together with the learning taking place inside formal education institutions. Validation makes visible the diverse and rich learning of individuals that take place outside formal education. Most of our learning takes place outside formal education and training – at home, in the workplace or through leisure activities. Around 45% of adults (aged 25-64) report participating in training in the last year, only 5.8 do it in formal education institutions. It is important to develop ways in which we can understand and communicate the outcomes of the individual's learning in all possible settings. Validation is the tool to achieve this understanding. In the Council Recommendation of 2012, validation was defined as a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of four distinct phases.

The 2018 European Inventory of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning constitutes an important source of information of the systems and ways in which European Member States are implementing validation. It constitutes an important tool for countries to learn from each other. The 2018 edition shows that countries are progressing at different speeds towards the objectives set by the 2012 Recommendation.

Brikena Xhomaqi (Lifelong Learning Platform) states that it was clear from the outcomes of previous Peer Learning Activities of the European Qualification Framework Advisory Group on validation, the Validation Festival in June 2018 and the international VPL Biennale in Berlin of May 2019 that the exchange between validation practitioners across countries is vital and instrumental. *The Berlin Declaration on VPL* called upon relevant stakeholders to collaborate and cooperate so that VPL holds value in society and can have a high level of recognition. The results of these manifestations confirmed a great willingness to support professional network development. The professional development and the creation of a common language among VPL-practitioners help increase the coherence and consistency of validation-practices across countries, within the diversity of national and sector-based validation systems.

People who work with candidates on the ground floor can benefit from the mutual exchange of successful (and unsuccessful) practices, professional advice from peers, and in general learn from people who do the same job in another institute, company, region, sector or country.

The Biennale Tracks
VPL gives visibility and value to all forms of learning and seeks to uncover and unlock latent talent in the workforce and in society. The 3rd VPL Biennale is for policy makers, researchers, users, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of Validation of Prior Learning. It`s about sharing knowledge, ideas and visions of VPL, learning from each other`s experiences and creating viable solutions in the 'VPL world'. The Biennale tracks cover all aspects and dimensions pertaining to sound utilization of Validation of Prior Learning-systematics.

Track 1 – organizational arrangements

Organisational arrangements are fundamental to the success of a VPL system. Key stakeholders' areas of responsibility need to be clearly demarcated, with extensive collaboration and cooperation across sectors.
Anni Karttunen introduces this paragraph of the *Berlin Declaration* and paves the way for the four contributions that concentrate on the principles developed of this conference track. These contributions come from Ireland, Finland, Canada and the ILO.

Deirdre Goggin (Ireland) reflects on the question 'How can bridges be built between stakeholders from the worlds of business, volunteering and education in order for VPL results to have value? Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has existed in Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) since 1999 as part of its central services to all learners for access, transfer and progression. The sustainability of RPL within CIT is a result of strategic decisions and the multi-faceted approach has been adopted and embedded by CIT to ensure that validation is implemented, used and valued. This paper outlines the policy, systems and processes CIT has adopted to meet the needs of all stakeholders including learners, staff, institution and industry. It focusses on the strategy and policy of the institution which has evolved and developed through dialogue and in the establishment of the CIT Extended Campus, a central unit which facilitates CITs relationships and engagements with stakeholders. This paper also outlines the challenges encountered and solutions which CIT enabled in response to their role in validation over the past twenty years.

Lotta Pakanen (Finland) aims at enhancing the validation of prior learning by NGOs. So far, Finnish NGOs have already undertaken important work to enhance VPL. An essential part of the work has included influencing and informing policy makers and formal educational institutions about liberal adult education and the skills and competencies gained by participating in courses and voluntary work. NGOs have 'studyfied' their activities and planned their courses and content of volunteering to be more competence-based. Study centres have provided skill certificates, digital badges and formal study registers. To enhance comparability, NGOs have linked their skills and competences to various frames of references like the European key competencies for LLL, EQF and ESCO. The Finnish Scouts have taken a step ahead and developed a digital tool to help NGOs and formal educational institutions compare their learning outcomes.

Christine Wihak (Canada) examines how consistency in validation across jurisdictions can be achieved through non-legislated means. Canada is a federated democracy whose constitution gives power to each provincial/territorial government to regulate health

professions. Although each province/territory sets standards for nursing competence, much consistency has been achieved through voluntary inter-jurisdictional co-operation among regulatory bodies and professional associations.

Internationally Educated Nurses (IEN) seeking to be licensed for practice in Canada commonly have to undertake a validation process to determine that their combination of formal education and work experience have given them Substantially Equivalent Competence to a nurse educated in Canada. This case study reports how validation is carried out in two Canadian jurisdictions – British Columbia and Nova Scotia -- examining the similarities and differences faced by IENs undergoing Validation in the two provinces. The paper highlights how considerable consistency in Validation can be obtained without state intervention, by drawing on inter-jurisdictional, intra-professional co-operation and shared understandings.

Christine Hofmann and *Helen Kirsch* (ILO, Switzerland) provide insight into how the International Labour Organization is supporting countries in the design of RPL systems and into the implementation of RPL pilots. While validation and recognition of prior learning (RPL) can provide access to education and training, it can also improve access to the labour market, to decent jobs commensurate with the person's skills and competences or facilitate career progression. Among others, the ILO supports Tanzania and Malawi in the establishment and implementation of an RPL system, as well as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka with a specific focus on migrant workers, supports SADC in the development of guidelines for RPL, evaluates pilot RPL schemes in India and implements an RPL pilot in Jordan for Syrian refugees and Jordanians.

Key success factors in the implementation of RPL pilots or systems that aim for labour market recognition include a trusted and transparent process with involvement of representatives of employers and workers in the design and oversight of the system, and the tying of additional benefits such as complementary training, access to labour markets, occupational licenses or financing. The ILO published a guide for RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning: Key success factors and the building blocks of an effective system), a learning package on RPL and a Policy brief on the subject.

Track 2 – Financing

Validation costs money. For this reason, the creation of financing structures and a response to the question of who pays what towards the cost of validation or qualification procedure are of crucial significance.

Jennifer Faulkner and *Martin Noack* introduce this paragraph of the *Berlin Declaration* and pave the way for the two contributions that concentrate on the costs and benefits of VPL. These contributions come from Belgium and the Netherlands.

An De Coen, *Kristof Mertens* and *Miriam Van Hoed* (Belgium) present a case study by the Flemish government in Belgium on how to calculate the costs of VPL. The Flemish government strives for an integrated VPL policy across its departments. In doing so, particular attention has been given to the financing of the VPL procedure since a sustainable policy has to be financially sound. Therefore, by order of the Flemish government, IDEA Consult analysed the budget that is required to implement an integrated VPL procedure and the potential return at the level of the Flemish region as accurately as possible.

The results of the case study reveal how much time and money it takes on average to finance a VPL trajectory. The analysis shows in detail the required investments for both participants

and providers as both parties have to perform different actions when going through the process from start to finish. Moreover, by using the standard cost model, the costs are visible for each stage in the VPL procedure. This approach shows which actions require the largest investments and to what extent efficiency gains could be obtained in order to organize VPL at a substantial scale.

Patrick Leushuis (the Netherlands) and *Lieve Van den Brande* (Belgium) present the outcomes of a research into the benefits and effects of validation for individuals and organizations in the Netherlands and its linkage with the European peer-learning activity in 2017 on funding validation. After several years of promoting and stimulating validation, the Dutch Government wanted to have more insight into the effects of validation for both individuals and organizations. The subsequent research provided evidence for significant benefits of validation, regarding career development, job matching and higher income. The research also gave insight into conditions that need to be met in order to realize the articulated benefits, especially related to human resources management policies and activities in organizations in the context of (the evolution of) the system for validation, which is aimed at both validation in education (VET and HE) and validation in the labour market.

Track 3 – Procedures and instruments

Procedures include structured pathways for validation of learning outcomes, training for assessors and guides, as well as mechanisms for quality assurance of validation processes. Instruments are tools that make learning outcomes visible or help to assess them.
Bodil Husted and *Antra Carlsen* introduce this paragraph of the *Berlin Declaration* and set the stage for the five contributions that illustrate the principles of this track. These contributions come from the Nordic countries, Italy, Ireland, Finland and Germany.

Per Andersson (Sweden), *Timo Halttunen* (Finland) and *Ulla Nistrup* (Denmark) reflect on the question whether a quality model can enhance performance of VPL and be as well a benchmark-model for national VPL arrangements.
In the Nordic quality model, the individual is in the center, a fact that users have found very helpful. The Nordic Model can be seen as a structured way to assess the current situation in validation at an institutional level and to identify areas in need of further development. A monitoring tool and a set of indicators (Road Map 2018) has been created in cooperation and is used to illustrate the validation process from mapping and assessment of prior competences all the way to how these results can benefit the individual and society. The Road Map highlights the central aspects that must be covered to facilitate a functional and smooth validation system. It can be used nationally as a development tool and for comparison among the countries. The Nordic region is in the process of benchmarking since autumn 2018. Strong focus is also put on quality development.
A recent research project on the Nordic quality model points out strategically important parts and phases in the validation process from a quality assurance perspective. The model's broad approach has been useful in identifying further development areas of all participating educational institutions, regardless of country or organization. The factors presented in the Nordic quality model strengthen this framework by encouraging the actors to discuss standardization, reliability and measurement in validation.

Lorenza Leita (Italy) gives insight in the tool of LEVER UP. This tool aims at levering transversal competences up in order to increase mobility and employability. LEVER UP values informal learning and transversal competences experienced in contexts such as volunteering to increase employability, social responsibility and mobility.

The EU-project 'LEVER UP' implemented an integrated system consisting of (1) a competence model, referenced to EQF, the eight EU key competences, and in due course to the EU mobility tools, (2) an internationally tested VPL evidence-based process and (3) a toolkit for supporting candidates, guides and assessors. The multilanguage solution (EN, NL, ES, PL, FR, IT) provides e-learning and blended courses for tutors and assessors. Open Badges are the credentials for the successful achievement in staff training and competence validation. Relations to ECVET mechanisms are also under evaluation. Several pilots tested the system with VET, the job market and volunteering. In Italy it is directly exploited in the Lombardy Region and links with the national contacts for NQF and EUROPASS to keep it more and more aligned and referenced, also in consideration of the upcoming ESCO. LEVER UP raises great interest and appreciation from all the external actors involved. It is considered an effective and operative lifelong learning solution to give visibility and potentially transfer the individual transversal competences from a context to another.

Pia Fenton and *Deirdre Goggin* (Ireland) explain how a VPL-programme for pilots can be embedded in university-programming.

The lifestyle and, indeed workstyle, of pilots has long proved an impediment to the attainment of third level qualifications while maintaining active and full participation in the workforce. Equally, the significant investment in pilot training has been poorly reflected in mechanisms of advanced entry to college and university programmes. This poses a quandary for those of us in Higher Education which requires quick resolution for this critical element of the airline industry. Cork Institute of Technology has developed a programme which, by design, reflects the training foundations and career trajectories of qualified pilots in a more holistic way. Through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) the programme recognizes the extensive learning involved in becoming a pilot at commercial level. The underpinning technical expertise, the competences developed and tested along the way, and the attendant awareness of the industry are critical pieces of learning comparable to that developed in many degrees. The RPL process accepts the value of this learning and through a rigorous and quality-assured means equates this to years 1 and 2 of a 4-year Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in International Business with Aviation Studies.

Sanna Brauer (Finland) demonstrates the merits of digital open badge-driven learning.

Digital open badges are gaining popularity as a means of identification and recognition of competences acquired via different modes of learning. Meanwhile new ways to motivate, scaffold and assess competence-based learning processes in professional development are emerging. This paper offers insights and examples of applying the competence-based approach, digital open badges and gamification in professional development to meet individual needs for working life. In addition, it represents the current state of emerging national ecosystems related to open badges in Finland. It is essential that the standards and guidelines are developed on a national and European level; however, to serve the students, trainers need to learn how to apply the competence-based approach in practice and further develop their digital pedagogical competences and practical applications. This contribution offers a brief summary of the first European doctoral dissertation to address digital open badges and digital open badge-driven learning. The thesis represents a novel application of

descriptive statistical methodology to the context of educational research. The primary results culminate in defining a digital open badge-driven learning process grounded on the badge constellation of competences. The entity of badge-driven learning includes learning materials, badge criteria, instructional badging, scaffolding and peer support.

Martin Noack and **Lena Wittenbrink** (Germany) address the issue of more than four million employed people in Germany sharing the problem that they have no proof of their skills and therewith are being considered formally low-qualified. Many of them have a migration background. In their contribution they explain how the initiative *#Showyourskills* offers a variety of instruments to make informally and non-formally acquired competences visible. Each instrument is available in at least six languages and is based on illustrations, pictures or videos – and usage is free for clients.
Two of these instruments are analogue and support direct, face-to-face interaction between the candidate and a counsellor. The other two tools are digital and can support assessment practically independent from a guided situation.

Track 4 – Support Structures

Access to guidance is essential for learners trying to navigate recognition procedures. A combination of face-to-face support and online tools and information form a valuable component of any functioning VPL system.
Ernesto Villalba introduces this track of the *Berlin Declaration* and paves the way for the six contributions that concentrate on the principles of this track. These contributions come from Switzerland, Cedefop, Finland, Germany/France, Italy and Honduras.

Deli Salini and **Patrizia Salzmann** (Switzerland) state that Validation of prior learning (VPL) is one of several pathways for adults in Switzerland to obtain a formal qualification of initial vocational education and training (IVET), that is, a Federal VET diploma (FDVET) or a Federal VET certificate (FCVET). This contribution describes the VPL option and how it is embedded in the broader framework of IVET for adults in Switzerland. In particular, it addresses the forms of support offered when choosing the VPL option. They outline the Swiss educational system and discuss the policies relevant to VPL procedures in Switzerland, both in general and in IVET. They also describe the different pathways for adults in Switzerland to obtain a formal IVET qualification at the upper-secondary level. As a conclusion, they discuss how VPL practices and in particular, the support structure for applicants, are consistent with the principles of the Berlin Declaration on VPL.

Ernesto Villalba and **Antonio Ranieri** (Cedefop) reflect upon Cedefop's exploration in 2019 of how coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be improved. Validation and guidance help individuals, organisations and Member States adapt to career challenges and create successful lifelong learning systems. However, little is known about how they are linked in practice and how this connection can be made more efficient. Building on Cedefop's expertise in the two areas, this study – based on an analysis of 13 practices from 12 countries – points to three critical success factors:
a. Comprehensiveness: adequate information provision and guidance before a decision to undergo validation is taken, throughout the entire validation process, as well as after it.

b. Coherence: use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks in all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills.

c. Quality of staff, resources, competences, and tools used.

The study concludes with policy recommendations on how to improve the links between guidance and validation.

Marjaana Mäkelä (Finland) analyses the integration of work and degree studies as a topical field of development work of Finnish higher education institutions. In the structure of national education, this sector is divided in two pillars: research-oriented universities and universities of applied sciences. Both pillars encounter the current societal situation where students work long hours weekly, alongside their degree studies. Moreover, an increasing number of students may have extensive work experience already when they start their study cycle in higher education, and this applies in particular to students entering part-time programs, targeted for professionals with prior vocational qualifications and/or practical experience in the field of study. Mechanisms facilitating this integration developed in Finnish higher education institutes, as they are articulated across actions of a nation-wide project *Toteemi*, are the topic of this contribution.

Mona Pielorz and **Patrick Werquin** (Germany & France) reflect on the learning and validating systems of Germany and France for debating the question whether formal technical vocational education and training versus recognition of non-formal and informal learning competitors are or not.

Roberto Trainito and **Stefania Lemme** (Italy) define the state-of-the-art of the Italian certification system of the competences, at national and regional levels. They explain the potential of the *Atlas of Work and Qualifications* together with its functional use for the competences' identification, validation and certification (IVC), the Italian way for VPL. The analysis demonstrates how *the Atlas of Work and Qualifications* allows correlation and equivalence between regional qualifications (through competence description) and describes the content of work in terms of activities (tasks, assignments, etc.) and potentially deliverable product/services in carrying out the activities described

Celeo Emilio Arias (Honduras) introduces the Observal-Honduras. The objective of this project is to develop an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for an observatory identifying concepts and theoretical constructs that have been used for analysing the recognition of *'previous, current and prospective learning'*. In a second step Observal-Honduras aims to conceptualize and operationalize the identified concepts and constructs. This article demonstrates that identified concepts and/or constructs can be found interconnected and/or dispersed in different approaches, models and perspectives within the study field of the 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)'. This is valuable for future research; and for consolidation and maturation of dominant and emerging concepts and constructs, both in the study field at international level, as well as in the Honduran and Latin American context. Furthermore, there is a great opportunity for the RPL study field to consider, in addition to Prior Learning, the integration with Current and Prospective Learning.

Track 5 – Post-validation Pathways

The value of VPL results on the job market and to education providers determines the success of a VPL system. VPL results must facilitate an individual's mobility, opening up pathways which were previously closed off.
Ruud Duvekot introduces this paragraph of the *Berlin Declaration* and paves the way for the seven contributions that concentrate on the principles of this track. These contributions come from South Africa (2), the United States of America, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and the EU-project ImproVal.

Karen Deller (South Africa) puts the candidate at the centre with an online RPL portal. RPL is often a tool for the empowerment of disadvantaged workers. But they are frequently unable to access RPL in a country like South Africa (due to various factors such as proximity to an RPL provider, cost of RPL and language). The conundrum of access has been solved in South Africa's banking sector through the launch of an online RPL portal. After RPL, the portal feeds into various post RPL pathways (including learning, career support and guidance and work opportunities). The benefits of an online portal and its role in enabling both RPL itself as well as progression post-RPL is presented in this contribution.

James Rickabaugh (USA) claims that most formal educational systems are designed to prepare students to be taught. Yet, today's young people face a future that will require them to be skilled, independent learners, regardless of the careers they choose or whether a formal instructional support is always present. While it will continue to remain important to develop key academic skills and knowledge, we know that success in a rapidly changing world will also demand the capacity and desire for lifelong learning.
The Institute for Personalized Learning in Wisconsin, USA is dedicated to meeting the challenge of nurturing powerful learners, who have the capacity and drive to learn for life. This article addresses the underlying theory and research supporting this approach and features examples of personalized, learner-centered practices. The implications are debated of a redesigned learning ecosystem that develops the capacity of all young people to learn without always having to depend on formal structures and professional instruction. The implications for developing capable, independent adult learners for success in work and life are explored as well.

Ruud Duvekot and ***Klaas Doorlag*** (The Netherlands) elaborate on the process of Dialogical Validation in teacher-training programmes in The Netherlands.
When flexibilizing learning, translating personal learning experiences - formally, non-formally or informally acquired - into recognizable learning outcomes is a critical success factor. This translation can be organized effectively in a dialogue between student and university-teacher through the validation of personal learning outcomes in a portfolio-steered process. Such *dialogical validation* is facilitated in the Netherlands at *Utrecht University AS* in teacher-training. *Dialogic validation* is defined as learning-independent assessment of prior learning experiences and advice on further learning, aiming at realizing a personalized learning trajectory. The learner and the 'teacher' act together – in dialogue – as co-owners of this process. It is a step forward from analytical assessment towards a holistic approach in which the learner is assessed as a complete and unique individual in her prior learning, working and living experiences. The result of *dialogic validation* is a personalized learning process in terms of content, form and meaning for the learning outcomes that a student still needs to achieve.

Dialogic validation has been introduced in bachelor-programmes for teachers in basic education (*groepsleerkracht*) and in secondary education (*zij-instroom*).

Heidi Bolton*, ***Joe Samuels***, ***Omotola Akindolani*** and **Takatso Mofokeng*** (South Africa) sketch the story of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) development in South Africa between 1995 and the present (2020), in a system where access to learning, redress, progression along learning pathways, quality, transparency and the integration of education and training are key. The paper has five parts. Firstly, it sketches the context for RPL in the country. Secondly, it explains how RPL is understood in South Africa, and RPL policy development. Thirdly, it analyses RPL developments since 1995. Fourth, it presents the latest RPL data in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) managed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The paper closes with reflections on these developments and their implications for access and redress, flexible learning pathways and lifelong learning.

Jo Peeters (The Netherlands) and **Jens Aichinger***, ***Karl-Heinz Gerholz***, ***Leonie Weigt***, ***Guus Bremer***, ***Pauline Boivin***, ***Eeva Jeronen***, ***Lotta Pakanen***, ***Ida Adolfová***, ***Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová*** and **Mária Joklová*** (Europe) present a study on the outcomes and impact when validating volunteer's competences. Education and learning are substantial and constant parts of everyone's life. Even though the concept of learning is often associated with courses, assignments and exams (formal learning), knowledge, skills and competences can also be acquired in many other ways (informal/non-formal learning). Sometimes, we are not even aware of all the activities from which we educate ourselves and which competences we might have developed through them. Let alone when volunteering.

Franz Fuchs-Weikl (Austria) presents a personal experience of the French validation system. On November 19, 2018 he obtained the university degree "DURIF" (*Diplôme d'Université Responsable en Ingénierie de Formation*) at the Sorbonne in Paris by means of the recognition of competence. This is a French Bachelor's level qualification in the field of education management. The prerequisite for this is admission by university, the preparation of a dossier and its 'defence' in front of a jury. He describes the entire process of one and a half year, from initial consultation to completion. He was the first non-native French speaker at the Sorbonne to undergo recognition of competences or a VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*).

Ana Catarina Mendes Garcia and **Maria do Carmo Vieira da Silva** (Portugal) problematize the question 'to what extent can a training model, based on the VPL approach and supported by principles of the educational sciences, contribute to individual empowerment and, consequently, to an improvement in the organizational quality of Portuguese SMEs?'. They found that the training processes presented valued learning in the workplace. However, the definition of a training assessment methodology focused on the development of individual competences and the combination of non-formal and informal learning seemed to be lacking. Based on these findings they suggest a dynamic intervention strategy by means of a training model based on VPL.

Track 6 – Legal Foundations

A clear legal framework, which coordinates and oversees quality provision of VPL, is the bedrock of a sustainable VPL system.

Lieve Van den Brande introduces this paragraph of the *Berlin Declaration* and paves the way for the three contributions that concentrate on the principles of this track. These contributions come from the Faroe Islands, Belgium and France.

John Dalsgarð (Faroe Islands) explicates how the Faroe Islands established a national VPL system with a proper legal foundation. The article sheds light on the main obstacles in the implementation process, including the unsolved question of funding, the scepticism from parts of the labour market, and the question on how best to provide suitable information, both to the public and the relevant stakeholders.

Preparations for a legal VPL system in the Faroe Islands started in 2011 as a result of a cooperation between the Vocational Education and Training Office (*Yrkisdepilin*) in the Ministry of Education, and the NVL (Nordic Network for Adult Learning). A conference arranged by the VET Office and NVL in 2011 led to a working group being established with representatives from the labor market, trade unions and the employers' association, the educational system, all relevant ministries and the unemployment office. The aim was to gain more knowledge and share experiences regarding validation and training in the Faroe Islands in comparison to other Nordic countries. Furthermore, this working group was tasked to suggest and describe different possibilities for establishing a Faroese VPL system. The result of this work was new legislation on validation, passed in the parliament in May 2014.

Nathalie Druine (Belgium) presents a concept for an integrated framework for VNIL [*EVC, Erkennen van verworven competenties]* as developed in Flanders, Belgium.

Regulations for validation of non-formal and informal learning exist in Flanders (Belgium) in several sectors and policy domains but an integrated approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) was still missing. For many years, attempts were made to reduce the fragmentation and to increase the societal impact of validation so as to increase the numbers of validation uptake. In July 2015, the concept for an integrated framework for VNIL *(EVC, Erkennen van verworven competenties/recognition of acquired competences)* was approved by the Flemish Government. This was the start for a long-lasting regulatory process mainly driven by the ministers of education and work but with the involvement of many stakeholders.

Yolande Fermon (France) focuses on the legal basis for *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) in France. Recognition and Validation of Prior Learning has been implemented in France long before the 2012 European Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The best-known validation procedure is the VAE created in January 2002. With this law a new right was given to French citizens, the right to have their skills and competences assessed and validated. VAE represents in France a means to access to qualifications just like education, apprenticeship or further education.

The article explains how the law and the different regulatory texts have organized the implementation of the VAE by sharing the responsibilities between the different actors. It will also show how, over the years, the evolution of the policies and the laws which express them have somewhat changed the initial purposes of the VAE and its link with the professional training of the adults.

The VPL-prizes 2019
The VPL Biennale called for examples of best practice in three categories. The competition offered applicants from around the world an opportunity to communicate best practice, helping to further develop and implement effective VPL systems.

The categories of the VPL-prize 2019:
1. *Products,* including tools and instruments that make learning outcomes visible or help assess them. In this category, *Tormod Skjerve* presents the prize-winner: VIRKE, the Enterprise Federation of Norway.
2. *Procedures,* including structured pathways for getting learning outcomes validated, trainings for assessor and guidance counsellors, or mechanisms for quality assurance of validation processes. In this category, *Violetta Seubert* presents the prize-winner: IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH Ostbrandenburg, Germany.
3. *Policies,* including regional, national or industry guidelines, laws and regulations on validation of prior learning. In this category, *Teresa Valentino* presents the prize-winner: Regione Piemonte, Italy.

Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning

May 8, 2019

Preamble

Validation of Prior Learning is the process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying the learning outcomes of individuals acquired within and outside formal education and training. It gives visibility and value to all forms of learning and seeks to uncover and unlock latent talent in the workforce and in society. Globalization, digitalization and migration are changing the way we work and learn. Where it is already established, we can see that VPL performs an invaluable bridging function between the individual and society, between learning and working. To empower VPL further, we, the VPL community, set out the following overarching principles for achieving a robust and effective VPL-system:

1. Organisational Arrangements

1.1 VPL should have clear entry points for the individual, which are widely advocated and accessible for all.

1.2 There should be clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, development and quality assurance of VPL.

1.3 Relevant stakeholders should cooperate so that VPL and its results hold value and are highly recognised in society.

1.4 VPL should be linked to qualification systems (EQF, NQF or transnational systems).

1.5 VPL should include guidance and support at every stage of the process.

2. Financing

2.1 A sustainable and transparent financing model needs to be in place to cover the full costs of validation including guidance, personnel, infrastructure, instruments and support mechanisms.

2.2 VPL should be accessible to all individuals regardless of financial status.

2.3 Systems for funding the validation of learning outcomes should build on existing infrastructure, regardless of pathway and validation service provider.

2.4 The costs and benefits of VPL, including its social and economic impact, should be monitored, analysed and shared with stakeholders.

2.5 Initial investment should be in place for establishing VPL systems and arrangements.

3. Procedures and Instruments

3.1 Quality assurance mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that assessment tools and instruments are valid, reliable, fair and sustainable.

3.2 Trusted, recognised and updatable instruments should enable flexible, individualized pathways and accommodate the diversity of candidates and learning paths.

3.3 Validation procedures need to refer to agreed standards, such as NQFs and/or sector specific standards, expressed in terms of learning outcomes.

3.4 Validation pathways need to be modular, transparent, and comprehensible at all stages of the process, in order to allow for flexible work and education pathways.

3.5 The outcome of the validation procedure should either grant credits, which allow for exemptions to shorten study time, lead to a full or partial qualification, or open up new routes to education and work.

3.6 Specialist training and certification of assessors is needed in order to ensure an open-minded, competent and non-discriminatory approach.

3.7 VPL should be accessible without any pre-requisite level of formal qualification.

4. Support Structures

4.1 Information provision and awareness raising of the value of people's informal and non-formal learning experiences should be embedded in learning, career guidance and work.

4.2 Accessible guidance and support needs to be provided before, during and after all phases of validation.

4.3 There should be visible entry points to the validation scheme, which are available both online and offline.

4.4 Specialist training and certification/validation for VPL practitioners is necessary.

4.5 Assessors should ensure an objective, fair and transparent process during the assessment and certification phases.

5. Post-Validation Pathways

5.1 VPL should facilitate an individual's personal development and mobility horizontally, vertically and diagonally within and between organisations, sectors and/or countries.

5.2 VPL results should be transparent, reliable and trustworthy for all stakeholders.

5.3 Where relevant, validation certificates need to be equivalent to formal learning certificates so that they hold the same value on the job market and education system and ensure that they form the solid building blocks of further learning and work pathways.

5.4 Further learning options need to be offered, based on the results of the VPL process. They need to be adaptable to the individual's learning preferences.

5.5 The individual learner should be empowered in being an active agent in the creation of functional learning and working pathways, alongside the responsibilities of the education system, employers and social partners.

5.6 Guidance should also be available in the post-validation process.

6. Legal Foundations

6.1 VPL arrangements should be embedded in the relevant legal frameworks and relevant policy areas need to be coordinated.

6.2 VPL legal frameworks should establish an individual's right to access validation and guidance processes and the right to appeal.

6.3 VPL legal frameworks should establish a sustainable funding system.

6.4 VPL legal frameworks should establish regulating body/bodies, which at a minimum oversee provision, uptake and quality assurance of VPL and coordinate the VPL system(s).

6.5 Regardless of the learning pathways, to avoid discrimination, (partial) qualifications and certificates should be the same.

6.6 Laws and regulations need to be reviewed on a regular basis to allow the evolution of the VPL system.

The Keynotes

Validation of Prior Learning: New Developments and Remaining Challenges

Borhene Chakroun

Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) or, in UNESCO-terminology, the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA)[7] is drawing increased attention by decision makers at national, regional and global levels. It is part of the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* of the United Nations[8] and is also featured frequently in the strategic and operational planning of regional economic communities (RECs) and international organizations. As an illustration, the *European Union New Skills Agenda*[9] calls for more. The agenda considers that more people should be able to benefit from this way of learning. The *African Union's continental strategy for TVET* to foster youth employment emphasizes the same necessity.[10] The *Asian Reference Qualifications Frameworks*[11] refers in its purpose, among others, to encourage the development of national approaches to validating learning gained outside formal education, while the *Caribbean Strategy for TVET* emphasises the needs for new mechanisms to reach out to those excluded individuals include Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.[12]

At global level, the *2019 G20 Employment and Labour Ministers Declaration* highlights the importance of recognizing experience developed during working life by older workers and recognizing and certifying relevant prior learning.[13] The *G7 Commitment Charter on Technical and Vocational Education and Training* [14]calls on countries to support strengthening prior learning assessment recognition systems.

Moreover, several international and regional organizations have developed approaches and tools to support the promotion of RVA. For example, UNESCO developed *International Guidelines on Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning*.[15] More recently, ILO produced a *Toolkit for Recognition of Skills Systems*

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7   *https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation*
8   *https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/*
9   *https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223*
10 *https://au.int/en/documents/20181022/continental-strategy-technical-and-vocational-educational-and-training-tvet*
11 *https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/*
12 *https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Regional-Strategy-for-Technical-and-Vocational-Education-and-Training_1990.pdf*
13 *https://g20-meeting2019.mhlw.go.jp/labour/img/Ministerial_declaration_2019G20LEMM.pdf*
14 *http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/education/2019-TVET-charter.pdf*
15 *https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation/unesco-guidelines-recognition-validation-and*

with the view to improve the design and implementation of RVA systems and programs internationally. This toolkit provides examples of good practice from ILO constituents around the world and guidance for policy-makers and practitioners.[16]

In the European context, the *2012 Recommendation on validation*[17] and the updated *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*[18] are key tools adopted to support EU member states in their efforts to promote RVA.

Another important global trend is the development of RVA in higher education. For instance, UNESCO's new regional conventions on recognition of qualifications in Higher Education and the Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education[19] consider RVA as a potential pathway to access higher education for the purpose of completion of a higher education programme or continuation of higher education studies.

Hence, it is safe to say that, notwithstanding the diversity of contexts, there is a global consensus around the need to promote RVA to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, especially sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and SDG 8 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Yet whilst RVA occupies an important place on policy agendas, the capacity of countries to develop at scale quality RVA systems and to respond to multiple and elevated demands is uneven, and in many countries often limited. There is a dearth of data on the scale, needs, beneficiaries, outcomes of RVA schemes which affect the capacity of actions of decision makers and the international community.

Furthermore, RVA is increasingly placed in the context of changing labour markets, the need to meet the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* and the ideal of leaving no one behind. The next sections outline major areas that should be considered to address these questions. The text starts by placing RVA in the context of the SDGs, then takes into consideration the implication of changes in the labour market. The last sections highlight the importance of evidence-based RVA policies and schemes and offer a set of areas for actions. The concluding section sums up the key messages.

The sustainable development context of RVA

In 2015, the international community set an ambitious *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, which were adopted, demonstrate the scale and ambition of this universal Agenda. The SDGs focus on five key elements: people, planet, peace, prosperity, and partnership. The 2030 Agenda is disruptive given its new paradigm for development (sustainable development rather than just growth), aspiration (eradicating extreme poverty by 2030), universal outreach (developed and developing countries alike) and inter-sectoral nature. Education is both a goal in itself (SDG4) and a means for attaining many of the other sustainable development goals such as poverty, climate change, health and gender equality[20].

In this context, the Sustainable Development Goal - SDG4 seeks to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all'. SDG4 frees learning from the narrow confines of the initial schooling and training and places it 'across life', inviting

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16 *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_541698.pdf*

17 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF*

18 *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4054*

19 *https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention*

20 *http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ENGLISH_Why_it_Matters_Goal_4_QualityEducation.pdf*

approaches that move education and training into workplaces, communities, families, internet and other environments outside the boundaries of formal education. Key components of SDG4 highlight the importance of better connecting learning to work and work to learning.

A Framework for Action supports the implementation of SDG4. It includes targets, indicative strategies and a series of indicators helping policy makers and national stakeholders to relate to the challenges at hand. Five of the ten targets are concerned with improving the quality of education for individual children, young people and adults, and to give them better and more relevant knowledge and skills. Qualifications are at the centre of the targets related to vocational and tertiary educations. The emphasis is on increasing the relevance and flexibility of education and training programmes, enhancing lifelong learning, improving the transparency of qualification systems, creating possibilities for credit accumulation and transfer, or developing quality assurance systems. Countries are also requested to develop appropriate mechanisms to recognize, validate and accredit prior learning.

Yet, as the review of SDG 4 for the UN Secretary General Report clearly suggests the world is off-track for achieving the 2030 targets. The report also demonstrates, however, that progress has been slow on many Goals, that the most vulnerable people and countries continue to suffer the most, and that the global response thus far has not been ambitious enough. While, there is no specific data regarding skills development and RVA, some proxies show the scale of the challenges. For instance, according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, about 750 million adults —two-thirds of whom are women—remained illiterate in 2018. The World Bank (World Development Report, 2019) estimates the global low skilled population to 2 billion persons. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 4, forthcoming) message regarding progress in adult learning and education is that 'participation is patchy, progress inadequate, and investment insufficient'. The bad news is that the situation in the labour market may bring rapid transformation and more challenges for individuals with low skills. The next section will discuss this aspect in details.

RVA in Industry 4.0 and future of work

The current industrial transformation often referred to as Industry 4.0, is attracting much policy attention. It has the potential to improve peoples' lives, but it also raises a number of important policy issues, including those of privacy, security, consumer protection, competition, taxation, job creation and job obsolescence. It presents the risk of worsening inequalities within and across countries. Whether the dividends that should accompany productive digitization can be harnessed or not is dependent on the existence of certain prerequisites and conditions: infrastructure to provide mobile connections; access to affordable connections for local populations; adequate content; and raising the level of education for all.[21]

ILO, OECD, World Bank and other organisations[22] produced an important report regarding shifts in labour markets consider that the automation will accelerate the shift in required

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21 *https://www.gsmaintelligence.com*

22 *www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_662410/lang--en/index.htm*
    http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DSTI/ICCP/IIS(2015)10/FINAL&docLanguage=En
    http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en
    https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2019

workforce skills and that the strongest growth in demand will be for social and emotional skills such as leadership and managing others will rise and demand for higher cognitive skills will grow moderately overall, but will rise sharply for some of these skills, especially creativity. In turn, the report considers that some skill categories will be less in demand. Basic cognitive skills, which include basic data input and processing, will decline as well as the demand for physical and manual skills.

In the same vain, a review of US O*NET occupations[23] shows that in 2002, 56% of the jobs studied required low levels of digital skills, nearly 40% of jobs required medium levels and just 5% required high-level digital skills. By 2016, the share of jobs requiring high-level skills had jumped to 23%, and the share requiring medium-level skills rose to 48% percent. And in a huge shift, the share of jobs requiring low-level digital skills actually fell from 56% to 30%. Significantly, a recent OECD study[24] found that less educated workers were more likely to have a job that could be at least partly automated in the future. Basically, routine tasks are expected to be replaced first, while tasks involving higher-level cognitive, social and emotional skills are more likely to be enhanced rather than replaced by technology. According to World Bank projections, low skilled persons may find themselves 'in dead-end jobs with relatively flat lifetime income growth… [and this] situation will only get worse as technology [continues to] affect the demand for skills'.[25]

Taken together, these findings indicate that the future world of work requires more than just job-specific skills. To thrive in the future world of work, a large set of skills will be needed, ranging from foundation skills through to the right socio-emotional skills to work collaboratively and flexibly, to green and digital skills. Twenty-first century skills including creative, learning to learn, entrepreneurial and transferable skills are at the top of employers' expectations for the workforce.

RVA should give more attention to these changes in demand and develop the right approaches to assess, recognise and validate such skills.

The advent and growth of digital technology provides the basis for the initial, and now most widespread, applications for on-line career guidance, assessment, validation and certification.[26] Digital technology can also support better access and effective RVA systems while it can improve data collection and use to support RVA. This point will be discussed in the next section.

Data to support RVA

In a paper entitled 'RVA that counts' Vilalba and Chakrounnote that policy-making, at both national and international levels, suffers huge data gaps and weaknesses in terms of

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23 Occupational Information Network (O*NET) is a free online database that contains hundreds of occupational definitions to help students, job seekers, businesses and workforce development professionals to understand today's world of work in the United States: *https://www.onetonline.org/*
   https://www.brookings.edu/research/digitalization-and-the-american-workforce/

24 *https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5jlz9h56dvq7-en.pdf?expires=1588168760&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=02D465DF5557D08C945BD496E3B8C7B2*

25 *https://books.google.fr/books?id=uWM9DwAAQBAJ&pg=PT167&lpg=PT167&dq=in+dead-end+jobs +with+relatively+flat+lifetime+income+growth+situation+that+will+only+get+worse+as+technology+&source= bl&ots=Ud2f9Zagu-&sig=iQlFWvF-CT72X7b6fAPL6DbIcUU&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v= onepage&q=in%20dead-end%20jobs%20with%20relatively%20flat%20lifetime%20income%20grow th%20situation%20that%20will%20only%20get%20worse%20as%20technology&f=false*

26 Keevy, J. & Chakroun, B. (2018). *Digital credentialing: Implications for the recognition of learning across borders.* Paris: UNESCO.

monitoring RVA schemes.[27] The authors highlight three major issues. First, they warn that even obtaining basic data and ensuring its accuracy is beyond some systems. Second, they highlight, the note that the ability to disaggregate for target groups in order to carry out any forecasting of needs is out of reach for most countries. Third, they point to the lack of feedback data, for example regarding labour market outcomes and further learning opportunities for RVA candidates. The authors conclude that few countries are basing their RVA strategies based on robust national data systems, while according to the authors such data is vital for policy-making, peer learning, benchmarking and comparison at international level.

Responding to gaps and enhancing international cooperation
The previous sections described the state of progress according to the data available to us today. They have also shown that beyond the data, a wealth of actions has been taken to respond to the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* of the United Nations. It is clear from this information that to realize the promise at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for people and planet alike, we must be much more ambitious. We must embrace deeper structural changes, and we must ramp up international cooperation and multi-stakeholder action. Based on the information emerging through the Voluntary National reviews and the numerous other intergovernmental forums that have contributed to the annual High-level Political Forum, fundamental changes are required in a number of systemic and cross-cutting areas. Six areas, each of which is interrelated, are set out below alongside country examples:

I) Supporting citizens to make well-informed choices about learning pathways and RVA: A number of prior conditions and criteria should be in place so that informed choices about learning pathways and RVA can be made. These include a set of policy measures that support the development of integrated and quality learning systems. For example, such systems should ensure that overarching qualifications frameworks and information and guidance systems are in place. It can also new entitlements for lifelong learning where RVA is a critical part.[28]

II) Anticipating the demand for skills so as to better inform learning pathways: Several countries are making particular efforts to anticipate and identify what skills will be needed for future of work. They use, among others, forecasting techniques and sectoral analysis tools to evaluate future skills demands. Increasingly countries are also using real-time labour market information to inform employment and skills development programmes. Several countries have developed effective systems such as France, UK, US and Australia. While others are developing appropriate systems such as Tunisia, Malaysia and Morocco (UNESCO, forthcoming).

III) Improvement of governance, including public-private partnerships: The cross-sectoral character of RVA, transversal to the education system, the world of work and, even more

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27 Villalba-Garcia, E. and Chakroun, B., RVA that counts: what data do we need to nurture Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Prior Learning? In: Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO & UIL (2019). *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks 2019. Volume 1: Thematic chapters.* Torino, ETF, pp. 45-59. Available at: *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/2224-0*

28 Chakroun, B. and Daelman, K., Lifelong learning examined from a rights-based perspective: The road not yet travelled. In*: NORRAG special issue 01: The Right to Education Movements and Policies: Promises and Realities*, 2018.

broadly, to life in general, implies shared responsibilities and cooperation among actors and stakeholders. To ensure that education and training keep pace with an evolving technological environment, many governments are working with employer networks to establish a regular forum to discuss priorities. Finally, skills councils, committees and observatories are also useful mechanisms for involving the private sector. Examples are SENAI in Brazil,[29] sector skills councils in the United Kingdom,[30] and sectoral observatories in France.[31]

iv) Provide enabling financing: According to UNESCO's global review of training funds (UNESCO, 2018), more than 70 countries (including five G20 countries) have training funds that support skills development and continuing training including RVA. From a rights-based perspective, the individual entitlements and individual 'drawing rights' models are of specific interest, as they focus on financial incentives for individuals to stimulate participation in lifelong learning. Such models have been developed by several countries. Cases to point at are the French personal learning account (CPF) and the Singapore FutureSkills initiative.[32]

v) Monitoring RVA data can improve decision making: As highlighted by Villalba and Chakroun (2019) the complex nature of RVA systems and their fragmented nature require a very clear definition of what RVA is and how its outcomes will be measured. Several countries such as France, Brazil and show how countries can effectively monitor and evaluate RVA. Key indicators regarding access, assessment and labour market outcomes are used. Administrative data, specific surveys and on-line data are used in this context.

vi) Enhancing international cooperation: The International community is engaged in achieving SDG4. It is important that efforts should extend beyond countries boundaries. Peer and policy learning are also important. UNESCO through its governing bodies and platforms including UNEVOC Network, and UNESCO Chairs plays an important role. Its Observatory on RVA is critical for monitoring progress and for knowledge sharing. The Biennale is another important forum that can advocate for RVA, identify promising practices, support peer learning and reinforce international cooperation.

Conclusion
This article started by demonstrating that RVA is high on the policy agenda. It emphasised the shift of policy objectives of RVA to a sustainable development paradigm and meeting the demand for industry 4.0 and future of works. In this context, *Education 2030*[33] has the potential to both reinforce RVA as a key driver of reforms in a lifelong learning perspective, and to connect the analysis of RVA with intended sustainable development outcomes. It suggest that RVA should give more attention to the skills in demand in the future of work. The article points to the importance of evidence-based approaches and data in this context. To meet these challenges and fill the gaps, the article suggests to give attention to the six key areas described above. International cooperation is key in this context with the Biennale as flagship event and process.

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29 *http://www.portaldaindustria.com.br/senai/*
30 *https://www.thetechpartnership.com/*
31 *https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/observatoire-du-numerique*
32 *https://www.skillsfuture.sg*
33 UNESCO, 2015. *Education 2030: Incheon declaration and Framework for action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf*

Validation in Europe. The State of Play

Ernesto Villalba[34]

Many of the people that participated in the VPL Biennale have contributed to the development of the European inventory on validation over the years, drafting the country chapters, providing information or comments to its diverse range of outputs. It is only thanks to this growing community of practice that the validation inventory is possible and has been continuously improving over the years. This chapter presents an overview of the situation concerning validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe.

Validation is about making all learning count. It is increasingly present in European and national policies, underpinned by two main principles: (a) all learning, irrespectively of how it has been acquired is valuable and (b) informal and non-formal learning complement formal learning (Villalba & Bjornavold, 2017). It is meant to add to and work together with the learning taking place in formal education institutions.

Validation makes visible the diverse and rich learning of individuals that take place outside formal education (Cedefop, 2015). Most of our learning takes place outside formal education and training – at home, in the workplace or through leisure activities. Around 45% of adults (aged 25-64) report participating in training in the last year, only 5.8 do it in formal education institutions (Eurostat, 2019). It is important to develop ways in which we can understand and communicate the outcomes of the individual's learning in all possible settings. Validation is the tool to achieve this understanding. In the Council Recommendation of 2012 validation was defined as "a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases" (Council of the European Union, 2012).

The importance of validation
Work and life-experience is of crucial importance to enter employment and to be integrated in society. But if this experience remains hidden and not valued, nothing much is gained. As highlighted by the European Commission in the European Social Pillar (European Commission, 2017) and the New Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2016) people should be able to use the full range of their skills for their careers or for further learning – including what they acquired in non-formal or informal ways.

Validation can contribute to a better functioning of the labour market by a better match of skills and labour demand. Making visible all the knowledge and skills of employees, including those acquire informally or in non-formal settings will provide a better pool of skilled workforce, better align with the needs of employers. In addition, lack of formal certification

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34 This chapter is based on the documentation prepared for the joint presentation by DG-EMPL and Cedefop delivered by Manuela Geleng (DG-EMPL, Director) and Ernesto Villalba (Cedefop) at the VPL Biennale 2018. The text also draws on: Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report.* The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Cedefop or the European Commission.

of informally acquired skills may hinder career progression and jobs prospects (Cedefop, 2018). We know that skills mismatch is not a static phenomenon; someone that might have started their job "matched" to their level of skills might become underkilled if s/he does not keep up with job demands. Reskilling and upskilling is a must for everyone, especially given the speed of technological development nowadays. This process of re-skilling and upskilling, however, is often invisible and the employee might not be able to use in case he is laid off or wants to look for another job. The previous experiences are acknowledged informally in a CV, but there is no certification associated with it and the level of trust in this information will vary. Employers will have more reliable information for recruitment if skills acquired through job-experience were properly certified through a validation process (Cedefop, 2014b). Validation can help in the transferability of skills between companies and sectors, and in this way support mobility within sectors as well as across the European labour market. A job for life is something that is becoming more and more rare. Individuals will have to be prepared to change jobs often and remain flexible to adapt to a changing labour market.

Employers also increasingly report that, as well as job-specific skills, they're looking for strong "transversal" skills, the ones which can typically be applied across jobs – and indeed throughout life. Adaptability, creative problem-solving, a spirit of entrepreneurship, excellent teamwork are among the most demanded type of skills (Cedefop, 2020b). We often build these skills through life experience; they're not so easy to capture in formal qualifications – so companies can't immediately see them. Initial education and training provide the necessary, strong foundation for further learning, but it is not enough. Validation can make skills that visible and help the match between their demand and supply – bringing employers and workers together.

Validation can also contribute to fighting social exclusion by providing a way to improve the employability of early school leavers, unemployed individuals, low-skilled adults, third country nationals, and other groups at risk. In Europe, there are 65 million low qualified adults, who are especially vulnerable to crises (Cedefop, 2017). Many of them have developed valuable skills, others had fewer opportunities do to so. Not all of them are even aware of their skills – an important first step towards putting them to good use. For all of them, proper validation is the starting point to raise their qualification level and their chances in the labour market. Validation tends to increase self-confidence of those that participate in the process, giving new impetus to their motivation to learn (Souto-Otero, 2014). Opportunities for validation can generate a "virtuous circle", making visible the skills acquired and motivating people to keep developing throughout their career. It is thus, a crucial element to implement lifelong learning systems.

Young people are also a major target of validation. Youth activities, volunteering, sport is as important for youth development as is formal education. Understanding and recognising the outcomes of these activities is therefore as important as recognising formal education achievements. Many of these experiences will provide valuable competences for future career prospects.

Finally, migration can benefit greatly from a good existing validation system. All migrants, of any type, might arrive to Europe with or without qualifications, but they all have skills. Identifying and validating migrants' skills is a crucial, necessary step towards their integration in society and the labour market.

The political journey

Validation gained momentum after the Commission communication on lifelong learning in which validation is an important element (European Commission, 2000). European level developments on validation were slow during the first decade of the century but spread across different policy documents on education and training (Council of the European Union, 2004; European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training & European Commission, 2002). In 2012, the Recommendation of 20 of December set up more clearly the agenda for validation(Council of the European Union, 2012). The Recommendation appeared in a moment, following the 2008 economic crisis and the need to rethink education, training and employment policies. Unemployment soared, hitting young people in particular, raising serious questions regarding the responsiveness and relevance of formal education and training.

With the 2012 recommendation, validation moves from being an exclusive education and training issue to become part of a wider policy challenge (Villalba & Bjornavold, 2017). The 2015 Refugee crisis confirmed this widening and validation was brought as an important element of the social pillar. Both at European and national level, several instruments and arrangements appeared to identify, document and assess refugee skills and competences (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018; Council of Europe, 2020; European Commission, 2019). The 2016 Skills Agenda that focused on low qualified adults also has validation as a key instrument in facilitating social and labour market integration (European Commission, 2016).

The 2012 Recommendation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. The Recommendation gives the EQF advisory group the responsibility to follow up the Recommendation. The recommendation also provides a series of principles that define the common basic denominator of validation arrangements in Europe. In addition, it establishes the European guidelines (Cedefop, 2015) and the European inventory as two important tools to support Member States in the development and implementation of validation arrangements.

The European Inventory

Cedefop has been working on validation of non-formal and informal learning for at least 20 years. In the year 2000, it published the seminal work "making learning visible" (Bjornavold, 2000) establishing the bases for the subsequent policies on validation. The report constituted a first attempt to look at what countries where doing in creating more flexible educational systems and what were the implications of the creation of arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In this sense, it is the predecessor of both, the guidelines and the European inventory.

The first European inventory came out in 2004, since then, it has been a regular feature in Cedefop's webpage (Cedefop, 2020a). It has been updated six times (Cedefop, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2010, 2014a, 2016, 2019). The objective has been always to collect systematically quality information on validation across Europe. The European inventory is now developed by Cedefop, the Commission and ETF. The main objectives of the inventory are:

1. To create a trustworthy source of information on validation.
2. Provide up-to-date information to allow for peer learning.
3. Have a systematic monitoring of progress on validation.

It has both thematic and specific country dimension. The 2018 edition features 39 country reports (EU-28, EFTA countries, Turkey, Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia). For

Belgium, two country reports were produced[35] and for the United Kingdom[36], three country reports were produced. Two synthesis reports were produced summarising main findings (Cedefop, European Commission & ICF, 2019). One for EU, EFTA countries and Turkey and a separate synthesis report for Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia (Scott, 2019). In addition, thematic reports included:

- Bridging the gap: validation creating routes and links between sectors (Hawley-Woodall, 2019).
- How digital forms of assessment and self-assessment might place a new challenge and opportunity for assessment methodologies (Luomi-Messerer, 2019).
- How social partners and other labour market-related stakeholders are involved in validation arrangements (Dzhengova, 2019).
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrants and refugee (Murphy, 2019).
- The role of validation in an upskilling pathway for young people not in education and training (NEETS), adults with low skills and long-term unemployed people (Endrodi, 2019b).

The 2018 edition includes also three international case studies: Canada (Mathou, 2019), Chile (Endrodi, 2019a) and Hong Kong (Duvekot, 2019).

The European inventory is meant to work together with the European guidelines (Cedefop, 2015). The EU guidelines articulate the main themes of inquiry on the inventory. While the guidelines, based on the 2012 Country Recommendation, present questions and possible consequences of the different choices countries faced when developing validation systems, the inventory shows how the actual implementation of the policies and practices look. The inventory shows what answers the countries have given to the questions the guidelines post.

Method

In order to understand the figures presented in this chapter, it is important to present in what way the inventory collects the data and how it is reported. The inventory collects information on validation arrangements differentiated by education and training, Labour market and third sector[i]. The education and training systems are divided into 5 sub-sectors: General education, initial vocational training, continuous vocational training, adult education and higher education. This was decided as validation might be possible in one sector of education but not in others. This allows for a better overview of what is happening in countries and for a more targeted, adequate reporting for countries to learn from each other. The data is collected by experts in each country that draft a country report and provide a summary through a country fiche. Each country report is reviewed by at least two experts and the representative of the EQF AG in that country.

The fiche mapped the situation in each country according to standardised indicators. It is important to note that capturing a complex reality such as validation practices through indicators requires certain level of interpretation and simplification. Thus, the figures present a possible interpretation by the experts on the characteristics of validation systems. The figures presented in chapter are based on an analysis of the data collected through the 'country fiche'. Questions within the country fiche were a mix of multiple choice and single response options, with some allowing for free-text entries. The presence of multiple-choice questions means that the totals can come to more than the total number of countries with

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35 Two reports have been prepared for Belgium: Flanders, Wallonia.
36 Three reports have been prepared for the United Kingdom: England and Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales.

validation arrangements in place in some questions. The questionnaire for the sectors of education and training (listed above) was the same across all five sectors. Different questionnaires were used for the labour market and third sector areas. The responses to the questions included within the 'general', labour market and third sector parts of the country fiche database were answered once only for each country.

Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the relationship between the Council Recommendation of 2012, the European guidelines and the European inventory on validation as well as the main themes that the inventory covers, based on the EU guidelines.

Figure 1: European inventory in relation to Council Recommendation and European Guidelines
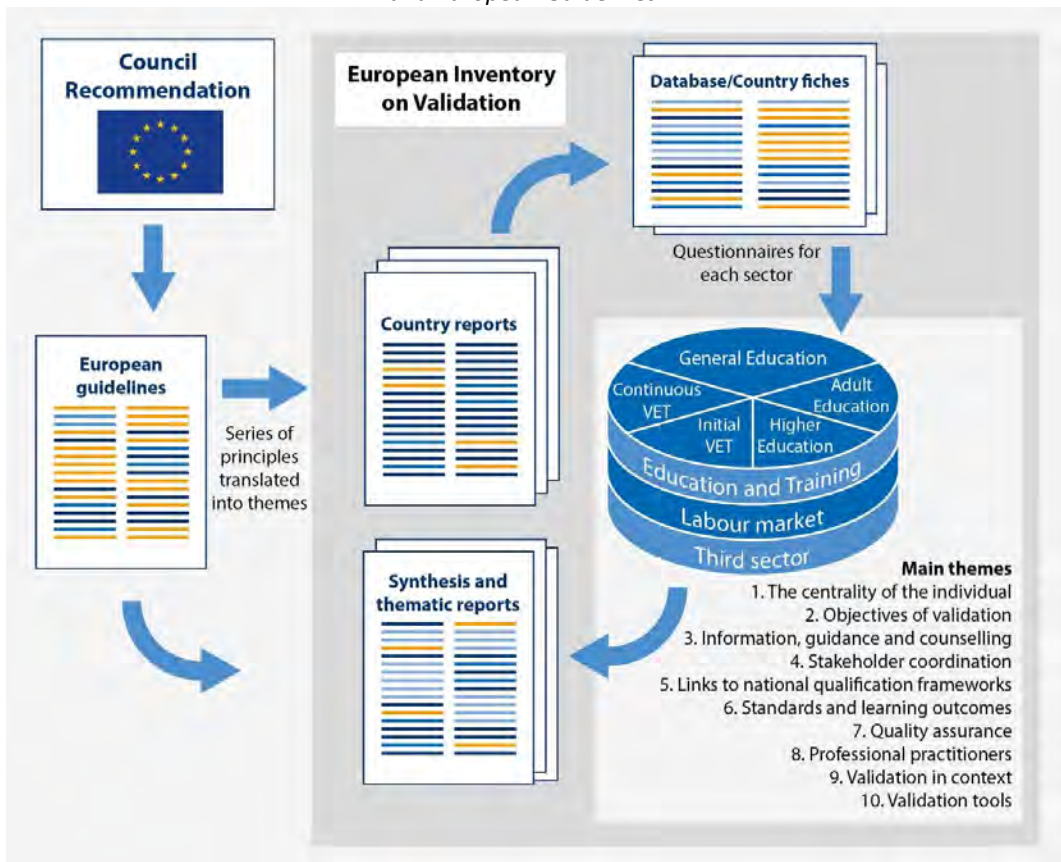
Source: Villalba, 2017.

Based on these themes, derived from the Recommendation principles, the European inventory developed in 2016 and 2018 a series of specific indicators that try to capture the progress towards the fulfilment of those principles. These indicators are a possible interpretation of the situation, based on country expert judgement. The indicators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Principles on validation

	Indicator
1	Validation arrangements in place
2	Guidance and counselling is readily available
3	Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is available and accessible
4	Validation arrangements are linked to NQFs and in line with the EQF
5	Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation comply with agreed standards that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes
6	Provision is made for the development of the professional competences of validation practitioners
7	Transparent quality assurance measures support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation
8	Synergies between validation and credit systems exist
9	Disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to benefit from validation
10	Skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment[37]

Note: for all principles, except 7, 8, 9 and 11 data have been collected in all three areas. For principle number 10, see footnote.

Results of the European inventory on validation

Figure 2 presents the number of countries in which the different principles addressed in the recommendation can be found on validation arrangements in each of the areas explored: education and training, labour market and third sector. The figure shows that validation remains something closely related to education and training and that validation possibilities connected to labour market or third sector area are less common across countries. However, countries seem to be increasing the possibility of validation connected to labour market initiatives. Validation is possible in at least one of the sub-sectors of education in 35 of the 36 studies countries. Experts reported validation arrangements in 23 countries for the third sector, compared to 22 in 2016. In the labour market, validation arrangements are in place in 19 countries in contrast with the 15 in 2016. The figure also shows that several of the principles are more easily found, such as the provision of information and guidance or linking to NQF. Professional development of validation practitioners is something that is less provided. Quality assurance, existence of credit systems or the degree that disadvantage groups are served by validation arrangements was only measure within education and training with a varying degree of development. It is also important to note that, even if some countries report to have validation arrangements in place and certain principles applying to

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37 The country fiche included two questions in relation to the Skills Audit. Across all areas, the question was: "Are skills audits, where the definition is compatible/informed by the Council Recommendation in place? ". This is the case in 26 countries as presented in Figure 2. The second question was asked in the labour market area only as follows: 'Is it standard practice to offer people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to undertake a skills audit?' This is currently the case in 15 countries. To assess the level of implementation, both indicators are used in Figure 3.

them, these arrangements might be very limited or although available their use might be very marginal.

Figure 2: Number of countries covering the principles addressed by the recommendation in at least one area/sector by area and principle
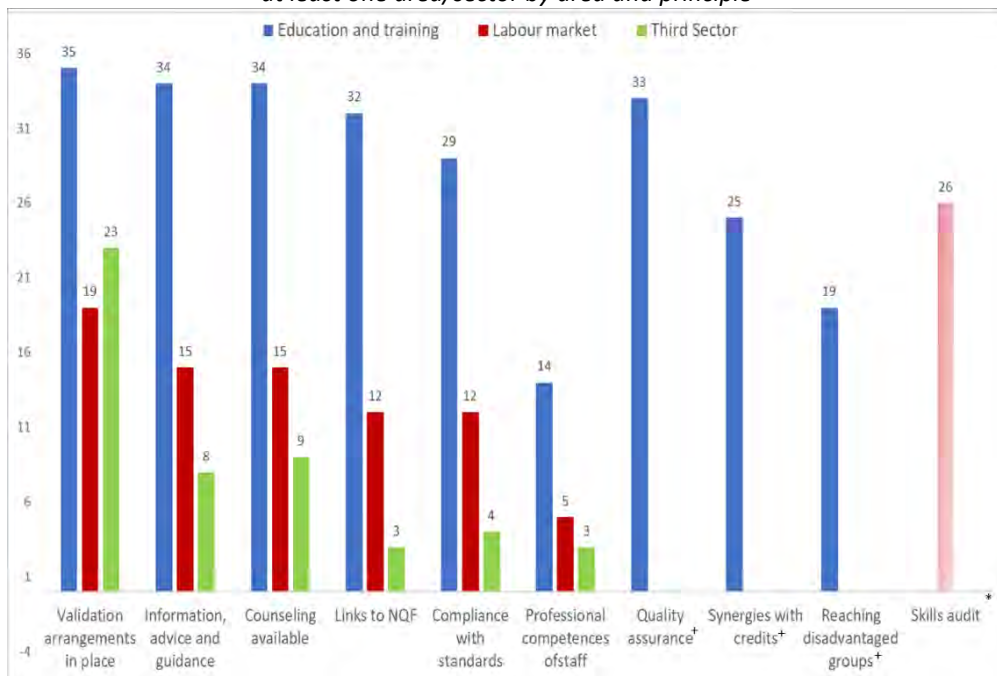
Source: European Inventory 2018
+ Information only available for Education and training area * Information collected globally (not specific by area)

While figure 2 shows a rather positive picture of the progress towards the creation of validation arrangements following recommendation principles, figure 3 shows a less advanced situation. The figure aims at capturing the level of comprehensiveness in the implementation of validation and its principles. Through a scoring process[38] the level comprehensiveness by principle. A high level of implementation means that the principle applied across education and training, labour market and third sector. The figure shows that more needs to be done in applying the principles across the different areas in which validation exist, especially in relation to the professional development of practitioners but also on the provision of validation to disadvantage groups, compliance with agreed standards or synergies with credits.

Another way of seeing this lack of comprehensiveness is presented in figure 4, which shows the number of countries across the different subsectors of education. Arrangements are more common in vocational training, both initial and continuous. Many countries have also possibilities for validation in the area of higher education and fewer in adult education, while validation is not commonly available in general education.

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38 See the annex in the Synthesis report of the inventory for a more detailed description of the methodology.

Figure 3: Number of countries by the level of comprehensiveness implementation and principle

Source: European Inventory 2018

Figure 4 also shows that form 2016 there has been certain increased on validation possibilities across sectors, with more countries making validation possible in almost all sub-sectors.

Figure 4: Number of countries with validation arrangements by sub-sector of education
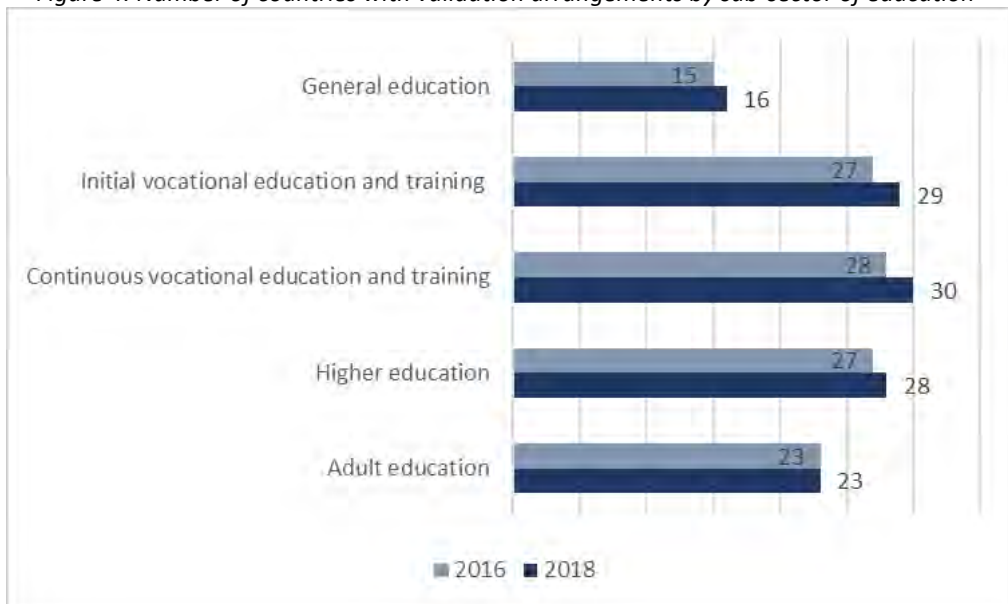
Source: European Inventory 2018

Figure 4 also highlights the fragmentation of validation arrangements that are distributed differently across sectors. Fragmentation was already signalled as one of the major problems in validation in the 2014 inventory (Cedefop, European Commission, & ICF, 2014).

The data of the inventory shows that countries are increasingly creating national strategies for validation, possibly as a way to combat this fragmentation. The Inventory asked national experts to indicate if validation arrangements are embedded into a strategy, that is, whether there are overarching legal frameworks or policies specifically and explicitly establishing validation initiatives. There is a significant increase in the number of countries with or creating validation strategies since 2010. While by 2010, 17 countries had no validation strategy, by 2018 in all 36 countries, some type of strategy for validation is either in place (25) or being developed (15) as illustrated in Figure 5. In Sweden, the National Delegation for Validation 2015-2019, was appointed to provide a first suggestion for a national strategy for validation. Other countries with validation systems established, such as the French- Speaking community of Belgium or Ireland, are moving towards a more coordinated approach, by bringing together practitioners and validation providers into networks or creating systematic exchange of information.

Figure 5: Number of countries with validation strategies by year

Source: European Inventory 2018

These strategies might be sectoral, pertaining to a specific sector or be overall national strategies, that approach validation holistically. Several of the later are embedded in lifelong learning strategies that countries have bene building since the year 2000. In addition, several of the strategies are associated with the developments of NQF in the countries. Since 2010, linkage between validation and NQF has increased steadily. A link between NQF and validation was reported in 31 countries. In several countries the development of validation has been connected to the development of an NQF and its referencing to EQF. Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia or Hungary are countries which validation strategies have become more

prominent as the implementation of their NQFs progresses. This is not surprising since the 2008 Recommendation on EQF (Council of the European Union, 2008) and its follow up in 2017 has an explicit reference to validation. In 2017, the new Recommendation on EQF on Annex III about criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) reads:

> *The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems* (Council of the European Union, 2017, pp. 189/24).

This shows the importance of building coherence across policies and the importance of establishing connections between the different European tools and Recommendations.

Figure 6: Number of countries with validation arrangements by year

Source: European Inventory 2018

However, the linkage between validation and NQF differs from country to country and in several cases, validation is only possible in a part of the qualifications included in the NQF. Similarly, validation might have different ways of connecting to the NQF qualification. It might allow for the acquisition of full or partial qualifications or it might allow for certain exemptions in forms of credits or modules. Validation can also be restricted to the provision of access to qualifications. In addition, although the tendency is to have comprehensive frameworks, not all formal qualifications are included in the NQFs.

The map in figure 7 shows the 30 countries in which in at least in one sector of education it is possible to acquire a full or partial formal qualification. Although it is important to consider that in some countries these possibilities are rather limited, it is a positive sign to have so many countries already providing at least some possibilities for awarding qualifications. There are 22 countries in which individuals can be awarded a full formal qualification through

validation. In 27 they might be awarded a partial qualification. Overall, in around 70% of all the existing validation arrangements across areas, experts reported that a qualification could be awarded. Awarding qualifications is most common in IVET systems, in which around 90% of the existing arrangements allow for awarding a full or part of a qualification. It is however only available in around 50% of the validation arrangements in higher education.

Figure 7: Countries in which it is possible to acquire a full or part of a qualification through validation (in blue)

Source: European Inventory 2018

The outcomes of validation include, in addition to award of a qualification or parts of it, a training plan for the individual, provision of access to a qualification or exemptions (in terms of modules, credits or other type of exemptions). In 30 countries validation provides exemptions in different ways (credits, modules or others). This constitute more than 85% of the countries in which validation exist. Exemptions and access to education is more common in higher education than in IVET or CVET in which validation is used for awarding. Training specifications are not very common and only in around 50% of the countries in which validation exist there is provision of a training map. This is most common in CVET and IVET. In the labour market arrangements awarding qualifications is possible in 13 countries while only in 4 countries awarding qualification is possible in the third sector.

This shows something that the 2016 inventory already found and that an analysis of stakeholder involvement on validation corroborates. Labour market validation initiatives tend to be more linked to formal qualifications than third sector initiatives. The third sector initiatives tend to be formative in nature, however, it would be important to explore to what

extent the learning outcomes validated in those initiatives are included in formal qualifications.

Figure 8: Percentage of countries by type of output possible in their validation arrangements
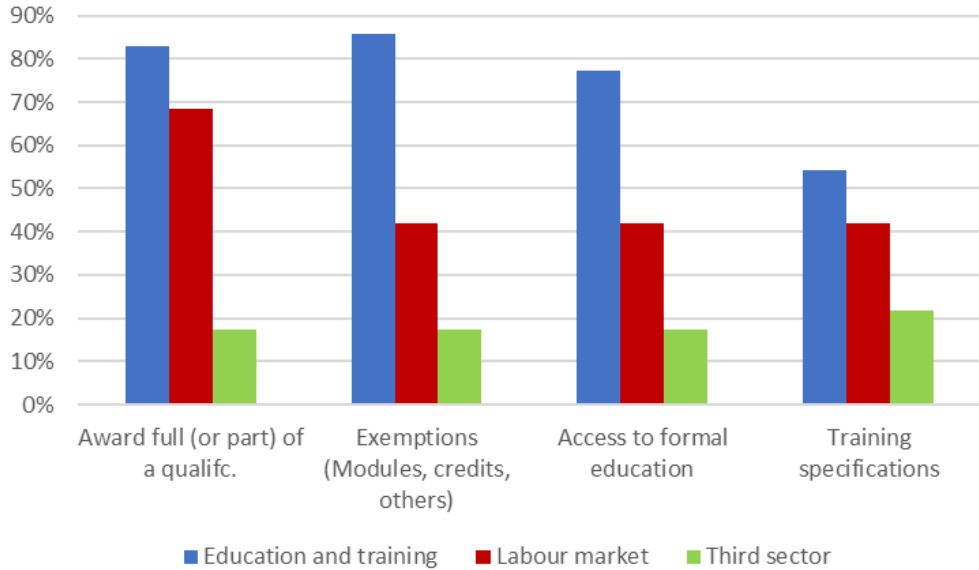
Source: European Inventory 2018

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Figure 9: Use of validation standards in relation to formal qualification standards, percentage of countries with information available
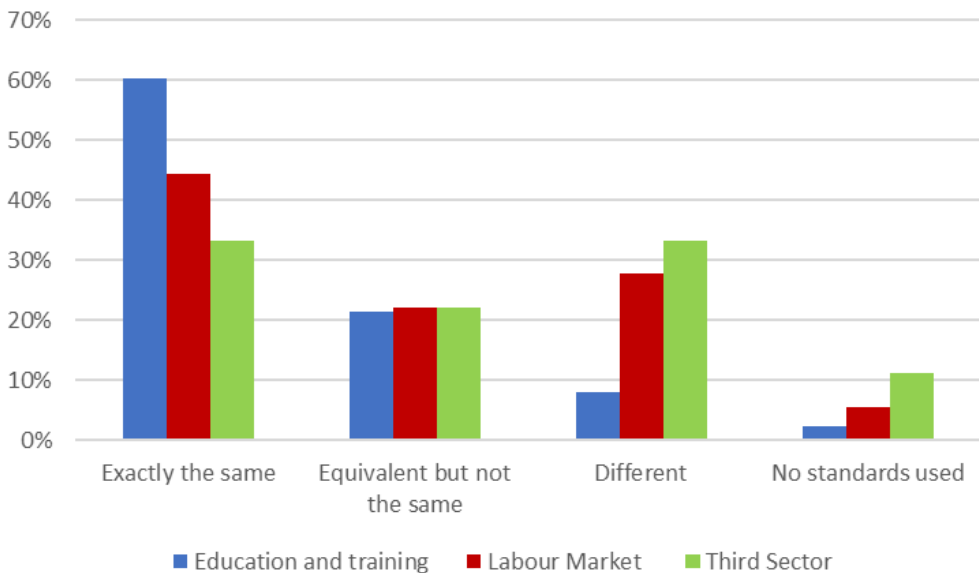
Source: European Inventory 2018

This relates to the standards used for the process of validation. A necessary condition for validation to be possible is that countries accept a learning outcomes approach, in which qualifications are described in terms of what an individual is knows or is able to do, and that criteria to award a qualification is not linked to times spent in an institution. Figure 9 shows the percentage of validation arrangements in which standards used for validation are the same of those in educational systems. In 27 out of 35 countries, standards for qualifications obtained through validation are exactly the same as standards for qualifications obtained through formal education and training programmes in at least one education and training subsector. In 11 countries, the standards used in the qualifications obtained through validation are equivalent in nature and level but not the same as those used in formal education in at least one education and training subsector. In labour market and third sector initiatives, standards used tend to be more different, in the initiatives in which it is possible to relate to formal qualifications. This shows that there is a need for further coherence across systems and the necessity of building bridges across sectors.

Conclusions

The validation inventory constitutes an important source of information of the systems and ways in which Member States are implementing validation. It constitutes an important tool for countries to learn from each other. The 2018 edition shows that countries are progressing at different speeds towards the objectives set at the 2012 Recommendation. There is an increase in the number of validation arrangements countries have in place. Countries seem to also be embracing the principles addressed in the recommendation that are addressed to a different degree across countries. It will be important that in the coming years all relevant stakeholders stay engaged in the development of coherent validation systems, as indicated in principle 1 of the Berlin Declaration

The role of NQFs needs to be further enhanced and supported by other initiatives and policies. While progress in connecting validation and NQF is clear, more needs to be done in expanding the possibilities to cover more qualifications and diverse sources of learning. To this end, further exploration of the standards and a better understanding of the development of learning outcomes will improve the possibilities of validation and increased its value.

To assure the value, quality, trust and adequate provision of validation, proper training of practitioners needs to be assured. The 2018 inventory showed that more needs to be done in the provision of training that is not common within existing practices. It might be necessary to define practitioners' professional profiles as well as common definition of training standards across Europe, to learn from each other what skills and competence are most needed.

In addition, it is not clear to what extent the existence of validation arrangements is translated in further opportunities for individuals. The existence of strategies or policies that on paper establish a validation system is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by properly resourcing and staffing with a transparent budget as indicated in principle 2 of the Berlin Declaration.

Finally, the inventory also shows that validation remains a fragmented service in which different initiative cohabit without the necessary connectivity. The question now, however, is not how to overcome the diverse and fragmented character of validation arrangements, but rather how to interconnect the diverse validation arrangements and how learning can be transferred from one system to another in a lifelong learning chain system. In other words, how an individual can access anytime, anywhere these arrangements and 'exchange' the

outcomes of non-formal and informal learning for future learning or employment opportunities.

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Transnational Cooperation in VPL

Brikena Xhomaqi

The 2018 Update of the European Inventory[39] on the validation of non-formal and informal learning shows that countries are increasingly creating strategies and policies for validation. Yet, the actual implementation of such a strategy and use of validation remains limited. In 2010 only ten countries had a plan in place versus 21 countries in 2018, which is definite progress. However, policy documents need to translate into actual actions and effective measures to allow individuals to take full advantage of validation opportunities. Validation provider organisations play a significant role in translating policies into practice. In particular, validation practitioners within these organisations play a crucial role in delivering validation (e.g. through guidance and assessment). The Inventory shows the professional competences of validation practitioners need further development.

It was clear from the outcomes of previous European Qualification Framework Advisory Group Peer Learning Activities on validation, the Validation Festival in June 2018 and the international VPL Biennale in Berlin of May 2019 that the exchanges between validation practitioners across countries are instrumental. The *Berlin Declaration* calls upon relevant stakeholders to collaborate and cooperate so that VPL holds value in society and can have a high level of recognition. The results of the *European Validation Festival*[40] in 2018, Brussels Belgium confirmed the willingness to support professional network development. The professional development and the creation of a common language among practitioners can help increase the coherence and consistency of validation across countries, within a context of diverse validation systems.

People who work with candidates on the ground can benefit from the mutual exchange of successful (and unsuccessful) practices, professional advice from peers, and in general learn from people who do the same job in another institute, company, region, sector or country.

Transnational validation networks and their link to EU policies
Transnational cooperation is at the foundation of the European Union and it contributes substantially to the implementation of its policies. In the field of education and training, such collaboration is vital in achieving the goals laid down in the *Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* and the *Upskilling Pathways Recommendation*, adopted in the framework of the *New Skills Agenda for Europe[41]*. In particular, it tackles essential issues mentioned in the *Recommendation*: quality

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39 *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory*
40 *https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1314*
41 The *Agenda* was a policy priority for the EU for 2017, adopted on 10 June 2016. It included 10 actions to be taken in the next two years: *https://ec.europa.eu/social/ main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en*

assurance[42], coordination of different stakeholders[43] and support to the Member States[44].

Despite the progress identified by the *2016 update of the European Inventory on VNFIL*[45], much still needs to be done in terms of *quality assurance* in VNFIL. Too many countries address quality assurance (QA) of VNFIL through guidelines/codes only or cover it through an existing QA framework from formal education and training systems. Moreover, less than half of the QA covers all phases of validation and about a fourth QA is considered flexible and easy to change according to need. Little is yet known on whether quality assurance systems and procedures are, in fact, able to ensure valid and credible assessments. Transnational cooperation will undoubtedly contribute to further progress in this area.

Transnational cooperation can support national bodies in charge of validation arrangements by fostering the harmonization of practices and enhancing transparency, trust and interaction between validation providers and practitioners.
Cooperation among education and training stakeholders within the country and transnationally has shown to be a critical success factor in the higher education sector, for example. The Bologna Follow Up Group has been the primary tool for harmonizing systems, improving quality assurance and fostering educational practices across Europe. This cooperation across countries has led to increasing internationalization of institutions and facilitated mobility of learners, staff and practitioners in the sector, among others.
It also confirms that when cooperation in the sector is transnational, benefits are verified on a European level too: providers, policymakers and other stakeholders learn from different countries and systems. This peer-learning contributes to *mutual support* among the Member States as well as to a general improvement of education and training systems in Europe.
In the last ten years, the number of informal and formal networks of validation providers in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been increasing but not yet to a level that could benefit progress in the validation of non-formal and informal education across Europe.

The need for transnational cooperation among practitioners at the Biennale
The international VPL Biennale in Berlin in May 2019 showed that validation professionals share a lot of common interests. Sharing one's expertise, working together and learning on a transnational basis broaden the view of validation-providers, policymakers, counsellors and experts. It makes them better professionals. The participants of the VPL Biennale consequently asked for more opportunities to exchange with other validation professionals. 95% of those present at the VPL Biennale agreed on the added value of an international network for validation professionals (*Mentimeter results at the VPL Biennale 2019*).

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42 2012/C 398/01- Art. 1.3: The Member States should (…) apply, as appropriate, the following principles (…): transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks are in place that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools.

43 2012/C 398/01- Art. 1.5: The Member States should (…) promote coordination on validation arrangements between stakeholders in the education, training, employment and youth sectors, as well as between those in other relevant policy areas.

44 2012/C 398/01- Art. 3.a: The Commission should (…) support Member States and stakeholders by facilitating effective peer learning and exchanges of experience and good practice (…).

45 *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/executive_summary_-_validation_inventory_2016_0.pdf*

See: https://www.mentimeter.com
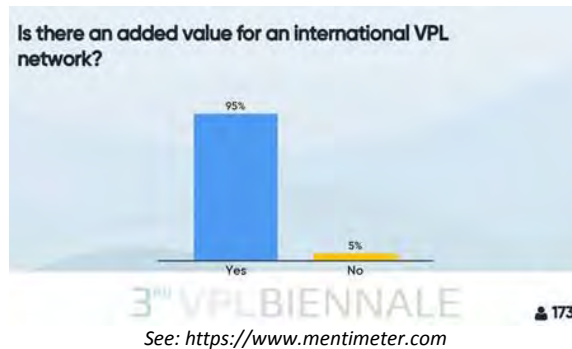
Concerning the motivation for joining a transnational network of practitioners, participants agreed on three points:
a) A chance to identify and connect with other experts.
b) An opportunity to exchange good practices.
c) A chance to receive feedback on your validation approach from peers.

See: https://www.mentimeter.com

When asked about involvement in existing networks, around 39% of participants were part of any. It confirms the fact that a lot of professionals in the field lack opportunities to liaise with other professionals. A follow-up survey confirmed this data that the partners of the VPL Biennale and the Lifelong Learning Platform conducted right after the event in autumn 2019.

See: https://www.mentimeter.com

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Follow-up study on the need for transnational cooperation among practitioners

The study conducted as a follow up of the VPL Biennale gathered over 100 additional responses from experts across Europe: 20 EU countries and six non-EU countries. The respondents were very diverse coming from public, private and third sector (non-profit): researchers, practitioners, policymakers, civil society etc. Only 40% of which were part of existing networks but in most of the cases national networks or regional ones except for a few transnational ones such as REVEAL, NVL, LEVER UP consortium, INNOVAL consortium, VPL Biennale or other Erasmus+ project consortium. A few were members of a national consortium of validation centre and practitioners such as QUALIFICA centres in Portugal, in Belgium the Walloon network of Validation centres and similar ones in Italy, The Netherlands and Canada.

The data confirmed the motivational factors being similar to the one asked during the VPL Biennale. Besides, respondents highlighted that the most crucial aspect was to be able to come together to learn from each other and develop policies, procedures and practices that are informed, coherent and connected. The absolute majority of respondents were firmly in favour of an international network of professionals which is indeed a vital level to begin.

Participants were asked about needs and interest in such transnational cooperation, and we could observe that the majority was interested in having access to the following information:
- Databases with tools and good practices.
- Transnational peer learning activities in topic-specific workshops.
- International conferences like the VPL Biennale and Validation Festival.

There was significant interest in getting informed about developments in international validation policies and the need to voice the concerns of the practitioners to policy and decision-makers at all levels. When asked about the training needs of the professional, 88% of respondents were interested in being trained in tools for identification, documentation and assessment followed by 67% interested in quality assurance.

Overall the two surveys confirmed a growing interest for cooperation among practitioners and highlighted a lack of possibilities being available. The professional development of practitioners is an essential step towards better validation arrangements and actual implementation of national NQFs.

Lessons learned from the project Transnational Peer Review for VNFIL[46]

A *peer review* is a voluntary, formative and external evaluation procedure that enables a personalised, bottom-up and dialogue-oriented evaluation. Peer Review supports the initiator in its quality assurance and quality development efforts. An external group of experts, called *peers*, are invited to assess the quality of the institution and its procedures and practices. During the evaluation process, the peers visit the reviewed institution and provide feedback about the requested quality areas.

The general aim of peer reviewing is to:
- Promote quality assurance and development.
- Enhance transparency and comparability of quality through a common European quality standard.
- Support equal opportunities.

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46   VNFIL = Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning.

In the project *Transnational Peer Review for VNFIL*[47], eleven transnational Peer Reviews were carried out. The VNFIL-providers participating in the pilot phases came from six different European countries. Lessons learned during this project can also be used for developing transnational networks in validation. Transnational Peer Review, in particular, supports international exchange and mutual learning between providers in Europe to strengthen mutual trust between providers in the European Member States and strengthen the credibility of transnational validation systems.

The Peer Review-network, a VNFIL Extended project has proven to be effective in supporting VNFIL systems in different countries by providing a common, European framework as well as various tools to VNFIL providers, organisations and policymakers at the national, regional and local level. When Peer Review is implemented all over Europe with the possibility to conduct it transnationally, providers, stakeholders and policymakers will learn more about other VNFIL systems in Europe, get acquainted with different policies and practices and thus contribute to the harmonization of VNFIL systems in Europe. Their learning process is even more enriching than on national level: new ideas, innovative approaches and inspiring methods can be shared among VNFIL practitioners all over Europe. On the long term, this will lead to an increase of the mutual trust between providers, stakeholders and systems of different countries and thus to better transnational use of VNFIL in Europe. Some lessons learned from this transnational project are:

1. *Motivation and expectations of participants in Peer Review*
The primary motivating factors for individuals taking part in Peer Review were further development and improvement of the (quality of the) validation process, European exchange and networking, mutual learning and the testing of an innovative evaluation procedure. VNFIL-providers did expect that the 'international' aspect of the project would provide additional and valuable perspectives on their questions.

2. *Transnational aspect*
The transnational aspect of the project was valued highly. Peers and organisations mentioned that it is of great interest that there was an emphasis on international qualification and validation systems. Also, through the global Peer Review, it becomes clear that partners have no business self-interest and can thus give obvious insight into his institution without competition. It was also mentioned that the international peer is unsuspicious and 'free' whereas a national peer is always 'bound' to the federal system.

3. *Language*
Language barriers did pose a problem in several cases. In some of the Peer Reviews visits, the transnational Peer was able to speak the national language well enough for some interviews to take place in the national language. But, in most cases, the Peer Review or significant parts of it were held in English. In five cases, the Peer Review was held in the National language, even though the transnational peers did not speak this language. Translations led to the loss of time and made the time schedules tenser. The language barrier prevented some of the peers to be more directive/focused during the interviews. The question of how to overcome language barriers should, therefore, be carefully thought through when preparing future transnational Peer Reviews.

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47 *http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/peer-review-vnfil-extended.php?lang=EN*

4. Cooperation

All participants highly esteemed the cooperation within the Peer Teams and the collaboration between the Peers and the VNFIL providers. In the meta-evaluations, the peers highlight the open atmosphere and the energy within the peer team. All partners agreed that during the peer visits, there was an open and transparent atmosphere. During the interviews with various stakeholders of the provider, the peers felt that there were no hidden agendas and that the interviewees answered the questions sincerely.

5. The added value of Peer Review

The participating organisations judged the Peer Review method as beneficial in several ways. For many institutions, quality development through Peer Review has been a new experience. They see the Peer Review method as a complement to the formative quality assurance procedures they already apply. The Peer Review method allows a profound insight into the visited organisation, which would not be possible without the framework of the Peer Review method. The peers' view from outside and their 'different perspective' were seen as a great benefit. The fact that the peer was someone 'on the same level' was also highly valued. Besides that, the openness and honesty of the peers and the trusting and collegial relationship were appreciated. It gave the organisations the impression that the peers wanted to make an effort in the further development of the reviewed organisation. The collegial aspect was highlighted as positive.

The process of dealing with real challenges in the workplace had a motivating and inspiring effect on all participants. Therefore, the feedback of the peers was often experienced as a confirmation. Some of the recommendations of the peers could be implemented concretely or encourage a longer-term development. The findings and recommendations of the peers were an essential basis for institutional development. The evaluation made clear that a robust implementation is necessary. One of the organisations stated that Peer Review created a spirit of optimism, which in the long run didn't keep its intensity. It needs someone who can carry it on in the longer term.

6. Changes in institutional development

In some institutions, the outcomes of the Peer Review ware immediately translated into actions. In others, it was a long process until the changes could be implemented. In general, the Peer Review influences the quality awareness and willingness to reflect in the institution positively. The clarification of roles can be mentioned as an example from an institution. This was possible because of the responsible persons involved as many colleagues as possible in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the Peer Review.

7. National and international networks

The peers indicated that a visit without cooperation in a Peer Review would not have the same effect; there would not be such profound insight. However, about international cooperation, the peers noticed that it is a requirement to have some knowledge of the country, the educational system and the institution before conducting the peer visit. Without this knowledge, it's tough to understand the underlying relations, and it will cost a lot of (extra) time.

8. Lessons learned during the Peer Review in terms of VNFIL

The learning effect was higher for the participating institutions and countries where VNFIL practice is less advanced. They benefitted mainly from the exchange with countries where VNFIL is more developed, such as the Netherlands. They provided insight into how VNFIL can evolve. Nevertheless, the insight into other approaches and peers' feedback also offered a learning experience for countries with well-developed VNFIL. For example, they recognised other ways of developing the VNFIL-process, more individualized and with different certification procedures. The role and perspective logically influenced the learning effects within the Peer Review process. In the role of provider/manager, participants learned how they could improve their VNFIL offer. The national peers gained insight into how other institutions organize VNFIL. As s transnational peer, the participants learned about different educational systems and the added value for VNFIL.

9. Challenges of Peer Review for VNFIL

According to the participants (both providers and peers), the biggest challenge for Peer Review in VNFIL is that there is no generic structure for VNFIL. Whereas the starting point and the goals are the same, every institution has its way of conducting VNFIL.

Another challenge is that their peers cannot always meet the expectations of the institution. In some cases, the institutions are explicitly searching for answers on their questions. But these questions cannot always be answered by 'only' conducting a Peer Review. Peer Review provides reflections, not necessarily solutions.

A third challenge is a linguistic hurdle: translation leads to time problems in the process of Peer Review and is exhausting for the translator. Nevertheless, in cases where the key people do not have foreign language skills equivalent to those of their peers, there is no alternative to translation.

10. Potential of Peer Review as formative external evaluation for VNFIL

The biggest challenge is the funding of Peer Review. Continuous public financing is needed, preferably through ministries interested in developing and maintaining a standard in VNFIL. Often, we see also public-private partnerships being formed, such as multi partnership agreements in the field of guidance.

The Peer Review has excellent potential for setting a common VNFIL-standard at EU level. This latter would be possible through the transnational exchange of know-how among users of VNFIL. International institutions vary widely in different areas. Even in countries where VNFIL is generally well developed, institutions can improve certain areas. Such sub-aspects can also work well in countries where VNFIL as a whole is not yet well developed. It was possible, for example, that Austrian approaches to target group attainment and support could be transferred to France and the Netherlands, as there is a strong tradition of adult education. Each country and institution in the overall picture are perfect in other areas. If everyone contributes to what she or he does well, the result in terms of VNFIL would be the optimum. Finally, this model can be considered a recommendation at the EU level.

The way forward: validation as change maker

There are a clear interest and willingness from all levels to establish a community of practice for practitioners and experts in validation systems across Europe and globally. The benefit was confirmed during the past VPL Biennale events, the first-ever European Validation Festival 2018 and the increasing number of cooperation projects on this very topic in Europe. UNESCO has been advocating for more cooperation in the field being often a hub of experts

to exchange on national developments. The European Union continues to put emphasizes on such need for collaboration and a second European Validation Festival will be organized in 2021. The evaluation report on the implementation of the *2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL[48]* addresses, among others, this need for more transnational cooperation among practitioners and stakeholders. The report highlights an existing need to move toward greater collaboration between stakeholders whereby deeper insights into how cooperation and collaboration between different stakeholder types involved in validation processes currently work in practice is required. Europe and the world's future social and economic challenges will put extra emphasis on the need for reskilling and upskilling of individuals. This was confirmed in July 2020 by the *New European Skills Agenda[49]* that sets new targets for adults across Europe. Validation is and will become increasingly important in these transition times.

There is more and more cooperation among practitioners' such as coalitions and networks established on a national level or sometimes regional but slowly at European level the trend is clear too. European programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Funds are helping tremendously the development of such networks giving many opportunities for practitioners to continue learning from their peers across countries.

However, the demand and need for more peer learning opportunities have not been yet catered sufficiently. Existing networks fail to represent a full range of validation experts, and many other challenges make the work of such systems across boarders rather tricky. Building a comprehensive transnational network with validation providers and practitioners will require more top-down support and overcome several obstacles. Moreover, focus needs to be on various levels:

- *Focus on providers.* Most people working in the validation are focused local and/or regional. That is where they find their candidates, stakeholders, contacts and market for their validation provision.
- *Focus on countries/governments.* In most European countries, the enthusiasm for immigration of workers from other European countries is limited. In most (western) European countries are shortages in the labour market. This dual attitude causes ambiguity that does not benefit the professional validation of competencies of individuals working in other countries.
- *Focus on Europe.* On the European level, one can recognise the need for transnational cooperation, mutual learning and alignment in the VPL. But that does not mean that much will happen. Without an active approach on the European level, the transnational network will stay small and not fulfil the needs in an open European labour market.

The main question is, what can be done on a European scale to stimulate transnational cooperation in the validation. The best idea is to follow the market. Are we already able to identify labour market sectors for which cross-border recognition of competences is useful? If we can locate such a market, it is possible, with support on the European level, to build a transnational network of validation providers around it with the focus on professionalization, mutual learning and alignment.

Validation has the potential of being the change-maker in the long-lasting complicated relation between education and the labour market. Policies in validation systems have

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48 https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8306&furtherPubs=yes

49 https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223

brought together these two worlds more than any other sector of education. The diversity of stakeholders involved is enriching by nature and has been vital in bridging education with the labour market needs. This was confirmed in the 2020 evaluation report of the VNFIL Council Recommendation 2012, where most Member States have confirmed the key role of such multi-stakeholder partnerships. Despite validation being key in both personal and professional development, its impact on labour market policies might play a key role in transitioning periods ahead of us.

While validation increasingly became a policy subject in national and EU policies, the real actors in validation processes still are dispersed at all levels. The building of a community whereby all stakeholders are interacting is crucial for further development of the validation work and policies. Significant efforts are necessary to build community structures from the bottom-up, with bilateral counselling and thus extensive procedures. EU and national policymakers and practitioners recommend enhancing community building as well among all stakeholders involved in the validation processes through European-wide events. A bottom-up approach can mobilize and engage the real providers and users of validation as well as providing a platform for dialogue and sharing practices and cases.

The 3rd Biennale Tracks

Organisational Arrangements

1

Anni Karttunen

Organisational arrangements are fundamental to the success of a VPL-system. Key stakeholders' areas of responsibility need to be clearly demarcated, with extensive collaboration and cooperation across sectors. Five principles support this statement on the vital role of organisational arrangements in VPL-systems.

A. VPL should have clear entry points for the individual, which are widely advocated and accessible for all.

Why is it important?
VPL pathways need to be clear and well-known to the citizens so that the individuals can take full advantage of the VPL services. Ideally, there is a national co-ordination point for VPL, which provides unbiased and accurate information on the VPL providers, VPL-procedures, (partial) qualifications available through validation, and entry requirements etc.

On a regional level, validation providers need to provide information widely on the VPL services, who to contact and how to apply. Key stakeholders (e.g., public employment services, trade unions, employers) should act as advocates for the VPL services in the region. Information on VPL should be available in various formats and on-line services need to be offered.

Citizens should have equal access to VPL services regardless of where they live, work and/or study. VPL provider networks should cover even the remote and sparsely inhabited areas. This requires taking advantage of existing modern technologies and calls for developing new, flexible technologies for VPL arrangements.

Where is it working well?
See how the Finnish National Agency for Education is operating as the national coordination point for VPL. They provide transparent information on the qualification requirements, the validation procedures and the validation providers for each qualification: *https://www.oph.fi/en/education-system/finnish-vocational-education-and-training.*

There are a lot of self-assessment e-tools (e.g. *www.my-professional-experience.org*) and e-portfolios available in different languages. However, pictures and videos could be more widely used as evidence, smart and VR glasses could be better taken advantage of in e.g. guidance or assessment situations. Guidance and candidate interviews can easily be carried out through internet applications.

B. There should be clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, development and quality assurance of VPL.

Why is it important?
To ensure clarity and high quality of the VPL-system, the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders need to be nationally defined and agreed. Stakeholders participating in the design, implementation and/or quality assurance processes of the system must bear high relevance (e.g. in relation to a business sector and sector specific competence requirements) and it must be ensured that the stakeholders remain impartial and are void of self-interest.

Where is it working well?
An interesting example is provided by Kosovo where the roles and responsibilities of different VPL actors have been defined: *http://www.dvv-international .ge/fileadmin/files/caucasus-turkey/Kosovo /Resources/AKK-Udhzuesi-Eng__3_.pdf*

C. Relevant stakeholders should cooperate so that VPL and its results hold value and are highly recognised in society.

Why is it important?
VPL should never exist in a vacuum; instead, it should be a result of close collaboration of various stakeholders (such as social partners, education and training, civil society organisations, public employment services, companies etc.) in setting up the process of the VPL-system, the standards and assessment criteria as well as guidance and assessment.
Ownership of the VPL-system should be widely, yet systematically, spread among stakeholders as it promotes stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder co-operation in VPL is the prerequisite for high market-value and trust towards the system and the outcomes of validation. It must be ensured that the certification gained through VPL carries the same status as a certification gained through traditional education and training and that the results of the VPL-process are nationally recognized both in the world of work and the world of education and training.

Where is it working well?
See the example of France: *https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/filead min/files/BSt/Publikationen/GraduePublikationen/LL_France_FINAF_Web.pdf*
Or the example of Finland in a video of the Finnish Competence-Based VET Qualifications, validation, certification and different pathways:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzRklnHP5iU&feature=youtu.be

D. VPL should be linked to qualification systems (EQF, NQF or transnational systems).

Why is it important?
National Qualification Frameworks serve as a tool to determine the level of learning and the required learning outcomes to be gained through a qualification. Linking the learning outcomes gained through VPL arrangements to the National Qualification Frameworks ensures the validity of VPL and the equal status of the certification gained through VPL.

Where is it working well?
See how the Finnish National Qualifications Framework and VPL arrangements are linked:

The legislation provides students the right to have their prior learning assessed and recognised at all levels and sectors of the education system. This right concerns both access to education and recognition of prior learning towards a qualification. In addition, the Finnish National Agency for Education has issued regulations and guidelines to support recognition of life-long learning in vocational education.[50]

E. VPL arrangements need to include guidance at every stage of the process.

Why is it important?
Guidance in validation is an integral part of the VPL-process. Guidance sets the VPL scene and helps the individual make appropriate choices before, during and after the VPL-process. Guidance in VPL should be carried out by dedicated professionals, who are unbiased and understand the various possible outcomes of the VPL-process. Guidance, in principle, should be voluntary to the candidate, but it must be ensured that guidance is available throughout the process.

Where is it working well?
Read here, how guidance in validation is perceived in the Nordic region and look at summaries from different Nordic regions: *https://www.euroguidance.eu/resources/ publications/other-publications/guidance-in-validation-within-the-nordic-region*

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50 Report: referencing of the Finnish National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework and to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. See: *https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/190482_report_on_the_referencing_of_the_finnish_nationa l_qualifications_framework.pdf*

Building Sustainability through Organisational Arrangements

1.1

The case of Ireland and the Cork Institute of Technology

Deirdre Goggin

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has existed in the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) since 1999 as part of its central services to all learners for access, transfer and progression. The sustainability of RPL within CIT is a result of strategic importance placed on it, and the multi-faceted approach which has been adopted and embedded to ensure that validation is implemented, structured and valued. This paper will outline the policy, systems and processes CIT has adopted to meet the needs of all stakeholders including learners, staff, the academic institution and employers. It will focus on the institution's strategy and policy, which have evolved and developed through dialogue, and on the establishment of the CIT Extended Campus, a central unit which facilitates CIT's relationships and engagements with external stakeholders. This article will also outline some of the challenges encountered and solutions which were adopted in support of validation over the past twenty years.

Developments in Irish Higher Education

In Ireland, the term RPL, which is commonly used in Higher Education, incorporates prior formal, non-formal, and informal learning which is to be validated in the context of a particular destination award on the National Framework of Qualifications. *HETAC Assessment and Standards 2009* outlined the considerations which have informed the local institutional policy development for RPL in terms of equity, fairness and maintaining quality assurance across programme design, development and assessment for all learners and learning.[51]

While the Qualifications Act 1999 established the legal basis for the development of RPL in Ireland, the NQAI[52] principles and operational guidelines published in 2005 were the foundation of much of the development of practice.[53] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) consulted in 2013 broadly with stakeholders in order to achieve a more cohesive approach to delivering RPL nationally.[54] This welcome initiative provided new impetus to support alignment with the European Council 2012 recommendation and in looking at future opportunities within education, training, the workplace and society in general.

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51 HETAC (2009). *Assessment and Standards; Implementing the National Framework of Qualifications and Applying the European Standards and Guidelines*. Dublin: Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

52 National Qualifications Authority Ireland.

53 National Qualifications Authority Ireland (2005). *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training*. Dublin: NQAI.

54 Quality & Qualifications Ireland (2013). *Green Paper on the Recognition of Prior Learning, for consultation*. [Online]. *https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/ Green%20Paper%20-%20Section%204.7.pdf*.

RPL is regularly noted as a key element within labour market activation initiatives by the government.[55] In 2011, the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs (EGFSN) was invited to report on RPL and its potential for up-skilling and reskilling of the labour force by the Department of Education and Skills. This report signified RPL as a critical element in Labour Market Activation programmes; for efficient use of resources within education and training; for lifelong learning; for flexible provision and to contribute to government targets on social inclusion and equity of access.[56]

The 2011 report of the EGFSN recommended a cohesive national approach for RPL to optimise provision. Significantly, the report (notes the work done by providers and by the QQI. However, it stresses the importance of commitment from the Department of Education and Skills to drive change at a national level. The report also states that while it is '*very difficult to estimate the demand for RPL*' arrangements for its provision and subsequent capture of resulting data should be in place. The report cites evidence arising from the Strategic Innovation Funded projects[57], showing activity varying considerably across higher education institutions, stating it is probable that '*practice is localised within particular institutions and is specific to certain groups of learners*'. Noteworthy also were the comments calling for specific funding for RPL provision, the implications for managing workflow for large numbers of RPL cases, the lack of systematic gathering of data on RPL cases across higher education institutions and uncertainty as to responsibility for providing RPL for specific roles in the workplace. It can be concluded that RPL delivery suffers from a lack of cohesion and consistency and would benefit from the adoption of a national strategy to support and inform local provision.

The QQI consultation on RPL of 2013 provided an important opportunity for stakeholders to have input to the national framework supporting RPL. This document provided a comprehensive picture of the policy and legislative framework (national and European) and invited consultations on six issues from various stakeholders across the education spectrum. The issues addressed were RPL and Access Transfer and Progression, national strategy on RPL, direct application to QQI for awards, RPL for access to FETAC awards, data on RPL & RPL and credit.

This consultative approach to capture the viewpoint of the range of stakeholders involved in RPL allowed for inclusion of all voices, while also providing some signposts for enhanced practice. The views outlined in Irish national commentaries align well with the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning and more specifically around organisational arrangements, support structures and legal foundations.

Higher education landscape

Reflecting on the past ten years higher education has undergone a period of rapid change reflective of the broader general socio-economic changes in Ireland and Europe. Underpinning the changing higher education landscape and signposting the opportunities for development is the *Irish National Skills Strategy* report published in 2015[58]. Action 4.3 of this National Skills Strategy 2025 calls for greater recognition of workplace learning and the

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55 European Commission, Cedefop & ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Ireland*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87062_IE.p df.

56 *http://www.skillsireland.ie/all-publications/2011/developing-recognition-of-prior-learning.html*

57 Sheridan, I. & O'Connor, M. (2012). *Towards a National Approach to Engagement in Irish Higher Education*. Munster, s.n.

58 Department of Education and Skills (2015). *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills .

development of capacity for RPL. The achievement of this is through the promotion of a common understanding of RPL and supporting the dissemination of good practice across VET and higher education.

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*[59] of 2011 already emphasised the key role that Ireland's higher education system has to play in building an innovative knowledge-age economy. The report calls for the sector to '*innovate and develop if it is to provide flexible opportunities for larger and more diverse student cohorts'*. Significantly, the report calls for clear pathways for progression and transfer, as well as non-traditional entry routes. This National Strategy called for a national framework for RPL to be developed and pointed to the opportunity to leverage input from existing expertise within its higher education institutions to contribute to the development of this RPL National Framework.

Within the HEA's 60 national systems performance framework, the development of institutional performance compacts is a novel undertaking, wherein each higher education institution, through a strategic high-level dialogue process, agrees a compact, which is publicly available.[61] Significantly, performance against agreed targets has funding implications for institutions. There is a requirement that compacts must include an element detailing provision for 'Increased participation, equality of access and lifelong learning' and make specific reference to arrangements for clear access pathways for access transfer and progression.

In relation to education quality and awards QQI is a state agency established by the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012, with a board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The functions of QQI include responsibility for maintaining the ten-level NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications). QQI also provides advice on recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad. The 2012 Act and subsequent 2019 amendment refers to RPL in the context of meeting standards established by QQI and in terms of access, transfer and progression.

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

CIT is a higher education institution in Ireland which offers national qualification programmes on levels 6-10. The institution offers programmes in the areas of business, humanities, science, engineering, music, art and maritime studies. It has a total student population of fifteen thousand students which comprise of part time and full-time students. The programmes that are offered in CIT include major academic awards from a higher certificate through to a PhD, as well as minor and special purpose awards which can vary in value from ten to sixty ECTS credits and at all levels of the national framework. Programmes in CIT are academically focused with the tradition of being informed by the needs of industry.

Validation in CIT

Validation in CIT began in 1996 as part of a three-year European funded project with an employer organisation who required upskilling and reskilling for their employees. This coincided with the 1996 lifelong learning European initiative.

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59 Department of Education and Skills (2011). *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. Dublin, Government of Ireland.
60 Higher Education Authority.
61 O'Connor, M., Patterson, V. , Chantler, A. & Backert, J. (2013). *Towards a Performance Evaluation Framework: Profiling Irish Higher Education.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Validation was identified at that time as a potential avenue to build on the existing learning of employees to identify potential opportunities. Initially it was part of an education development department as practice evolved nationally and internationally in teaching and learning. A strategic commitment was given by the institution in 1999 and validation was resourced as part of the central functions of the institution.

A strategic decision was made from the outset that validation was a central and relevant part of all disciplines, all programmes and at all levels of the framework within the institution. This was a unique position in higher education institutions in Ireland at a time when many were considering the merit of validation and the recognition of learning which was acquired external to the academic institution. This commitment was also reflected in the resourcing put in place, which was further expanded in 2003.

In the initial stages, validation was primarily used for access to programmes, for non-standard entry or advanced entry beyond year one of a programme. As validation has evolved within CIT, the practice expanded into module exemptions and the attainment of full academic awards on all levels of the national framework of qualifications.

Reflection on the evolution of practice over the past twenty years has shown in excess of six thousand positive applications for validation, one hundred and twelve successful applications for advanced entry to a programme, 696 module exemptions in one hundred and fifty one programmes, there have been 37 full academic awards acquired through validation and 505 assessors have supported the assessment of validation applications in CIT.

Fig. 1: Validation activities in Cork Institute of Technology

Source: https://extendedcampus.cit.ie

The sustainability and development of RPL is ensured through a multifaceted approach which is depicted in figure 1. Support for internal staff and students in terms of mentoring and familiarity with validation and associated assessment are considered. As previously outlined, validation has been further expanded within CIT through purposeful interactions with industry and employer organisations who are committed to the upskilling and reskilling of employees, retaining their competitiveness within global markets.

Staff Training and Development
In CIT, staff training and development for validation is delivered in multiple ways. It can take the form of informal discussion sessions which aim to increase familiarity with validation and the benefit it can be to learners, but also the institution. Workshops on policy, practice and assessment are regularly carried out with existing staff but also new entrants to the academic staff of the institution. Validation or RPL is also a key element of the institution's *master's in teaching and learning*, which focuses on the development of staff in the integration and implementation of validation within their modules and programmes in line with good practice.

Learning Clinics
Learning clinics is a service coordinated by the validation unit within CIT and offered in conjunction with other academic departments to regional industry partners to familiarise their staff with upskilling and reskilling opportunities available to them, incorporating validation. This is increasingly run as part of organisations' learning and development activities.

Mentoring
Mentoring is available to all prospective and registered students who are seeking validation. The mentoring is centrally provided through the CIT Extended Campus on a workshop and one to one basis. Mentoring is available to staff who are unfamiliar with validation and the validity of an application by a student within an academic programme. Mentoring is also available to staff who themselves are seeking validation for professional development and job promotion opportunities.

Student and Staff support
Staff and student guidelines and templates have been created by CIT to support the assessor and applicant in reviewing or developing applications for validation. A dedicated website with additional support is also openly available to any individual or group interested in finding out more about validation and RPL. Staff and student testimonials provide guidance and encouragement to those who are new to the process of validation.

Customised course development incorporating validation
Customised courses, - which acknowledge the prior learning of the participants - that response to a particular requirement of an industry or employer, are becoming increasingly popular. Validation is a cornerstone of these interactions with external organisations which present a unique opportunity for all stakeholders.
The model of validation and associated structures in CIT are unique within higher education in Ireland. By recognising the workplace and indeed other life experiences as valid opportunities for learning, CIT has sought to encourage adult education and lifelong learning

through a multifaceted approach. Validation has been incorporated into the broader engagement agenda of CIT through the CIT Extended Campus.

Validation and CIT Extended Campus

While there is strong awareness of the potential for - and of - collaboration between higher education, enterprises and communities to contribute to economic renewal and social innovation, this is often difficult to achieve as the higher education institution can present a fragmented interface for the external organisation. Worse, the interface often comprises a confusing array of academic disciplines and acronyms representing research units and centres. For an external perspective it may appear that one's problem or opportunity statement needs to fit neatly into a particular academic discipline or field in order to interact with higher education.

There is a recognition that 'higher education institutions could be more dynamic and coherent in their approach to collaboration'. This view is echoed by Healy et al.(2014), who assert that … 'despite the resurgence in business-university collaboration, research reports consistently find that cooperation practices are highly fragmented and uncoordinated, particularly when it comes to the educational offer'. This fragmentation can result in lack of consistency and coherence in developing relationships and interactions with enterprise.

Working closely with community and enterprise partners has always been an important part of Cork Institute of Technology's mission. This has included: ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and current for local regional and national employers, working in partnership with industry experts to develop applied research solutions and supporting new and exploring and responding to emerging workforce reskilling and upskilling needs. Despite having longstanding relationships with external organisations and employers, many of the interactions were conducted as separate, distinct activities with little overview of the totality of engagement interactions across the institution. Anecdotally, this situation led to Heads of Academic Departments passing each other in the car park of local multinational companies – neither knowing what the other one was doing there. This disconnected nature of the activity also meant that when one academic department or unit of the institution had a successful interaction with an enterprise organization, the knowledge was often lost to the organization as a whole and not used to build a broader strategic relationship or contribute to organizational learning or structures to stimulate or support more engagement.

Fig. 2 Pillars of Academic- Enterprise Engagement

Graduate Formation
- Work placement
- Guest lecturers
- Work-based projects
- Sites visits
- Sponsorship
- Programmatic review
- Curriculum inputs
- Shared governance
- Employability & entrepreneurship

Workforce Development
- Recruitment
- Part-time courses
- Customised & on-site learning
- Recognition of Prior learning
- Work-based learning
- Special Purpose awards

Research & Innovation
- Consultancy
- Use of equipment & facilities
- Contract & collaborative research
- Innovation vouchers & innovation partnerships
- Licensing & patents
- Commercialisation
- Incubation supports

Continuum of Academic-Enterprise engagement

Source: https://extendedcampus.cit.ie

Through tracking of the nature of interactions sought by external organisations over a number of years, and an analysis of the types of interactions experienced in practice in Cork Institute of Technology, the range of potential interactions identified was refined into three main categories of potential interactions which are outlined in figure 2.

Extended Campus model
Responding to this reality and seeking to enhance practice and potential of external engagement interactions by changing the way we interact with, and are viewed by, enterprise partners, internal changes have been implemented in CIT to seek to join up and maximize the benefits of an already actively engaged institution. Ensuring that the institution does not just teach entrepreneurship or support entrepreneurs but collects and uses business intelligence to itself to act entrepreneurially. This objective of the restructuring was to:
- Make it easier for external organizations to engage in mutually beneficial interactions with CIT academics and researchers.
- Develop a clear view of the extent and depth of existing and desirable engagement interactions to feed into institutional strategy and decision-making.
- Stimulate more interactions and measurably support regional economic development.
- Ensure that the variety of interactions with companies are collated and built on to develop broader supportive long-term mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Support enhanced practice development by exploration of processes and sharing of good practices.

In 2011, the CIT Extended Campus was developed and launched as an interface to support interactions with all the various parts of the institution. CIT Extended Campus model built directly on the strategic importance of engagement for CIT, the knowledge, experiences and expertise gained through the leadership of many collaborative projects and an exploration of practice internationally. The role of the Extended Campus is to facilitate initial needs analysis and consultation sessions for external organisations with a view to matching them with appropriate internal units and individuals. Following this initial phase, the external organisation is introduced to the appropriate internal unit(s). At all stages in the interactions a customer relationship management system supports the collation of appropriate information and the compilation of information on queries and interactions provides a rich source of business intelligence for the strategic management of the institution.
The CIT Extended Campus seeks to stimulate the demand for interaction with higher education through publication of case studies or vignettes illustrating previous interactions, including some exploration of the need or problem statement and the process involved in partnering with higher education, to address the need. In each case a brief synopsis of the difficulty or opportunity and the enabling factors is presented. These case studies are chosen from a range of interaction types and across a range of external organisation sectors and sizes. Having stimulated the interactions and generated the queries, consideration must then be given to the process which will support these interactions through to resolution.

Lessons learnt
As validation has been an integral part of CIT since 1999 and with the establishment of the CIT Extended Campus in 2011 it is timely to reflect on the developments of validation over that time frame. Validation policy within the institution has been an agreed documented policy since 2003 and integrated into the associated academic policies since that time. These

Figure 3. Validation in CIT 2000-2020
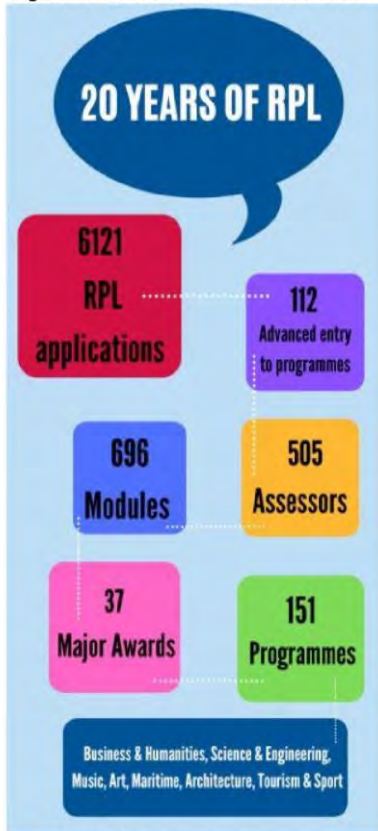
Source: https://extendedcampus.cit.ie

include access, transfer and progression, student appeals, quality assurance and marks and standards to name a few. The growth in validation has been due to focused efforts to raise awareness of validation as an enabler of education and participation. The evolution of validation is due in part to the view that it informs conversations with industry and learners who are interested in returning to education in a full or part time capacity. During recessionary times this was very apparent as people sought upskilling or reskilling opportunities to enhance their employability. In more recent years the collaborative development of customised courses to support organisations in responding to technological and other challenges in an increasingly dynamic global workplace has been underpinned by a validation approach which takes account the prior learning of the learner/employee and builds on it rather than repeats it.

CIT has established practice in the area of validation for the past twenty years. However, scholarship is also a significant element, which enhances and encourages development in how validation is used within the quality assured systems of the institution. One fundamental reflection of the growth, development and sustainability of validation within the institution is that it has been fully integrated into the foundations of the institution and the associated academic, quality and administrative systems and it has a centrally located physical space. It is also apparent through the data gathered within the institution pertaining to validation (figure 3) that it is an activity which spans the entire institution.

Key reflections

In reflecting on validation in CIT and the evolution of it within the broader engagement agenda of the institution, the visibility of validation across campus through the allocation of a central physical space and presence has been instrumental in its development.

Through the CIT Extended Campus and the integration of engagement on an institute-wide basis, further discussions and considerations surrounding validation especially in the context of customised course developments have been facilitated and organisational learning has been deliberately enabled. This builds the bridges internally and externally and facilitates the communication of the potential.

Validation and its evolution within CIT would not have been possible without the policy, procedures and support in place to enable and sustain development and to build trust in the process in a quality-assured context. The appointment of dedicated staff to grow and develop validation within CIT has been central to its success and more importantly the appointment of the right staff who have the right skillset to bring people along on the validation journey.

Future directions for VPL

As outlined in the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning (2019) six overarching top level principles were identified as being important to the future development of a robust and effective VPL-system. The experience of CIT has been that success in a single principle can begin the development of VPL however sustainability is only guaranteed through an integrated approach involving all principles and an openness to change in the ever-evolving environments of education, society and the workplace.

The disparity in many systems is the disconnect between the high-level statement as to what is desirable and the subsequent action necessary to implement and gain traction within one of the principle areas. Considering future directions for validation, it is apparent that sustainable investment, which embeds validation within existing structures and related discipline areas, is required to drive sustainability and growth in validation forward.

Filled with Skills

<div style="text-align: right; font-size: 2em;">**1.2**</div>

Organisational arrangements in the third sector in Finland

Lotta Pakanen

Identifying and recognising skills and competences is a collaborative effort between an individual and various organisations. The various practices related to recognising previously acquired skills and competences form a complex maze, but there is, however, a common intent that guides us. In spring 2019, Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, launched a focus area for lifelong learning[62], with the aim of supporting various actors in Finland in promoting life-long learning. One of the recommendations of the focus area is to establish uniform guidelines for identifying and recognising skills and competences acquired in various ways.

In the NGO sector in Finland, the actors involved in the process of identifying and recognising skills and competences include voluntary organisations, study centres, formal educational institutions, and working life. The organisations generate high-quality, diverse and up-to-date competences, which can help people advance in their studies and accelerate their graduation in formal educational institutions and can also provide them with valuable working-life skills. Finnish organisations have increasingly started to promote the identification and recognition of skills and competences. An essential part of this work has been to make skills and competences visible and to participate in public debate. The study centres have guided organisations to use work-based learning in volunteering and to plan training based on skills and competences. Certificates and digital badges support the documentation of skills and competences. In order to maximise the comparability of skills and competences, several organisations use a standard unit of credit (ECTS or ECVET), as well as different reference frameworks (such as the EQF reference level) and competence classifications (such as ESCO).

Sivis Study Centre steering the way

In 2019, the Sivis Study Centre launched an internal programme called Tunnustettu osaaminen ('Recognising skills and competences'). The goal of the programme is to acknowledge the importance of education provided by NGOs as part of lifelong learning in society, and to validate the skills and competences acquired in organisations in both educational institutions and in working life. The programme examines the identification and recognition of skills and competences from four perspectives:

1. Validation promoting qualification attainment - Skills and competences are identified and recognised in different educational institutions. The goal is to shorten study times, facilitate studying, and accelerate graduation.
2. Validation promoting career development - Skills and competences are identified and recognised in working life. The goal is to promote employment, or to achieve a change in the content and competence level of a job.

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62 *https://www.sitra.fi/aiheet/osaamisen-aika/*

3. Validation promoting work in NGOs - Skills and competences are identified and recognised in other NGOs. The aim is reducing overlap and to shorten study paths.
4. Social validation - an individual (and the community) identifies and recognises skills and competences. The aim is empowering individuals in a community and to achieve a change in their social status.

Figure 1: Actors involved in identifying and recognising skills and competences[63]

VPL in Finland is co-operation with

Ministry of Education and Culture
The highest authority responsible for all publicly funded education.

Finnish National Agency for Education
The national agency responsible for developing education and training, early childhood education and care and lifelong learning, as well as for promoting internationalization.

Formal education providers
Including upper secondary level (general upper secondary school & vocational college), university of applied sciences and university.

Liberal adult education providers & NGO's

Working life
Including public and private sectors

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
MEAE's task is to build an operating environment and to ensure productivity, growth, high levels of employment and well-being.

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63 All figures in this article are reproduced under responsibility of the author.

Online services to make competences visible

The validation promoting qualification attainment and career development requires reliable and up-to-date documentation of previously acquired skills and competences.

Figure 2: The Sivisverkko interface

National Study Register KOSKI

→ **Ministry of Education and Culture**
Working group for validating competencies & skills in liberal adult education

FINQF – Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules

→ **Ministry of Education and Culture**
Working group for coordination of broadening the FINQF

"Interpretation forums"
Conversation between formal education providers and NGO's → aim is to compare skills & competences within NGO's to formal qualifications.

Studyinfo.fi
The official and up-to-date website with all the information about study programmes leading to a degree in Finland

Application programming interface, API

Sivisverkko-webservice
✓ Study register.
✓ Strong authentication
✓ Competence-based goals
✓ ECTS-points
✓ EQF-level
✓ ESCO-skills

Sivis study centre

Different services and apps mapping skills & competencies

Job Marketplace –site
→ Possibility to broaden the ESCO-classification and "fill the gap"

Sivis Study Centre developed a service which provides an online tool (*Sivisverkko*) for managing training provided by NGOs. Through the online tool, the training provided by NGOs is planned in terms of learning outcomes (competence-based system) and measured in terms of credits. In addition, the level of skills and competences is defined based on the EQF.

The online tool provides training participants an electronic certificate and a transcript of records, indicating the skills and competences acquired. In the future, it will also be possible to transfer data from the Sivis online service to other national systems via an open interface. The skills and competences acquired while working in NGOs thus add to an individual's demonstrated skill set, for example, when searching for work. In addition to certificates, NGOs are encouraged to create and adopt digital badges, which are suitable for the recognition of non-formal skills and competences. In this way, skills and competences acquired through volunteering and working in positions of trust can also be documented in electronic records.

Filled with skills – open online course

The integration of learning and competences acquired in NGOs into national systems does not yet constitute a fully successful validation process of skills and competences. It is important to further increase the recognition of learning gained in liberal adult education and in NGOs as an integral part of lifelong learning. Validation process that promotes qualification attainment greatly benefits if teachers and guidance counsellors are familiar with the NGO field and perceive the skills and competences acquired in NGO activities as part of the individual's overall skills set. Sivis Study Centre, along with a few other study centres and organisations, created an open online course for teachers and guidance counsellors in formal educational institutions. The title of the course is *Filled with skills! - NGOs boost studies and promote qualification attainment*.[64]

One of the goals of the course is that the participants would be able to compare the skills and competences they acquire in NGOs to the qualification requirements at their own institution. The course introduces participants to the world of liberal adult education and NGOs through a variety skills and competences related to e.g. leadership, guidance, entrepreneurship, everyday life and education.

It is important to keep up to date on how skills and competences acquired in NGOs are validated in educational institutions and working life. It is also important that individuals understand the various aspects linked to the skills and competences they acquired working in NGOs.

Competence disc for Scouts and Youth organisations

The idea behind the *Competence disc* service developed by the Youth Work Centre of Expertise of the Guides and Scouts in Finland is similar to the Sivis online tool.[65] The content of the Competence disc is based on learning outcomes defined in cooperation with formal educational institutions on 'interpretation forums', which look for equivalences between the training and competence badges provided by the Guides and Scouts of Finland and other youth organisations, and the qualification requirements provided by educational institutions. The interpretation forum developed a validation recommendation, which is recorded in the Competence disc and displayed on the website of the participating institution. The

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64 *https://www.taynnaosaamista.fi/*
65 *https://www.osaamiskiekko.fi*

Competence disc and the Sivis online service will be integrated so that information about the training provided by NGOs will automatically be displayed.

Open badges for working life skills
Validation procedures that aim at promoting career development have made advancements regarding generic working-life skills in particular. According to the *Vapaaehtoistyö Suomessa 2018* ('Volunteering in Finland 2018') survey, conducted by the Citizen's Forum, volunteering improves, e.g. communication, interaction and problem-solving skills. These support the future working life skills listed in the Osaaminen 2035 ('Competences and Skills in 2035') report by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education. Based on the results of these two reports, Sivis Study Centre, together with Accenture Finland and a few other organisations, developed a family of working life skills badges to help to identify and recognize important working life skills and competences that are acquired through work in NGOs. This family of open badges was launched in early autumn 2019 and it includes eight badges related to, e.g. organisational skills, ability to work independently, learning ability, and interaction skills. The goal of the badges is to help young people and immigrants specifically to demonstrate their skills and to find employment more easily.

Roles and responsibilities
Despite the common intent and the development work carried out, the identification and recognition of skills and competences is not always entirely straightforward. Educational institutions are quite concerned with the assessment criteria for skills and competences, and the qualifications of the assessors. However, NGOs do not have to aim at being educational institutions, but they should rather look at their own activities in terms of competences and learning outcomes and analyze what type and what level of competences individuals generate through their activities. This will make it easier for them to understand their role in society and lifelong learning.

Implementing across Jurisdictions

1.3

The Case of Internationally Educated Nurses in Canada

Christine Wihak

This contribution looks at how consistency in Validation across jurisdictions can be achieved through non-legislated means. Canada is a federated democracy whose constitution gives power to each provincial/territorial government to regulate health professions. Although each individual province/territory legislates regulatory Nursing Colleges that set standards for nursing competence and procedures for issuing licenses to practice, much consistency has been achieved through voluntary inter-jurisdictional co-operation among regulatory bodies and professional associations.

Internationally Educated Nurses (IEN) seeking to be licensed for practice in Canada have to undertake a Validation process to determine that their combination of formal education and work experience have given them Substantially Equivalent Competence to a nurse educated in Canada. This paper examines how Validation is carried out in a two-part process at the national and provincial levels in two Canadian jurisdictions – British Columbia and Nova Scotia. The case highlights, how considerable consistency in Validation can be obtained without state intervention, by drawing on inter-jurisdictional, intra-professional co-operation and shared understandings.

Background on Canadian context

Canada is a confederation of 10 provinces and three territories. Under Canada's *de facto* constitution, the *BNA Act of 1867*, the nationally elected Federal parliament is given power over immigration. The provincially elected legislatures have power over education, including regulated occupations which encompass all health-related occupations. Thus, an internationally educated nurse (IEN) must deal with two levels of government in order to immigrate to Canada and become licensed to practice as a Registered Nurse (RN) in one or more of the provinces and territories.

Health-related occupations are self-regulated in Canada. That is, the provincial/territorial legislature creates a professional College tasked with setting standards for the profession and developing and administering procedures to allow entrance to licensure. A major responsibility of each College is to protect the public by ensuring that every licensed professional meets minimum standards of competence. While most of the focus is the licensure of recent graduates from formal education programs in Canada, since the 1990s, validation of International Educated Professionals has become of increasing importance in the health professions, driven by Canada's aging population and a shortage of Canadian-educated professionals.

In the Nursing profession, each of the provinces/territories has its own regulatory College. A voluntary national body, *The Canadian Council of Registered Nurse Regulators* (CCRNR), lacks

any regulatory or legislated status but serves as a communication vehicle amongst the different jurisdictions. Prompted by Interprovincial Labour Mobility agreements introduced in the early 2000s (and updated in 2017), the Nursing Regulatory Colleges began taking action to make it easier for a nurse registered in one province to transfer registration to another province.

As early as 2004, in an effort to use a voluntary process to ensure similar Nursing registration standards from province to province, a *Jurisdictional Collaborative Process* was in place to develop a statement of competencies for entry-level Nurses. Led by representatives from the provincial/territorial regulatory bodies (except Quebec, Canada's francophone province), this group produced a statement of *Competencies in the Context of Entry-Level Registered Nurse Practice.* When the CCRNR was formed in 2012, these competencies were formally adopted to guide standard setting by the provincial/territorial regulatory bodies. The competencies were revised in 2017, with the next revision due in 2022. Through CCRNR, the provincial/territorial bodies (again with the exception of Quebec) adopted a national exam that all entry-level nurses are required to take to gain registration. In 2015, all the Nursing Regulatory Colleges except Quebec adopted the NCLEX exam, an American-based exam, as the final hurdle that all applicants must pass to become Registered Nurses. To ensure that graduates of Canadian Nursing schools possess the required entry-level competencies and knowledge needed to pass the NCLEX, another voluntary national body accredits Nursing Education. The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing created a framework that articulates core Nursing competencies that accredited programs must teach. At present, all provinces except Manitoba have institutions offering accredited nursing programs, demonstrating the strong commitment of the Nursing profession to consensus on what represents quality education in the field.

Thus, there has been a convergence of nursing education and licensing requirements across the country (currently a four-year Bachelor of Nursing degree in all provinces and territories except Quebec). These developments in national co-operation on Nursing regulation paved the way for national co-operation with regard to Validation for Internationally Educated Nurses. A national Validation portal has been operating since 2014. Before describing the current situation, we will look at what IENs faced with regard to Validation before the portal was initiated.

Pre-2014 Validation for IENs
As mentioned earlier, the division of powers and responsibilities between federal and provincial levels of government meant that IENs seeking to practice as Registered Nurses in Canada had to apply for permission to immigrate through the federal government and for RN licensure through one of the provincial territorial bodies. While the federal government was actively encouraging educated professionals to come to Canada, co-ordination with the professional licensing bodies was weak. Each province and territory had its own process for assessing foreign nursing credentials. The different Colleges showed great variability in their ability to serve IEN applicants, beginning with the assessment of non-Canadian education.

In 2005, the Canadian Nurses Association sponsored a study of Validation (called Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition or PLAR in Canada) across the country.[66] This study spotlighted the obstacles facing IENs and noted the weak use of Validation to assess

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66   Association Strategy Group (2005). *Navigating to Become a Nurse in Canada: Assessment of International Nurse Applicants.* Canadian Nurses Association, Ottawa.

competency acquired through experience. The study recommended the establishment of a national service that would apply a consistent approach to assessing educational credentials, clinical competency and English/French fluency (Canada's two official languages).

National Nursing Assessment Service

The National Nursing Assessment Service (NNAS) was incorporated in 2012 as a non-profit organization. The Board of Directors and members were drawn from provincial/territorial Nursing regulatory bodies. With funding from the regulatory bodies, the federal government, and some contribution from the provincial governments, an implementation project was launched to develop the process, in partnership with the United Stated-based body *CGFNS*, internationally known for evaluation of Nursing credentials.

The vision (Figure 1) was to create a bilingual web portal as a single point of contact for IENs applying for licensure in Canada. The assessment service would take a consistent approach to document collection and credential evaluation, as well as establishing a database of evaluated international credentials.

Figure 1. The NNAS vision[67]

Source: https://www.nnas.ca
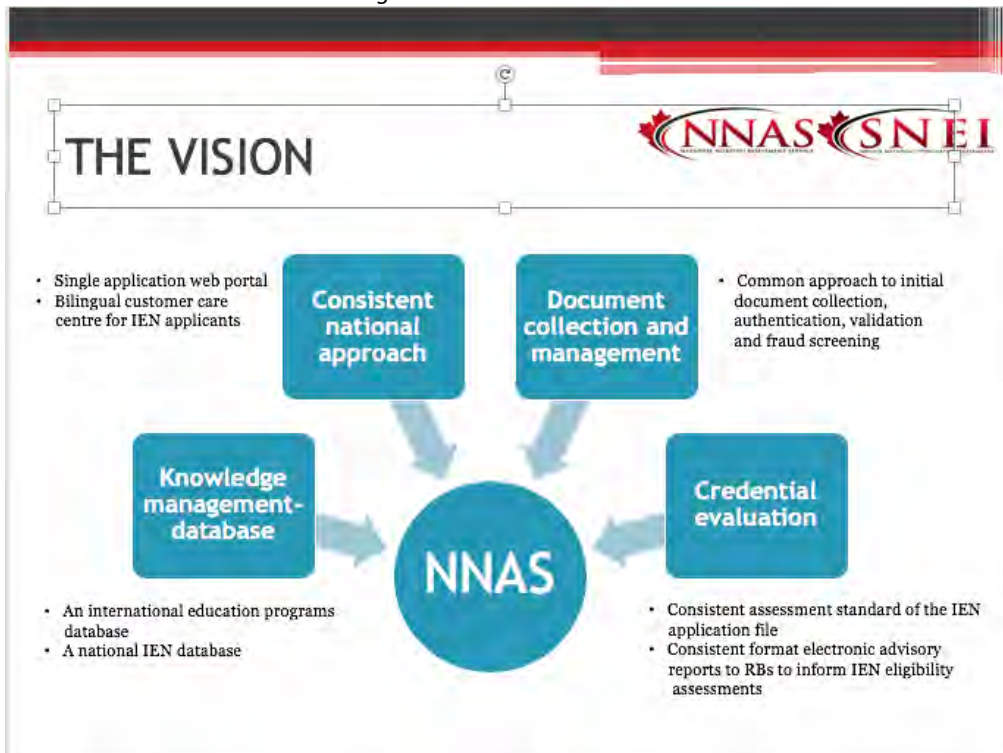
The project led to the 2014 launching of NNAS's National IEN portal. NNAS and the IEN portal are supported from fees charged to IENs for assessment ($650 US as of 2019). The IENs individually may receive some support from provincial immigrant serving agencies operating

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67 National Nursing Assessment Service (2014). Implementation Project. Presentation to the 2014 National Metropolis Conference: Partnering for Success: Facilitating Integration and Inclusion, Ottawa.

with funding from the provincial and federal governments. The IEN Validation process is essentially divided into two major parts, with the NNAS first determining if the applicant can meet the Canadian requirements entirely on the basis of formal nursing education in the home country or whether further competency testing is required. If further competency testing is required, the applicant is referred to one or more of the provincial regulatory bodies.

NNAS (2014) provided a diagram (Figure 2) demonstrating the steps in the validation process for IENS, highlighting the role of the national portal and the role of the provincial regulatory bodies. While the NNAS process includes credential evaluation, it goes beyond that service in that the NNAS report identifies specific gaps in the IENs background for further competency assessment and/or remediation. Any competency assessment that NNAS recommends is carried out through the relevant provincial/territorial regulatory body. A recent paper explored details of competency assessment for IENS in two Canadian provinces: British Columbia on the west coast of the country and Nova Scotia on the east coast.[68]

In British Columbia, the regulatory College has delegated assessments to the Nursing Competency Assessment Service of BC[69] (NCAS-BC) while in Nova Scotia, the regulatory college delegates assessments to the Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre[70] Processes in the two provinces are similar, although that in BC it is supported with more sophisticated technology.

NCAS-BC[71] uses a *Computer-based Assessment (CBA), a Simulation Lab Assessment (SLA)* and *an Oral Assessment (OA).* The CBA is taken at a proctored computer lab operated by Prometric and is offered in many countries and cities in the world. The SLA and OA are offered in Vancouver. Candidates MUST attend in person. The SLA and OA are taken at the same time. Because assessment results are based on the outcomes of all three assessments, candidates MUST complete all three components to complete the NCAS process.

The Simulation Lab assessment and Oral assessment take place in labs that have been created to look like different Nursing practice venues (acute care, hospital, community clinic, a private home). The IEN applicant is given a chart providing detailed information about a simulated patient and is asked to carry out appropriate nursing care during the allowed time. Video cameras record the IEN's performance, which is later assessed by two assessors. At the end of each scenario, an examiner poses questions orally.

In Nova Scotia, IENs similarly face a multi-part assessment, although unlike BC candidates, they must come to Nova Scotia for the complete assessment. The Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre[72] process assesses 34 competencies using multiple assessment methods. The assessment consists of written examinations containing multiple choice and short answer questions, oral examinations (clinical judgement and triple jump assessments) and modified objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs). OSCEs are conducted in a lab setting where the nurse demonstrates his or her abilities to care for a patient. The nurse also needs to complete a self-assessment tool. Unlike BC, the structured clinical examination is not video recorded but is assessed in real time by a single assessor.

68 CAPLA (2019). Best Practices – Canada. Paper prepared for the Educational Research Unit, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Poland.

69 *http://www.ncasbc.ca/Assessments/Pages/default.aspx*

70 *https://www.rnpdc.nshealth.ca/InternationalLearners/InternationallyEducated/*

71 *http://www.ncasbc.ca/Assessments/Pages/default.aspx*

72 *https://www.rnpdc.nshealth.ca/InternationalLearners/AssessmentCentre/*

Figure 2. IEN Validation process

Source: https://www.nnas.ca
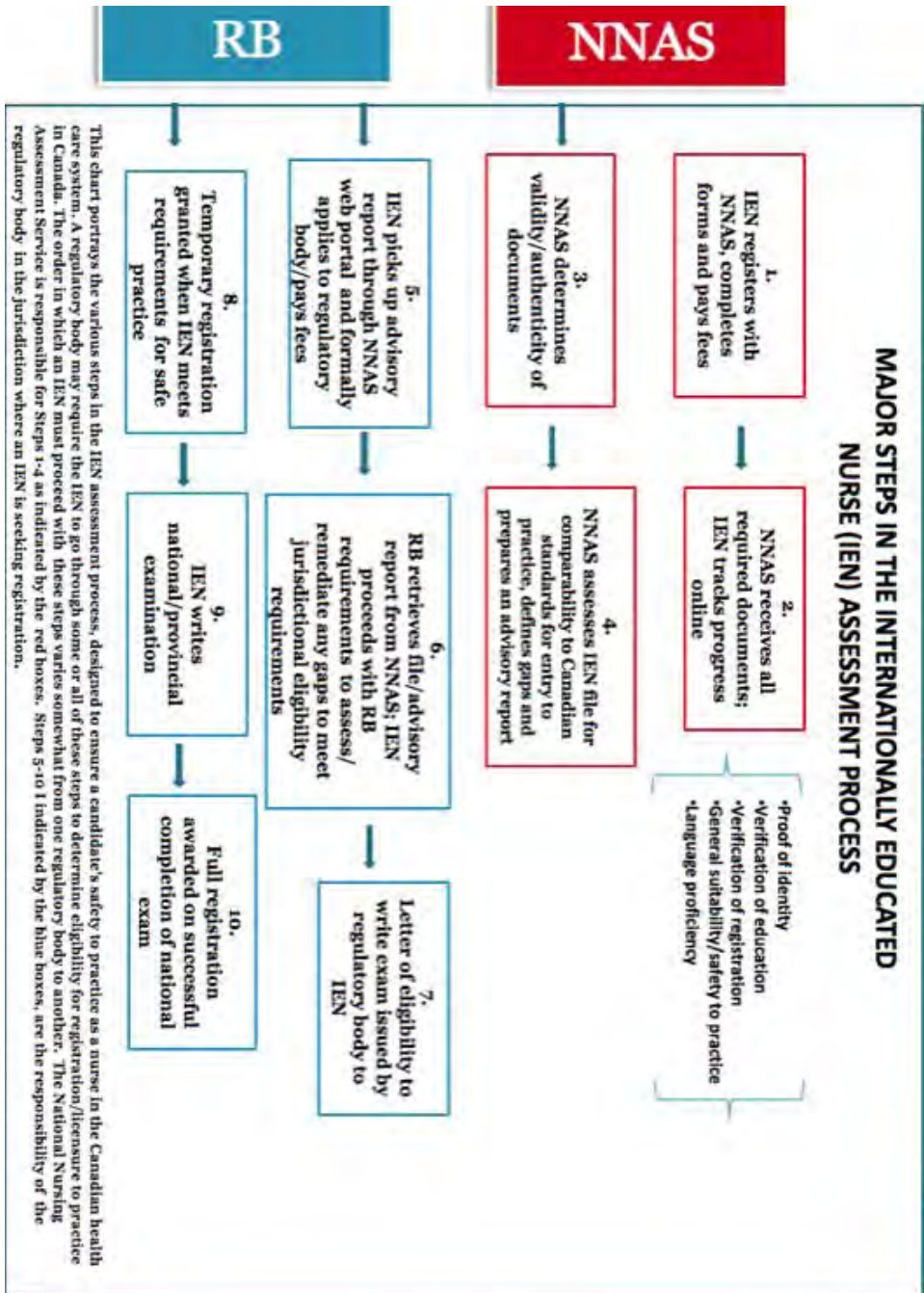
Successful competency-assessment candidates in both provinces are granted temporary licensure and permission to write the NCLEX (national nursing exam) and become registered.

Both provinces offer remedial education for IEN candidates who are only partially successful in the competency-assessment. IENs with significant deficits identified during competency assessment may be required to complete a four-year Bachelor of Nursing Science program. Alternatively, they may be referred to attempt registration as a Licensed Practical Nurse, a lower-level nursing qualification. (Note that in BC, IENs may now apply for a dual competency assessment, in which they are assessed against Registered Nurse competencies and Licensed Practical Nurse competencies simultaneously.)

Once an IEN becomes registered in one province/territory, mobility to other provinces or territories follows the same straightforward process as for Canadian educated nurses.

Conclusion

The division of powers between Canada's federal and provincial/territorial governments created challenges for IEN's wishing to immigrate to Canada and become licensed to practice as Registered Nurses. Through predominantly voluntary co-operation, prompted by Interprovincial Trade Agreements on labour mobility, the Registered Nursing profession evolved a system that simplifies Validation process for IENs and creates more consistency in how their education and work experience are assessed across Canada. This case study demonstrates that, at least in self-regulating professions such as Nursing, direct state intervention may not be needed to result in robust and transparent Validation.

The Importance of Skills Recognition   **1.4**

An ILO Project Review of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Jordan

Christine Hofmann and Helen Kirsch[73]

Workers in the informal economy and migrant workers in particular often face challenges to access decent jobs because public authorities or employers do not recognize their skills and prior learning. International Labour Standards have emphasised the role of skills recognition for more effective skills d evelopment systems, portability of skills, labour market inclusion and promoting transitions to formality. The ILO Recommendation on Human resources development: Education, training and lifelong learning (No. 195) calls on member states to *facilitate the recognition of prior learning and previously acquired skills, irrespective of the countries where they were acquired and whether acquired formally or informally*. One of the latest recommendations, adopted in 2015, on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (No. 204), also stipulates that countries should *recognize prior learning such as through informal apprenticeship systems*. The ILO multilateral framework on labour migration adopted in 2006 also stresses the importance of skills recognition.

Social dialogue between the tripartite constituents of the ILO (governments, workers and employers) is at the core of the ILO's mandate. Systems for the recognition of prior learning are no exception and need to be built on dialogue, collaboration and mutual trust. The recognition of prior learning can concern access to education and training, or access to the labour market. Governments, employers, individuals and education and training providers need to work under a jointly agreed framework that takes existing labour market regulations, regulated occupations, learning pathways, certification bodies and skills development frameworks into account.

This chapter presents practical examples of how countries have designed, piloted and assessed recognition of prior learning (RPL)[74] systems in recent years with the technical support of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Its conclusion will present a number of lessons learned and recommendations for the design and implementation of systems for the recognition of prior learning.

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73 The authors are working on skills for social inclusion at the ILO's Skills and Employability Branch.
74 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes against standards used in formal education and training. Thus, RPL provides an opportunity for people to acquire qualifications or credits towards a qualification or exemptions (from all or part of the curriculum, or even exemption from an academic prerequisite for entering a formal study programme) without going through a formal education or training programme.
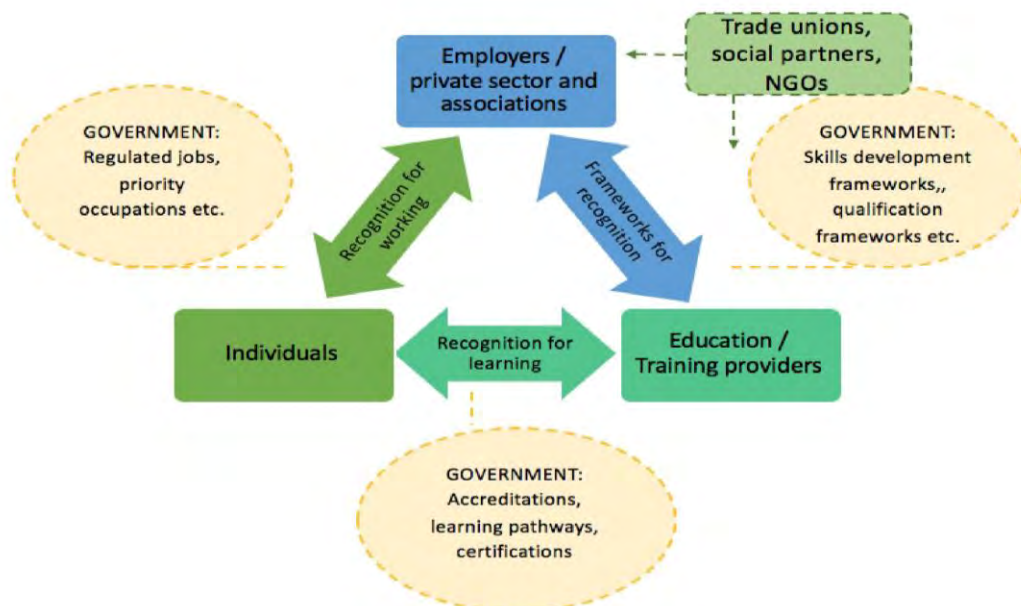
Source: Braňka, J. (2016). *Understanding the potential impact of skills recognition systems on labour markets.* Genea, International Labour Organization (ILO).

Recognition of Prior Learning in Bangladesh

Context - With over 80% of the workforce employed in the informal sector, a large majority of Bangladeshi workers acquire their skills informally through work experience or as informal apprentices working for a master crafts person. Moreover, various public and private, NGOs and industry-based institutions deliver a variety of non-formal trainings using different approaches to delivery and assessment. Also, with 2 million young people joining labour market, the exiting number of training institutes is not enough to provide skills training. To facilitate overall access of informal economy workers to formal jobs and ease the return and reintegration of Bangladesh's large share of migrant workers (estimated at over 10 million in 2015 (UNESCAP, 2019), Bangladesh's National Skills Development Policy (2011) pledged to introduce a system for the Recognition of Prior Learning.

Funded by the European Union and the Canadian Government and technically supported by the ILO, the Ministry of Education with the support of other ministries and the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), launched a project to develop and implement an RPL scheme. The system would certify prior learning for technical vocational education and training (only), and link to Bangladesh's newly established National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF).

Process - To date, Bangladesh's RPL system is overseen by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) and implemented through Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) and accredited RPL assessment centres (AACs). With the support of the ILO, BTEB developed an RPL Operational Guideline to guide Registered Training Organizations (RTO) in

understanding necessary procedures to carry out RPL. To apply for assessment, an applicant (or sponsor) will have to pay the RPL fee, and complete an online application and a self-assessment, available at all ACCs. The ACCs would subsequently advise applicants on where to collect copies of documents providing evidence to support their application. Once assessors reviewed these documents, an applicant would be interviewed or undertake skills testing to verify the legitimacy of their claims.

Currently there are two pathways towards certification, the "assessment-only" and the "combination" pathway. The combination pathway allows applicants to obtain a full qualification through a combination of training and assessment and credits obtained through the RPL assessment. In the assessment only track, applicants obtain all required credits for certification without attending formal training. Due to the diversity of different actors in Bangladesh's skills system, applicants are assessed centrally through challenge tests. While decentralization of the assessment has been discussed, central assessment avoided the diffusion of quality in the early stages of the process.

Lessons learned - The system in Bangladesh relies on centrally set examinations. A proposal has been made to abandon these and introduce a competency logbook to document competencies in the informal economy. Yet in the early stages of the project, implementers preferred to retain centrally set examinations to ensure quality and coherence of the assessment process.[75]

Sustainability/Key achievements - As of today, the project has trained more than 1,100 assessors and more than 31.000 workers have been tested and certified. Moreover, BTEB has produced 212 manuals for competency-based learning material and 336 skills standards, thereby contributing to the standardization of training requirements and content in Bangladesh's fragmented skills landscape. Finally, the Government identified RPL as a potential means to strengthen social inclusion within its skills system. Having completed at least eight years of schooling used to be the requirement to access formal skills training. Since the introduction of RPL, the government abolished this requirement, allowing early school-dropouts to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to access the formal training system without having to complete 8 years of schooling.[76] Finally, a governmental evaluation of the STEP project[77] found a positive impact of RPL assessment on monthly incomes of self-employed assesses after the study period.[78]

Recognition of Prior Learning in India

Context - With its large population beginning to decline and its economy growing at an average of seven percentage points annually in the past decade, India faces the challenge of

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75 International Labour Organization (2018a). *Skills for Migration and Employment. International Labour Organization*. ILO, Geneva. *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_651238.pdf*
International Labour Organization (2018b). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Learning package*. ILO, Geneva. *https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_626246/lang--en/index.htm*

76 Singh, Madhu (2015). *Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning*. Springer International Publishing.

77 World Bank-funded Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP), on expansion of RPL

78 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (2016). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment. Package No. SD-52.* With assistance of Development Technical Consultants Pvt. Ltd. *http://www.dtcltd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/RPL_2016-web-report.pdf*

satisfying the skills demands of its diversifying economy. Nevertheless, in 2014, only 6.8 per cent of the Indian working age population (15 years and above) received vocational training. Recognizing this challenge, the government established the Ministry for Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in 2014, to initiate large-scale reforms that would result in training more than 225 million non-agricultural workers and labour market entrants in the coming decade.[79]

Only a year later, the country's first national skills development policy (2015)[80] made RPL a key component of these efforts, seeing it as a critical instrument to map existing skills and provide access of informal economy workers to the formal skills development system. The National Skills Development Agency (NSDA), under the MSDE, was charged with the implementation of a pilot scheme targeting four sectors, agriculture, healthcare, gems and jewelry, and domestic work. Together these labor-intensive sectors employ more than 50% of the Indian workforce.

Process - The government requested technical support from the ILO to develop and submit an initial design for these RPL programs. Moreover, the ILO was tasked to evaluate the pilot projects during and after their rollout through a tracer study to analyze the benefits of RPL along four dimensions: (a) individual economic gains, (b) occupational health and safety improvements; (c) social recognition; as well as (d) motivation for further training.

To identify and mobilize suitable candidates for registry, assessment, and tracing, existing Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and project partners approached employers through their associations and local networks. In the construction sector, all candidates were pre-assessed, and if required, received 120 hours of training before being admitted to the final assessment. Final RPL assessments were in no way different to those for learners who undertook formal skill development courses. With the exception of the domestic work sector, SSCs through their empanelled Assessment Agencies (AAs) carried out the assessments. Results were recorded and the assessors made recommendations for certification. Those who qualified received certificates issued by the competent authority or SSCs.

Lessons Learned: - The ILO study found that assessment per se is rarely a motivator for workers and employers to undergo RPL. Therefore, the study recommended instituting a pre-assessment process followed by a bridging training as a condition for the assessment adding value to the process. These pre-assessment frameworks should be sector specific and define a minimum number of years of work experience for eligibility. Moreover, schemes should focus on institutionalizing quality to build credibility of the service rather than targeting too many individuals in its early stages. Finally, the study found that the appropriate design, sector and occupation selection, as well as the implementation of a sound monitoring and evaluation framework were key factors to the success of RPL schemes.

Achievements/ Sustainability - Based on lessons learned from the 2016 pilot, the NSDA has set up the PMKVY scheme which provides funding for RPL. The scheme operates a "demand aggregation portal" connecting interested candidates to a number of RPL centres across a variety of sectors and districts, offering RPL in mainly medium-skilled occupations. A pre-

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79 Rothboeck, S., Comyn, P. & Banerjee, P. S. (2018). Role of recognition of prior learning for emerging economies: learning from a four-sector pilot project in India. In: *Journal of Education and Work* 31 (4), pp. 394–408. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2018.1473560.

80 *https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=122927*

screening test, including self-assessment and examination of supporting documentation is now mandatory for all sectors. Moreover, candidates receive at least 12 hours of orientation, comprised of 6 hours of occupation specific training, 4 hours of training on soft skills and entrepreneurship, and 2 hours to familiarize themselves with the assessment process. While no fee is charged from candidates undertaking RPL, successful candidates receive 500 Indian Rupees as well as a free of charge three-year insurance policy against accidents. As of 2019, the portal claims that 600.000 individuals have been assessed and certified (PMKVY, 2019)[81] The key building blocks of any RPL system are briefly presented in the following. They can take many different forms, yet in their entirety are critical for a system that is demand-led and achieves the expected results.[82]

Recognition of Prior Learning in Jordan

Context - Since 2010, around 1.3 million Syrian refugees entered Jordan both regularly and irregularly. Many of these had lost or never obtained formal qualifications, forcing them to seek employment in the informal economy often under hazardous conditions. This contributed to segregation in the already fragmented Jordanian labour market, with broader knock-on effects on wages and working conditions, for both Syrian and Jordanian workers as well as inequality posing a potential threat to social cohesion.[83]

Recognizing the need to turn the refugee crisis into a 'development opportunity' by granting Syrian refugees access to formal employment and education, the Jordanian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), in close collaboration with the National Employment and Training Company (NET), and technical assistance of the ILO, set up a pilot scheme for the recognition of prior learning[84].

Process - To ensure the relevance of the intervention in the context of the Syria-Jordan migration corridor, the ILO and CAQA identified the construction, confectionary and garment sectors as priority areas for intervention. Large numbers of Syrians are already working in these sectors informally. The RPL scheme includes a four-day theoretical training course provided by a recognized local institution on four consecutive weekend days, in order to minimize participants' opportunity costs of foregoing income. It covers trade-specific content, occupational safety and health and basic labour rights. A subsequent practical test is organized in collaboration with CAQA on-the-job, which can be repeated in case of failure after an additional day of training. After passing a final examination, the beneficiary is entitled

81 *https://rpldap.pmkvyofficial.org/*
82 ILO, 2018a; -- 2018b.
    Aggarwal, A. (2015). *Recognition of prior learning: Key success factors and the building blocks of an effective system*. ILO, Pretoria. *https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_625895/lang--en/index.htm*
83 Stave, S. E. & Hillesund, S. (2015). *Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market*. ILO, Geneva. *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_364162.pdf*
    Economic Research Forum (2018). *Migration Shocks and Housing: Evidence from the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan*. ERF, Dokki. *http://erf.org.eg/publications/migration-shocks-and-housing-evidence-from-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-in-jordan/?type=undefined&tab=undefined*
    Ajluni, S. & Kawar, M. (2014). *The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the labour market in Jordan*. ILO, Amman. *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_242021.pdf*
84 The Project "Formalizing access to the legal labour market through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and certification for Syrians and Jordanians working in the construction, confectionary and garment sectors" is funded by the US state department *https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/WCMS_645874/lang--en/index.htm*

to a Formal Skills Certificate recognizing their prior and updated learning. The certificate is granted by CAQA and provides access to a formal work permit, allowing for the legalization of the worker's status (ILO, 2018a, 2018b).

Achievements - Between 2017 and 2018, over 10,000 Jordanian and Syrian construction confectionary and garment workers were trained and certified. Moreover, to increase sustainability of the training, the ILO coached and trained a select number of 50 beneficiaries to become technical coaches and trainers in their field of occupations themselves. This was achieved by involving beneficiaries in the preparation of training material on teaching and learning approaches and methodologies. To raise awareness about the RPL scheme and support Syrian refugees in obtaining work permits, five employment support offices in Amman, Mafraq, Irbid, Zarqaa and Karak were set up.

Lessons learned - The main incentive for Syrians to participate in the RPL scheme lies in the opportunity of obtaining a formal work permit. Preferential trade access for firms access that employ Syrians as at least 25% of their workforce incentivized the government to issue work permits for migrants outside of the "kafala system", in which a Jordanian sponsor agrees to pay the usually high fees for an official work permit. The "kafala" practice is common in MENA countries and is associated with human rights abuses and bonded labour. Its circumvention can be considered a milestone for migrants in the corridor. To ensure that the programme contributes to social cohesion, employers also had to commit to employing another 25 per cent of their workforce among Jordanians. However, meeting this requirement often turned out to be challenging, due to the low attractiveness of work in the two sectors for the Jordanian host community. Only around 500 of the trained and assessed workers in Jordan work in the garment sector.

Recognition of Prior Learning in Sri Lanka

Context - Sri Lanka has witnessed a fifteen-fold increase in emigration between 1886 and 2015. Current estimates suggest that about 3 million migrants work abroad, with annual outflows reaching up to 300,000 persons in 2014 (UNESCAP, 2019)[85]. Many work as low-skilled domestic or construction workers in the Gulf region and are thus vulnerable to exploitation.

In 2009, the Government adopted a new National Labour Migration Policy focusing on low-skilled migrant workers (in particular female domestic workers). In 2015, it formulated a national sub policy on return and reintegration of migrant workers. Its pillar II emphasized the importance of skills certification and recognition for returnees to foster Economic reintegration.

There have been several Government efforts to upgrade the skills of migrant workers. For example, the government has introduced standardized 5-day pre-departure orientation and training for female domestic workers (40 days) and low and semi-skilled male workers in construction. Moreover, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) under the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training now certifies the "domestic worker training programme" at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3.

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85 *https://sitreport.unescapsdd.org/labour-migration-outflow*

Process - In 2016, the Sri Lankan Government requested the ILO's support to establish "RPL Coordinating committees for Migrant workers" at the Divisional Secretariat level to pilot the project in selected districts[86] in the country. A pilot mechanism for RPL targeting 200 both prospective and returning construction workers in eight districts was designed and set-up in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Employment and the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training. To support its implementation, eight "RPL Coordinating committees for Migrant Workers" were established in these districts.

Lessons learned - The pilot highlighted the importance of (a) providing adequate information on-skilling options/RPL process at the pre-departure stage, (b) linking vocational training institutions with divisional and village level officers (for referral), and (c) providing returnees with information on-skilling and re-employment opportunities.

Achievements/Sustainability - In 2018, the pilot was extended to Public Employment Service Centres (PES) to promote RPL among returnee construction workers in two districts. PES centres were vital in orienting and counselling, facilitating access to RPL, Vocational Training Centres and linking them with local employment opportunities as skilled workers.

Recognition of prior learning in Tanzania

Context **-** Tanzania's latest national strategy for growth and the reduction of poverty (2016-2021)[87] pledges to assess and recognize the skills of 200.000 informal apprentices and workers by 2021 (URT, 2016). According to the latest labour force survey (ILFS Tanzania 2014)[88] informal apprenticeships constitute 26.2 per cent of all skills acquisition modalities of the current workforce, 38.8 per cent when considering informal economy workers only, with an average duration of 9.89 months. Informal apprenticeship is embedded in social norms and traditions, but not formally recognized.[89]

Formal and informal vocational education and training fall under the auspices of the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA), which operates under the Ministry of Education (MoE). Given that VETA's own training capacities at 125,000 trainees per year, are limited and satisfy only about 12 per cent of the estimated annual demand for training[90], VETA implemented a pilot for the establishment of a System of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in 2011.

Process - Between 2011 and 2018, VETA developed five occupational standards covering occupations with a high incidence of informal apprenticeships[91] with technical support of the ILO. The baseline requirement to apply for RPL are three to four years of work experience.

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86 Kurunegala, Galle, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Ratnapura, Gampaha, Matara, Ampar.

87 *https://www.international.gc.ca/development-developpement/assets/pdfs/countries-pays/NATIONAL-STRATEGY-FOR-GROWTH-AND-REDUCTION-OF-POVERTY-TANZANIA.PDF*

88 *https://www.ilo.org/surveydata/index.php/catalog/1333*

89 Nubler, I., Hofmann, C. & Greiner, C. (2009). Unde*rstanding informal apprenticeship. Findings from empirical research in Tanzania*. Employment Sector, Working Paper No. 32, ILO, Geneva. *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_110481.pdf.*

90 *https://docplayer.net/28204610-Vocational-education-and-training-authority-veta-guidelines-for-recognition-of-prior-learning-assessment-rpla-in-tanzania.html*

91 Namely: motor mechanics, carpentry and joinery, masonry and brick laying, food production, and food and beverage services, tailoring and sewing, plumbing and pipe fitting, auto body repair, welding and metal fabrication and electrical installations

Informal apprentices and workers may submit an application (with a portfolio), which is evaluated by a VETA-registered assessor. If the application is successful, assessors guide candidates to overcome shortcomings and prepare for the final assessment. Moreover, they seek the mastercraftsperson's endorsement of the candidate prior to the assessment. As of 2018, 5282 informal apprentices had been assessed. The majority of these (89 per cent) were men. Almost 90 per cent of assessed men but only 79.8 per cent of assessed females, passed the assessment.

VETA offers short-term courses for unsuccessful candidates[92] in TVET centres or the workplace. Successful candidates may also choose bridging courses to acquire further qualifications. In fact, skills-upgrading has become the most attractive part of the system, with many applying for an assessment in order to get access to upgrading offers. To date, 591 informal apprentices and workers received additional training.

Sustainability - As of July 2018, another 17.000 informal apprentices and workers had been identified for RPL assessment. Yet VETA's limited capacity to assess and subsequently train the many skilled individuals applying for RPL, is hindering it to reach its ambitious targets. Since 2016, and in recognition of increasing demand for RPL, the central government pledged to contribute to VETA's budget with a budget dedicated to RPL. This has allowed VETA to scale up the initiative increasing assessment numbers in recent years whilst ensuring the sustainability of the intervention.

Figure 2: RPL in Tanzania's Apprenticeship System

Source: VETA (2014).

Lessons learned - While the sustainability of RPL funding has improved considerably in recent years, collecting a small RPL fee of 10-20 dollars from applicants could contribute to the purchase and maintenance of equipment and training materials used for the assessment, yet could also be a disincentive for participation. Moreover, the introduction of on-site-

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92 Reaching less than 75 per cent in their final exam.

assessments involving the respective MC, especially in sectors like construction, improved the efficient use of raw materials. Still, there is room to strengthen the use of on-site assessments.

In the absence of vibrant trade and business associations able to contribute to standard setting and assessment, VETA's capacities to offer assessment as well as skills up-grading remain constrained. To fill this institutional gap, VETA assessors have been seeking MCs' endorsements of all applicants. While sometimes challenging this has led to the identification of an additional source of demand for RPL, many applications being filed by MCs themselves. Second, it allowed to identify skilled MCs able to support the establishment of RPL. Finally, it ultimately helped to gain the support of the informal networks that govern informal apprenticeships.

Figure 3 Key Building Blocks of an RPL system
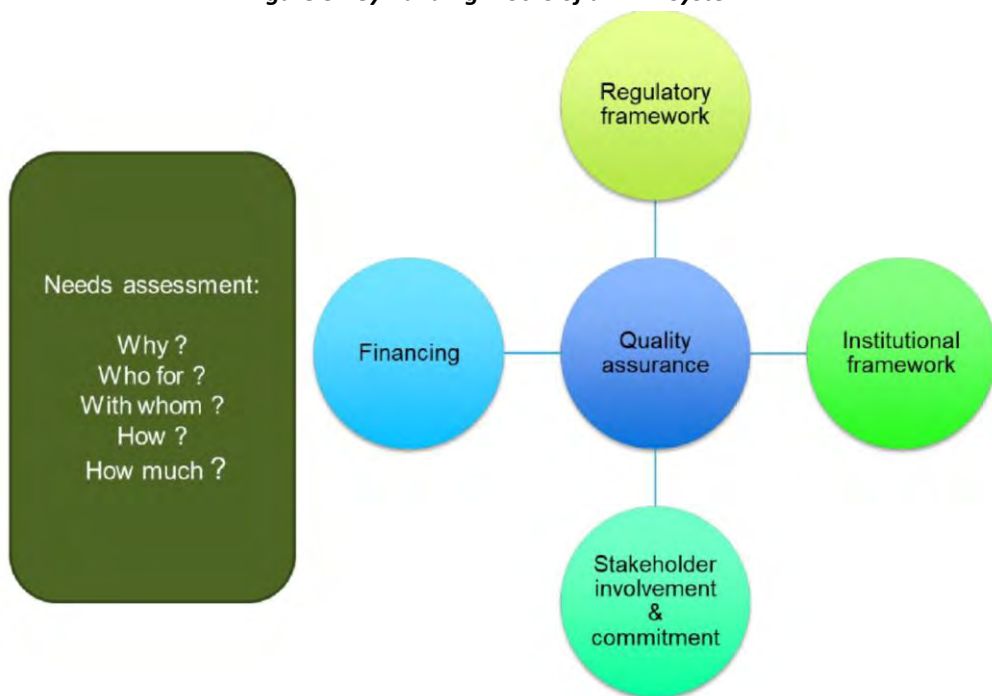
Source: ILO, 2018b

Discussion

The above cases highlight the diverse groups of potential beneficiaries of RPL systems such as workers in the informal economy (Tanzania, Bangladesh), refugees (Jordan), migrant workers and returnees (Sri Lanka), and even early school dropouts (Bangladesh). Moreover, RPL may help countries to recognize the skills and qualifications of a large number of skilled workers in a short period of time to support their development aspirations (India).

Furthermore, the examples reveal that RPL assessment for certification per se is rarely the main motivation for workers and employers alike to undergo an RPL process. Instead, motives like obtaining a work permit (Jordan), pursuing further training (Tanzania), and receiving higher wages (Bangladesh) prevail. These findings somewhat refute criticisms that

the benefits of RPL are confined to improving assessees' feelings of self-worth and skill and have no other tangible economic benefits – provided systems are designed this way.

The cases also emphasize the importance of basing the selection of sectors and occupations for RPL assessments on thorough needs assessments since not all sectors are equally suitable for RPL (Jordan). Likewise, prioritizing quality of the assessment process (for example through screening and self-assessments of potential candidates) over quantity (Bangladesh, India) may help to ensure long-term sustainability of the RPL system and generate trust with local stakeholders. Another important factor in the same regard is the effective use of awareness raising and outreach tactics through local employers' or sectoral organizations.

Lastly, through the parallel development of competency and training standards, and in some cases national systems of vocational qualifications, RPL may offer an avenue to increase coherence and quality in the skills system as a whole (Bangladesh).

In a nutshell, key challenges to establishing ad managing an RPL system thus relate to: (i) creating awareness and facilitating outreach, guidance and counselling, (ii) matching occupational and qualification standards so that skills acquired in the workplace mirror RPL assessment requirements equivalent to existing qualifications, (iii) building capacity of RPL professionals, in particular of counsellors and assessors, (iv) assuring quality so that the system and certificates are trusted, and (v) ensuring a fair distribution of costs and sustainable sources of funding.

Institutional arrangements to address these challenges, can take many different forms. Therefore, the ILO has identified a set of five key building blocks, which – in their entirety – are critical for a system that is demand-led and achieves the expected results:

- Needs assessment – Why is RPL the right policy response? Who is the system for? With whom does it have to be established? What for? How? For how many people and how much will it cost?
- Regulatory framework – Can pilot interventions be implemented without changes to the regulatory framework? Are additional incentives needed to stimulate demand for RPL, such as work permits, professional licenses, access to (subsidized) services?
- Financing – Who shares costs and how? Can training funds be used? Will employers contribute? How are assessors being compensated?
- Institutional arrangements – Who plays what role? Information, guidance and counselling? Who assesses? Who certifies? Who provides bridging courses if candidates fail/not qualify?
- Quality assurance – How to avoid fraud? Which institutions are trusted? How can processes be valid, transparent, reliable and fair?
- Stakeholder engagement and commitment – How are employers' and workers' organizations involved? Do they trust the process? What is their contribution? What role do civil society organizations play?

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Financing

<div style="text-align: right; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">2</div>

Jennifer Faulkner & Martin Noack

While promising a return on investment for many parties involved, validation costs money. For this reason, the creation of clear financing structures and a response to the question of who pays what concerning the cost of validation, or subsequent qualification procedure, is of crucial significance.

A. A sustainable and transparent financing model needs to be in place to cover the full costs of validation including guidance, personnel, infrastructure, instruments and support mechanisms.

Why is it important
Low fees for VPL encourage participation but there are other factors, which have a bearing on uptake, namely provision of free guidance, support and training, particularly for candidates with low levels of formal qualifications. Furthermore, funding is needed for awareness raising campaigns, quality assurance mechanisms and training for assessors and guides. These are all vital components of a functioning system and adequate and reliable funding must be allocated, particularly as the cost of providing these elements is not insignificant.

Where is it working well?
Virtually all cantons in Switzerland are currently complying with the Federal Government recommendation that validation procedures (including supplementary training courses and guidance and support across all phases of validation) should be offered free of charge to all candidates who are not in possession of an initial vocational qualification.
Finland offers predominantly public financing for validation, alongside graded contributions by participants. Here too, financing covers free supplementary training measures, guidance and support.
Also, companies often contribute financially to the VPL process by allowing their employees to take the necessary time off work for training and certification. In some countries such as France, the contribution from companies goes even further. Not only do they release their employees through 'educational leave' but also all the expenses linked to the validation procedure are paid by the company (300 employees+) through its training plan budget. If the company comprises less than 300 employees, the accredited joint body to which the company pays its tax for continuing training covers the expenses. In the Netherlands, a similar system is in place, with the threshold being less than 500 employees.

B. VPL should be accessible to all individuals regardless of financial status.

Why is it important?
Validation of prior learning can transform the life chances of all citizens. For the unemployed, low-qualified and low-income workers it might have even more significance. However, with limited financial means at their disposal, the cost of validation-processes, especially for portfolio build-up, guidance and assessment, constitutes a critical barrier for uptake. It is essential that sufficient financial support is available to all citizens and especially these designated target groups, which have so much to benefit from validation.

Where is it working well?
In some countries, like Norway and France, there is a right to predominantly publicly funded VPL, while in other countries there is a more mixed form of financing spanning public, private and the individual. For those employed, public financing support often comes from the Ministry of Education or is partly covered by tax-emptions. For those unemployed, public financing support often comes from the Ministry of Labour or Social Affairs. In addition, a contribution is often requested from the individual for fixed costs, the exact amount determined by income.

In Hong Kong, the government provides various kinds of financial subsidies to help the Appointed Assessment Agencies sustain their Recognition of Prior Learning operations. Financial subsidy may include start-up grants for procurement of necessary assessment facilities and/or equipment, maintenance grants for necessary expenses to keep the RPL mechanism updated. Moreover, for each applicant who has completed an application, a fixed subsidy for each completed application is provided to the assessment agency.[93]

C. Systems for funding the validation of learning outcomes should build on existing infrastructure, regardless of pathway and validation service provider.

Why is it important?
Rather than creating new structures, the most sustainable approach is to incorporate VPL arrangements into existing funding mechanisms. However, it is important to design a system that can accommodate innovation and flexibility to meet the demands of the different validation pathways and the needs of the users. Furthermore, such an organic development must make sure no learner, falls through gaps, cracks or holes in the financing scheme.

Where is it working well?
In France, VPL is integrated into the qualifications framework as well as the further training framework. Linking the financing of validation to existing instruments, such as validation qualifying for Continuing Training Funds - with individuals each having a Personal Account for Training - has had a positive effect on uptake.
In a federally structured country such as Switzerland, central programmes may be supplemented by decentralised instruments and funding opportunities. This flexibility supports companies and public employers (like schools, hospitals) in filling-in vacancies in shortage sectors by means of validation-systematics utilised for matching people's competences with the organisation's need for competences.

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93 *http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_ HongKong .pdf*

In the Netherlands, both companies and individuals can offset the costs of validation against tax. Furthermore, regional *LeerWerkLoketten* [Learning and Working Desks] aim at strengthening people's skills and competences to match regional labour market needs through the brokering function of the Desks that foster the cooperation between education providers, local authorities, social organisations and the business community. Services offered to citizens are including VPL-processes for employed and unemployed. Funding is available through the ministry of social affairs and regional funding by the partners in the 'desk'.[94]

D. The costs and benefits of VPL, including its social and economic impact, should be monitored, analysed and shared with stakeholders.

Why is it important?
The costs of validation are relatively simple to calculate but the return on investment is harder to define numerically. This is due to the number of beneficiaries, the cross-sectoral nature of validation and the individualised learning paths and outcomes. What we do know though is that the benefits to society and the economy are substantial and demonstrating the return on investment is a powerful advocacy tool, which will allow a validation system to thrive.

Where is it working well?
There is a need for more data collection and in-depth studies and wherever possible, a consistency and coherence in approach to allow cross-country comparisons. The Flemish government commissioned an analysis of the budget required to implement an integrated VPL procedure, and the potential return on investment at the level of the Flemish region. In the Netherlands, a study conducted by interviewing organizations and employees demonstrated that VPL has tangible impact on individuals' career progression. Moreover, it demonstrated the costs and benefits of validation can be viewed from four different stakeholder related perspectives: the individual, the providers, the government, and the employers and social partners.

E. Initial investment should be in place for establishing VPL systems and arrangements.

Why is it important?
Establishing a VPL system requires seed funding, usually from the public sector, in order to set up the necessary organisational arrangements, legal foundations, financing structures and training of assessors and advisers. The system should be designed as a whole, with funding available to bring the right people together to develop a functioning and sustainable system.

Where is it working well?
The role of national governments or training funds is crucial for embarking on building up VPL-systems and arrangements. Many countries provide good practice in turning a vision on lifelong learning into a practical strategy incorporating VPL-systematics as one of the pillars. Throughout the chapters in this book many examples are given of countries or training funds investing in setting up a national or sector-based VPL-system.

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94 https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5575_en.pdf

Cost Analysis of VPL

2.1

An De Coen, Kristof Mertens and Miriam Van Hoed

In Flanders (Belgium), until recently, different sectors and policy areas had their own Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) policy. However, joined efforts, across policy areas, were made to draw up an integrated VPL policy in order to fully realize the potential of VPL measures and to increase the transparency and sustainability of VPL. First, the concept for an integrated VPL-framework was approved by the Flemish Government in 2015. Then, an extensive process resulted in new regulation, namely the Parliamentary Act of 26 April 2019[95]. A recurring point of attention in the preparation of the Parliamentary Act was the financing of the VPL procedure. Stakeholders expressed, among other things, the need for a financing model for VPL that responds to the demand and the social needs for VPL and that adjusts the financial capacity accordingly. In doing so, the choices made in the organizational model of VPL must be taken into account. The Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) also stressed the need for sufficient funding for the development of a qualitative and effective VPL policy. This was in line with the advice given by the Flemish Education Council (VLOR), calling for sustainable financing of the costs related to the organisation of VPL.

Insight in what an integrated VPL policy could cost or yield in different organisational models requires a thorough analysis of costs and benefits of the system. This article shows how the costs of VPL were identified and quantified (to the extent that they could be expressed in monetary terms), followed by an overview of the main learning effects.

Process steps in an integrated VPL process
In order to calculate the costs, the different steps within VPL procedures must be clear. The international framework for validating non-formal and informal learning published by Cedefop[96] defines four standard stages within a VPL trajectory:
- Identification (mapping) - reflection on an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning, i.e. the acquired competencies.
- Documentation - making the acquired competencies visible, indirectly by means of evidence or directly by taking tests or trials.
- Assessment (evaluation) - checking whether the competencies correspond to the ones described in the recognized standard.
- Certification (recognition, validation) - formal confirmation that the person possesses the competencies that he or she claims to have acquired through a formal qualification such as a certificate or a diploma.

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95   'Decreet van 26 april 2019 betreffende een geïntegreerd beleid voor de erkenning van verworven competenties', published by the Flemish government on 3 June 2019.
96   Cedefop (2009). *European Guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

This framework focuses on the steps that participants go through during a VPL trajectory and the decisions that they have to make (depending on the phases that they actually go through). Although this framework is very useful to crystallize the conceptual thinking about VPL, interviews with VPL providers show that the operational implementation of VPL procedures is more important. For example, many actions start as soon as the decision is taken to offer a VPL trajectory. The general framework with the four standard phases therefore needs to be further developed in order to visualize the process steps to be calculated in the cost analysis.

Figure 1: Central components of an integrated VPL procedure
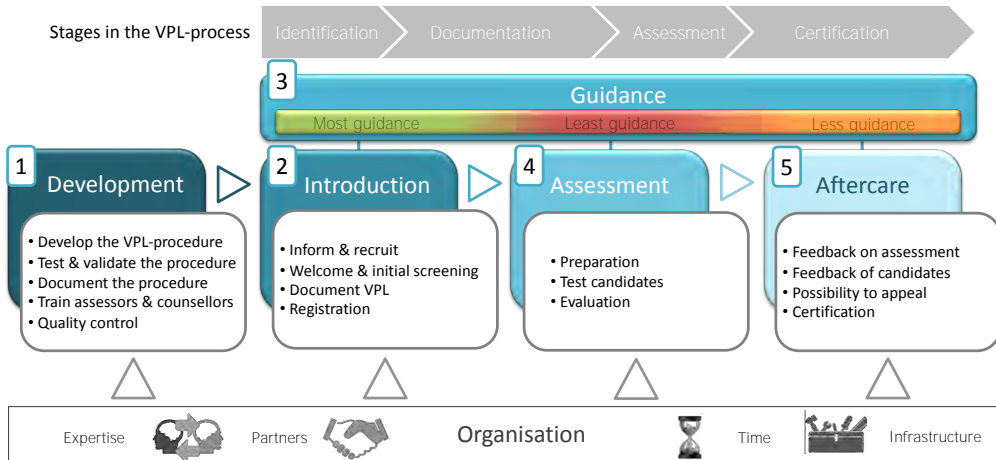
Source: IDEA Consult

By means of semi-structured in-depth interviews with VPL-providers from different fields and a follow-up workshop, we were able to identify the general components of VPL procedures in Flanders and the actions they generally include. Despite the difference in the final goal of the procedures (e.g. for educational or labour market purposes), the following five components are part of each VPL process (see figure 1):

1. *Development*. Developing and testing the VPL procedure was identified as a first step, including the development of documentation and the training of assessors and counsellors. Additionally, the continuous updating of the procedure is also part of the development phase.
2. The *introduction* phase includes everything related to the promotion of VPL as well as the recruitment and 'selection' of (potential) participants
3. The *guidance* of the (potential) participants starts during the introduction phase, which runs like a thread through the VPL process. The degree of guidance offered is strongly context-dependent. All the procedures that were studied include guidance in the introduction phase. There are large(r) differences when it comes to assessment and 'aftercare' (follow-up).
4. VPL providers generally agree that counsellors never act as an assessor. Yet, some provide guidance during the assessment phase, while others strictly separate guidance from assessment. During the assessment phase guidance is mainly offered in procedures that focus on vulnerable groups, who need more support.

5. During the aftercare (follow-up) phase guidance is mainly provided to promote the development and self-development of the participant. Together with the counsellor, the participant can go deeper into the results of the VPL process and find out what actions he or she should ideally take to fill in missing competencies, to use acquired competencies or to develop them further.
6. The *assessment* phase starts as soon as competency testing is initiated. It ranges from actions related to the preparation of the test to the formal assessment.
7. *Aftercare* (follow-up). The assessment is followed by the completion of the process, in which the test results are communicated to the participants and the proven competencies are certified. In this phase, participants also have the opportunity to appeal and to give feedback from their point of view.

The stages of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying competencies start in the introduction phase, when the participant decides to reflect on his or her acquired competencies. Documenting competencies usually starts in the introduction phase and is completed during the assessment phase, in which the assessment also takes place. Certification is the final part of the process. For each phase, organizational choices are also made with regard to the appropriate expertise, partnerships, time investment and the required infrastructure.

Figure 2: Illustration of the process steps in the introduction phase

1.	**Offering information through the website**	
	1	Developing content
	2	Putting content online
	3	Keeping content up to date
	4	Search for information and go through it
2.	**Generic information moment (e.g. job fair)**	
	1	Developing content
	2	Practical preparation
	3	Attending the event
3.	**Specific information moment (e.g. via PES or educational institution)**	
	1	Developing content
	2	Practical preparation
	3	Giving the presentation
4.	**Mailing to potential participants**	
	1	Identification of potential participants
	2	Developing content
	3	Make appointments with partners for layout, distribution, …
	4	Sending message
	5	Follow-up mailing
	6	Reading message

All information is integrated in the cost analysis, although not every VPL process by definition includes all five components. For example, projects limited to identification of competencies may only include the first three phases. It may also that acquired competencies are documented by means of one or more tests, but are not formally certified, so that the process can stop after the 4th phase. The cost analysis must take this into account.

Each phase is furthermore divided into process steps that generally need to be followed in different VPL processes and organisational models. This analysis results in concrete actions that can be expressed in terms of time or money in the cost analysis. Figure 2 shows an example for the bullet 'inform and recruit' in the introduction phase.

The standard cost model (SCM)

The SCM methodology was originally designed to list all the regulatory steps that citizens, businesses and associations have to go through to measure the time spent on each of these process steps. Adding up the time spent on all these steps gives an estimate of the administrative burden of regulation. The administrative burden is measured by multiplying a price parameter by a quantity parameter for each process step and adding up all these amounts. The detailed breakdown of the procedure into process steps ensures that all parties involved have the same understanding of what is meant by a certain procedure. Furthermore, it enables the persons involved to make an estimate of the time needed to go through the entire process at a manageable level.

The price parameters in the SCM include the estimation of the time to go through a process step, the performer's hourly rate (including overhead costs) and any out-of-pocket costs.

- The time estimation refers to the time actually spent by all the people involved in providing input for a particular process step (and thus not the lead time). For example, if you spend three times a quarter of an hour on a process step during a period of 2 weeks, only 45 minutes may be taken into account and not 14 days.
- In order to determine an hourly rate, standard hourly rates are used in Flanders that -for instance- take the qualification level of the operator into account (e.g. the highest rate is for someone at management level).
- Out-of-pocket costs are actual expenditures apart from labour costs (wages), for example, printing costs of leaflets, but also shipping costs, rent, consulting costs, travel costs, costs related to the development of software, etc.

Data collection

The data to measure the price and quantity parameters was collected through *interviews* with ten VPL providers and a follow-up workshop. The interviews were also the most important source of information to identify the different process steps in a VPL procedure and develop Figure 1. In addition to VPL providers from adult education and higher education, test centres of the public employment service, sector training funds, private players, the Flemish Training School and providers of entrepreneurial training (the 'syntra') were also interviewed.

The qualitative information was validated during a one-day *workshop* in order to ensure the completeness of the various process steps and develop an unambiguous description of each step. Then, these process steps were entered into an Excel measurement table to collect both the price parameters and the quantity parameters in a structured way. The digital measurement table also enables simulations to see the effect of adjusting one or more parameters on the cost of VPL.

For each process step, the participants tried to make the best possible estimate of the average time, whereby a distinction was made between (1) a pragmatic approach to the process step and (2) an advanced approach. In a pragmatic approach, one can, for example, build on an already existing procedure (for instance within the framework of other tests organised by the provider), so that the development time is only a fraction of the time of an advanced approach.

In the latter case, the development of a VPL procedure often starts from scratch (or it is very complex by, for instance, developing the most ideal test scenario).

A simplified version of the measurement table[97] was sent to about twenty VPL providers, asking them to fill in as many time parameters (time, hourly rate and out-of-pocket costs) as possible before the workshop, where the measurement table was discussed collectively. Sometimes it was necessary to consult colleagues in order to determine the correct parameter values for the various process steps. Then, during the workshop, all process steps were reviewed one by one and the representatives of the various VPL providers were asked to give their best estimate of the time it would take both the providers and the participants to complete each process step. In case of major differences, the necessary context information was collected to find an explanation for the different estimates.

During the workshop the *time* parameters could be estimated relatively well, as opposed to the *out-of-pocket costs*, which were difficult for the workshop participants to monetarize. Still, the hourly rate already includes an overhead cost (for ICT equipment, rent of buildings, etc.) so that a large part of the overhead costs is already taken into account. Yet, it is possible that in the context of VPL processes, large non-current expenses are incurred (such as, for example, the cost of heating ovens, the rent of a crane, etc.). It is impossible to give a complete overview of such costs, also because the infrastructure is not exclusively used for VPL purposes. During the workshop there was consensus that VPL procedures should be offered by institutions that also offer the formal learning track, as they already have the necessary expertise and infrastructure. As long as the number of participants is too low to justify investments in additional machines, test centres, etc., such an organizational model is the most efficient way of organizing VPL in practice. Since VPL-related investments in infrastructure are exceptional in Flanders, we mention such costs in an exemplary way so that they can be taken into account when calculating the cost of a single project. There was little discussion about the *hourly rate*. Usually the average standard rate in the education sector was used, but in specific cases a mix between the standard rate and an hourly rate for a manager was used if higher or more experienced profiles were also involved in certain process steps.

The collection of the quantity parameters was rather difficult due to a lack of monitoring data. Because VPL is used in various policy areas and there is no uniform monitoring system, quantity parameters could be collected partially. For instance, we are only able to estimate the time required to complete the development phase once because there is no overview of the total number of developed procedures. This is not problematic because costs incurred in the past are 'sunk costs' anyway. Moreover, a cost calculation of the development of VPL procedures seems particularly valuable for future budgets. If the unit price is known, it is easy to calculate the costs to develop a certain number of VPL procedures. Or if a certain budget is available, it is possible to calculate how many VPL procedures can be developed.

Cost analysis
This study focuses on VPL processes that result in a certificate as these processes make it possible to measure all the costs that may be involved in VPL. Projects that do not have an

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97 The first-time stakeholders are confronted with the measurement table, they may be overwhelmed by the size of the table. It is therefore advisable to present a simplified version that has already been filled in as much as possible by actors in the field and that asks for a manageable amount of information. Columns of parameters that they do not have to collect should be omitted.

assessment phase, for example, can disregard these costs when they want to get a picture of the costs that are relevant to them. We estimated the average costs for VPL providers and participants for each of the 5 phases defined above, thereby making a distinction between a pragmatic and an advanced approach. The costs are expressed in terms of time and money. The minimum and maximum values are also reported to give an indication of the range of observations. Since there are no quantity parameters for the development phase (see above), only unit costs (of developing one VPL process) can be given.

It is important to interpret amounts correctly: *the figures give an average picture of the order of magnitude of the costs.* Furthermore, two things have to be kept in mind:
1. The figures are based on observations and calculated assumptions obtained through the workshop and desk research. The discussions showed that the differences between different fields were limited, while there were significant differences between processes (also in the same field) according to the type of competences that are to be validated. This observation led to a substantive approach (e.g. to integrate assessment scenarios in the cost analysis), rather than having parallel analyses per policy domain.
2. The figures at the level of a single VPL process should be treated as average values: not every process has the same cost structure but based on the collected input one might assume lower and higher values levelling each other out and so result in the reported value[98]. In other words, the figures need to be considered within a broader cost range.

Phase 1: Development
Estimation unit: required cost and time to develop one VPL process, except for step A6, where time is estimated per assessor or counsellor.

P1.1. Estimation of development costs for suppliers[99]

PROVIDER			unit	Time in hours provider						Unit cost provider	
				pragmatic			advanced			pragmat	advanced
DEVELOPMENT				AVG	min	max	AVG	min	max		
A	**Development VPL system**		mix	186			3722			€ 7 721	€ 154 793
	1	Determination of the standard	type process	23	10	40	347	140	500	€ 970	€ 14 416
	2	Developing the test matrix	type process	38	10	86	idem			€ 1 594	
	3	Developing a scenario (VPL-procedure)	type process	67	26	120	2760			€ 2 800	€ 114 775
	4	Testing the procedure	type process	13	8	18	32	25	40	€ 541	€ 1 317
	5	Validating the procedure	type process	12	8	16	189	128	250	€ 499	€ 7 860
	6	Developing VPL expertise (insight in tools and assessment methods	per person	39	25	67	idem			€ 1 640	
	7	Developing documentation	type process	16	11	24	97	60	120	€ 651	€ 4 020
	8	Update (quality control)	type process	16	10	32	260			€ 665	€ 10 812

The total development time of 186 hours (pragmatic approach) and 3.722 hours (advanced approach) does not take into account step 6 because it depends on the (unknown) number of assessors and counsellors to be trained. Training a coordinator, counsellor and assessor takes respectively 57h, 25h and 26h and costs respectively €2.795, €1.026 and €1.100. The

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98 Other assumptions are included in the final report (only in Dutch): De Coen A., Mertens, K., Van Hoed, M. (2016). *Kosten-baten analyse en financiering van EVC* (*Cost-Benefit Analysis and Financing of VPL].* A study from IDEA Consult for the Flemish Government. Brussels, IDEA Consult.

99 For this, and all other tables, the source is: IDEA Consult.

large number of hours in steps A1 and A3 is mainly due to the large number of meetings with a lot of stakeholders. We assume the VPL process is subject to quality control and needs to be updated every 3 years.

P1.2. Estimation of costs for participants
Participants are not involved in this phase of the VPL process and incur no costs.

Phase 2: Introduction
Estimation unit: individual process.

P2.1. Estimation of costs for suppliers
For each participant in a VPL process, the average time investment for the introduction is about 3 hours and costs €85. 67% of the costs and time concern the general welcome.

PROVIDER		Time in hours provider						Quantity pa		Unit cost suppl		Estimated to
	Unit cost	pragmatic			advanced			Prag.	Adv.	Prag	Adv	
Introduction		AVG	min	max	AVG	min	max			€ 85		€ 696 719
A Recruiting participants	type process	27			108					€ 782	€ 3 173	€ 65 332
1 Offering information via website	type process	8	0,7	8,0	56	25	120	119	6	€ 224	€ 1 631	
2 Organisation generic information moment (vb. job fair)	type process	8	1,3	18,0	idem			48		€ 240		
3 Organisation specific information moment (vb. via PES of educational institution)	type process	4	1,3	6,0	18	12	24	101	5	€ 125	€ 527	
4 Mailing to relevant candidates	type process	7	1,9	13,0	27	26	27	10	0	€ 193	€ 775	
B General welcome	type process	2	0,8	2,5	13			8 772		€ 53	€ 383	€ 466 977
C Registering decision to start VPL	individual process	1	0,2	2,0	idem			8 187		€ 20		€ 164 410
										per participant	€ 85	

P2.2. Estimation of the costs for participants
The actual time investment per individual participant ranges from 5 to 7 hours (depending on how the participants are recruited). This results in an average cost of €211 per participant. This cost is mainly created by a large number of participants consulting information on the website. Travel costs are also important assuming all participants visiting the VPL provider at least once before deciding to register.

PARTICIPANT		Time in hou participant	out-of-pocket cost	Quantity parameter	Unit cost participant	Estimated total cost
Introduction		10			€ 211	€ 1 728 291
A	Recruiting (potential) participants					€ 1 066 904
1	Offering information via website	2,5		17 544	€ 52	€ 911 411
2	Organisation generic information moment (vb. job fair)	4,0	20,4	480	€ 104	€ 49 690
3	Organisation specific information moment (vb. via PES of educational institution)	4,0	20,4	1 007	€ 104	€ 104 245
4	Mailing to relevant candidates	0,8		100	€ 16	€ 1 559
B	General welcome	2,4	20,4	8 772	€ 70	€ 610 350
C	Registering decision to start VPL	0,3		8 187	€ 6	€ 51 038

Phase 3: Guidance
Estimation unit: individual process.

P3.1. Estimation of costs for suppliers
The estimated average time a counsellor spends on a participant is approximately 11 hours and the cost is about €329. Most of the time is spent on introducing candidates to VPL.

PROVIDER		Time in hours provider			Quantity paramet er	Unit cost supplier	Estimated total cost
		AVG	min	max		€329	€ 2 693 636
Guidance							
A	Introduction	8,6	1,5	10,0		€ 173	€ 1 419 657
1	(Helping to) think in terms of competencies	2,3	1,5	3,0	8 187	€ 68	€ 558 763
2	Provide support with drafting the portfolio as a screening tool	3,6	1,5	6,0	2 047	€ 105	€ 214 325
3	Determination of designated route	2,7	1,0	4,5	8 187	€ 79	€ 646 568
B	Assessment (preparation for tests)	2,9	1,6	5,0	8 187	€ 85	€ 698 453
C	Aftercare (follow-up)	2,4	1,0	4,0	8 187	€ 70	€ 575 526
1	Feedback on the result with the participant after the assessment	1,6	0,5	3,0	8 187	€ 48	€ 391 134
2	Provide advice on next steps	0,4	0,3	0,5	8 187	€ 12	€ 100 577
3	Sounding board function with regard to the VPL process	0,4	0,3	0,5	8 187	€ 10	€ 83 814
						Per participant	€ 329

P3.2. Estimation of the costs of participants
Participants spend about 24 hours on guidance with an average cost of €501. Compared to the providers, participants spend relatively more time and money on guidance related to assessment and less on aftercare.

PARTICIPANT			Time in hours participant	out-of-pocket cost	Quantity parameter	Unit cost participant	Estimated total cost
GUIDANCE			24			€ 501	€ 4 104 942
A	Introduction		16,7	20,4		€ 263	€ 2 156 434
	1	(Helping to) think in terms of competencies	5,6		8 187	€ 137	€ 1 123 973
	2	Provide support with drafting the portfolio as a screening tool	8,4		2 047	€ 194	€ 397 600
	3	Determination of designated route	2,8		8 187	€ 78	€ 634 861
B	Assessment (preparation for tests)		8,2	20,4	8 187	€ 170	€ 1 389 361
C	Aftercare (follow-up)		3,3	20,4	8 187	€ 68	€ 559 147
	1	Feedback on the result with the participant after the assessment	1,6		8 187	€ 51	€ 419 644
	2	Provide advice on next steps	0,4		8 187	€ 7	€ 54 440
	3	Sounding board function with regard to the VPL process	0,5		8 187	€ 10	€ 85 063

Phase 4: Assessment
Estimation unit: individual process

P4.1. Percentage of participants doing types of assessment

% participants doing this type of assessment	Mix of assessment methods				
	portfolio	interview	Practical test (not intensive)	Practical test (intensive)	Written test
Scenario 1	100/75	100			
Scenario 2a	100/75	100	50	50	
Scenario 2b	100/75	100	80	20	
Scenario 3	100/75	100			100
Scenario 4	100/75	100	25	25	50
Scenario 5	100/75	100	15	15	20
Scenario 6a			50	50	
Scenario 6b			80	20	

Often a combination of different assessment methods will be used depending on which competencies will be tested. To estimate the cost of a mix of assessment methods, we calculate the cost of 8 frequently occurring scenarios, consisting of a mix of assessment methods, but with a constant number of participants. Because we assume that a quarter of the participants have already had to draw up a portfolio as part of the guidance, we assume in the scenarios with a portfolio that only 75% of the participants must draw up a portfolio in the assessment phase. All participants still have to discuss and defend the portfolio with the assessors (while the counsellor helped to draw up the portfolio in the guidance phase).

P4.2. Estimation of assessment costs

PROVIDER	Time in hours provider						Unit cost provider		Estimated total cost
Number of participants: 8.187	Little intensive			intensive			Little intensive	Intensive	
ASSESSMENT	AVG	min	max	AVG	min	max			see scenario's
A	Planning assessment (preparation)	10	2,9	20,0	idem			€ 279		€ 2 087 378
B	Portfolio as an assessment tool	7	4,0	12,0	idem			€ 208		see scenario's
C	Conducting a competence-based interview	7	3,0	10,0	idem			€ 191		
D	Practical test, simulation and role play	16	10,0	20,0	64	22,5	81,0	€ 477	€ 1 861	
E	Written test	6	3,8	11,0	idem			€ 185		
F	Global assessment across all tests	3	0,5	4,5	idem			€ 77		€ 628 608
								per participant		

Estimation of costs for providers
Assessment costs vary greatly depending on the mix of assessment methods used. The most expensive scenario (2a) costs over 2.5 times more time and cost than the cheapest scenario (1). Especially the very high cost of an intensive practical test, which often takes about 5 days, increases the costs considerably. In general, practical tests are a time-consuming assessment tool. For some professions, however, it is the best way to verify whether people have the required competencies (for example, cleaning staff, fork-lift truck, etc.)

P4.3. Average time and costs of assessments for providers

Provider	Average time per participant in hours	Average cost per participant in €
scenario 1	24,3	711
scenario 2a	62,3	1.824
scenario 2b	49,0	1.432
scenario 3	30,6	895
scenario 4	46,5	1.359
scenario 5	37,0	1.081
scenario 6a	49,4	1.445
scenario 6b	36,0	1.053
average	41,9	1.225

These costs do not take into account any out-of-pocket costs that can be high. Especially practical tests sometimes have considerable out-of-pocket costs. For example, if you want to do a bakery test, it is necessary to preheat the oven for 2 days and the price of raw materials

can also be high. Some examples of VPL processes that can take up to 5 days are those of healthcare professionals and car mechanics.

P4.4. Time and costs of assessments for participants

Participant		Time in hours participant	out-of-pocket cost	Quantity parameter	Unit cost participant	Estimated total cost
ASSESSMENT						see scenario's
A	Planning assessment (preparation)	2,5		8 187	€ 53	€ 430 986
B	Portfolio as an assessment tool	18.5 or 3.8		see scenario's	€390 or €86	see scena
C	Conducting a competence-based interview	2,4			€ 50	
D	Practical test, simulation and role play	10-45			€ 208 - € 935	
E	Written test	3,5			€ 72	
F	Global assessment across all tests					

Estimate of costs of participants
Accordingly, the costs for participants in the assessment phase also vary greatly depending on the mix of assessment methods used. The most expensive scenario 2a takes about 2.5 times more time and money than the cheapest scenario 1.

P4.5. Average time and costs of assessments for participants

Participant	Average time per participant in hours	Average cost per participant in €
scenario 1	20,4	424
scenario 2a	51,0	1.060
scenario 2b	39,4	820
scenario 3	24,2	502
scenario 4	37,6	781
scenario 5	30,3	630
scenario 6a	33,2	689
scenario 6b	21,6	449
average	32,2	669

Phase 5: Aftercare

Estimation of costs for suppliers
Each participant in a VPL process is estimated to spend on average 1,6 hours on aftercare, which costs on average €38. If participants appeal, the costs vary from €277 to €890 if all appeal procedures are exhausted and if no legal counsel is called in. If that is the case, the cost can be as high as €2.400 per individual participant.

P5.1. Time and costs for aftercare for providers

PROVIDER		Time in hours provider		Quantity parameter		Unit cost provider	Estimated total cost
AFTERCARE (FOLLOW-UP)		AVG	min	max		€ 44	€ 363 387
A	Possibility of appeal	6,7 tot 21,4		82		€277 tot €890	€ 49 271
	1 Informal mediation procedure	6,7	3,0	10,2	82	€ 277	€ 22 674
	2 Starting up internal appeal procedure	11,7	6,0	20,0	21	€ 487	€ 9 958
	3 Start external appeal procedure	3,0	1,5	4,5	10	€ 126	€ 16 638
B	Administrative settlement of the VPL process	1,6	0,5	2,6	8 187	€ 38	€ 314 116

Estimation of costs for participants

P5.2 Time and costs for aftercare for participants
In this phase, participants only invest time into appeal procedures. The time varies from 7 to 18 hours if all appeal possibilities are used by the participant. The costs vary from €141 (only mediation procedure) to €369 (using all possibilities for appeal and assuming that no legal counsel is engaged).

PARTICIPANT		Time in hours participant	out-of-pocket cost	Quantity parameter	Unit cost participant	Estimated total cost
NAZORG					€ 215	€ 30 254
A	Possibility of appeal	van 6,8 tot 17,8 u			€ 215	€ 17 668
	1 Informal mediation procedure	6,8	20,4	82	€ 141	€ 13 210
	2 Starting up internal appeal procedure	8,0	20,4	20	€ 166	€ 3 820
	3 Start external appeal procedure	3		10	€ 62	€ 638

Overview of average costs
The tables below summarize all unit costs expressed in time and € for an average VPL process. They show that the costs related to VPL on average amount to € 1,683 (57,6 hours) for the providers and € 1,385 (66,9 hours) for the participants. As mentioned above, the costs for the development phase (for VPL providers) are only expressed as a unit cost. For the assessment phase, we report an average cost over all 8 scenarios.

Note: When comparing the cheapest and most expensive process at participant level, we see a difference of 636 euros that can be attributed to the difference between the cheapest and most expensive scenario. This brings the cost of the cheapest process to 1,351 euros, while the most expensive process costs 1,987 euros (both amounts do not include registration fees).

P6.1. Average time and costs of the whole VPL-process for providers

PROVIDERS	Average unit cost		Share in total cost
Phase	Time in hours	cost in €	
Development	186 to 3.722	€7.721 to €154.793	nvt
Introduction	3,0	€ 85	5%
Guidance	11,2	€ 329	20%
Assessment	41,9	€ 1.225	73%
Aftercare	1,5	€ 44	3%
TOTAL	57,6	€ 1.683	100%

P6.2. Average time and costs of the whole VPL-process for participants

PARTICIPANTS	Average unit cost		Share in total cost
Phase	Time in hours	cost in €	
Development			
Introduction	10,2	€ 211	15%
Guidance	24,1	€ 501	36%
Assessment	32,2	€ 669	48%
Aftercare	0,2	€ 4	0%
TOTAL	66,7	€ 1.385	100%

Learning effects
Four key learning effects result from the analysis:

1. Need for monitoring as input for cost analysis
The quality of a cost analysis depends on the quality of the available data. In this study, the consensus between providers of different VPL processes in different policy areas is an indication of the reliability of the collected information. However, the cost analysis also requires accurate quantity data to aggregate the estimation of single processes in order to know the costs at macro level. Although some VPL providers accurately register the number of participants, this does not appear to be a general practice. Data on the number of developed VPL standards is also missing. While we could overcome this lack of data by making well-founded estimates, it will be crucial to monitor such data carefully in the future in order to optimize the analysis by replacing estimated values with accurate observations.

2. Estimated cost of same order of magnitude as previous analyses aborad
The methodology we used to estimate the costs of VPL is based on the Standard Cost Model (SCM) dissecting the various components in a VPL procedure into more detailed process steps, which are then expressed in terms of the time needed to go through them once and the related costs. We made sure that all consulted VPL providers completed every process step in the same way. Their estimates formed the basis for the cost analysis. This bottom-up approach makes it possible to make realistic time estimates. Collecting information via a workshop also ensures that the participants know each other's estimates and have the opportunity to reach a consensus themselves (instead of immediately taking the average).
The analysis shows that the costs related to VPL amount, on average, to € 1.683 (57,6 hours) for the providers and € 1.385 (66,7 hours) for the participants. International experiences in

the field of VPL have resulted in a similar cost of 1.500 to 2.000 euros. In terms of time investment, it is generally assumed that processes easily exceed the threshold of 50 hours. In this sense, the estimated cost appears realistic.

3. Guidance and assessment as the largest cost items
For both the providers and the participants, guidance and assessment have the highest costs. Among other things, we found that practical tests have by far the highest costs. Consequently, assessing acquired competencies via a portfolio and a competency-based interview is by far the cheapest. Such a 'light' scenario would cost VPL providers on average 711 euros and the participants 424 euros. These costs are significantly lower than in the most expensive assessment scenario, where half of the participants complete an intensive practical test in addition to a portfolio and interview, and the other half combine a portfolio and interview with a less intensive practical test. This scenario costs, on average, € 1.824 for VPL providers and € 1.060 for participants. These figures underline the importance of a well-chosen mix of instruments.

4. Efficiency gains possible in various areas
Reducing the meeting intensity could contribute to a more cost-efficient development phase, as could sharing templates and learning effects. The use of new tools such as e-learning can also help to brief and train counsellors and assessors in an efficient way.
In the introduction phase, the first welcome of (potential) candidates is the biggest cost item. Organizing a collective information moment can reduce this cost. In addition, raising awareness by means of a general campaign can be more efficient and effective than an isolated approach by the various VPL providers.
The costs related to guidance vary greatly according to the needs of the participants. Nevertheless, VPL providers could, for example, investigate when it is more or less appropriate not to use a portfolio to assess the acquired competencies, but as a tool for the initial screening of the participants. External career coaches can also play a role. They could be responsible for generic aspects such as informing participants about suitable VPL processes or helping them to think in terms of competencies.
In the assessment phase, exchanging 'good practices' between assessors with a similar assignment can make 'learning to evaluate' more efficient. In addition, sharing a pool of assessors among different VPL providers would create efficiency gains, especially for jointly developed tests. The quality control and coordination of the pool can be centralized. This also applies to the training of assessors to a certain extent, insofar as it concerns generic assessment competencies. Technical aspects generally vary greatly between VPL processes and institutions.

Benefits and effects of validation for individuals and organizations

2.2

A cross sectional investigation into the effects of VPL

Patrick Leushuis & Lieve Van den Brande[100]

After several years of promoting and stimulating the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) also known as the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL)[101], the Dutch Government wanted to have more insight into the effects of validation for both individuals and organizations. Besides the original function as an intake and exemption procedure for formal education, validation of prior learning is also considered to be a career development instrument on the labour market. Research, using scientific methods that included analyses of both qualitative and quantitative date, provided evidence for the benefits of validation, such as career development, job matching and higher income. The research also provided insights in conditions that need to be met in order to realize the benefits, especially related to human resources management policies and activities in organizations. In this paper the research and its results are presented, in the context of the evolution of the Dutch system for validation and the way Europe responded. Focus was and is on a system which is aimed at both validation in education in terms of educational qualification standards as well as validation in the labour market such as national qualification standards in branches of industry.

European interest in cost-benefits models for validation is increasing
'2018' was the year that all EU member States implemented their national working arrangements on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL). Setting up functional systems for validation is complex and perceived as expensive. This perception however has no convincing empirical support. Validation costs are rarely measured and nearly not compared with 'real' costs for formal education. The question arises what the cost would be of having no validation?
On 14 and 15th of December 2017 the Peer Learning Activity organized by the Flemish and French Belgian Ministries of Education brought together 50 participants (European Qualifications Framework – Advisory Group (EQF-AG) members, policy makers on validation of non-formal and informal learning, practitioners, social partners, private sector stakeholders, and youth organisations to discuss how one can improve cost-benefit models for validation. See for more details Lieve Van den Brande (2018)**.**

The European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNIL) shows that there is still little information available on the actual costs of validation. Financing of validation of course depends on the way the validation arrangements have been organized in each country. As such it is difficult to advocate for validation initiatives. The Peer Learning

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100 Diederick Stoel and Eveline Wentzel contributed to this chapter.
101 In order to remain unambiguous with the structure of this book, the term VPL is used in this article.

Activity demonstrated through good practice cases in which way validation is funded (Belgium: Flanders & Wallonia), the Netherlands, France, Iceland, Portugal, United Kingdom) that cost-benefit models of validation do exist and costs calculation of validation are possible. The calculation of benefits is more complicated as one has to look into many intangibles and non-monetary benefits such as equity in access to learning. However, these practices also show that these cost-benefit models are exploratory in nature, not always coherent and thus less comparable. Second, funding validation models on itself are only an instrument and not enough to directly convince and change the mind-set of policy makers and practitioners to embed validation of non-formal and informal learning into their policies. Examples show the importance of commitment and engagement of the State in requesting and/or initiating studies on cost-benefit analyses as input to implementing validation processes.

Dutch study exploring the benefits of validation

Some questions around cost-benefit models high on the European Agenda are 'What are the effects of VPL?' and 'How can one leverage the effects of VPL?' The study focusing on benefits of validation by Stoel and Wentzel[102] was already presented and discussed at the 1st VPL Biennale in 2014. The presentation introduced general definitions of validation, the validation process, and the effects of validation and the beneficiaries of validation. Validation can contribute to combatting social exclusion of disadvantaged individuals and those more at risk of unemployment such as migrants, early school leavers, low qualified persons by providing an opportunity to return to the labour market or education. Validation can also promote the mobility and transferability of skills across sectors, making economies more resilient and conducive to growth.

A key message was that the assumed effects of validation can be viewed from an organizational and a personal level. At the organizational level, validation can contribute to better productivity and quality in work processes and products and consequently increased sales and growth. At the personal level, validation can contribute to greater self-esteem and awareness of one's own competences. Furthermore, at the personal level validation may contribute to people becoming better at taking the initiative at work as well as better job prospects and mobility on the labour market. At the personal level, validation enhances the individual's career self-management behaviour, and validation apparently makes people more aware of and better at career exploration, career goal development, and career strategy implementation.

These assumed effects were confirmed by the results of the study, which indicated that validation improves people's career progression. The results showed that people who obtained an VPL certificate or diploma have a better chance to make a step forward in their career if they manage their career actively. However, the study showed that VPL effects are not universal, and that they manifest within certain groups and under certain circumstances. Therefore, in order to work the VPL process and its purpose must be segmented and adapted to specific target groups such as refugees, low-qualified persons, or certain occupations. The VPL must be sold with a 'user story' that makes the purpose of the VPL clear from the perspective of a specific target group. For example: 'As a refugee, I want to have verified evidence of my prior learning to convince my employer of my capabilities and get a job.'. The user story contains the theory of validation and its effects.

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102 Stoel, D., & Wentzel, E. (2011). *Beloften, feiten en ongekende mogelijkheden: Onderzoek naar de effecten van EVC (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties)*.

An important prerequisite for validation to work is that people are motivated to use it actively as a tool for career self-management. In other words, VPL has no effect without career self-management. At organizational level, the potential benefits of validation can be used to convince employers to take responsibility for their employees by using validation systems. In addition, validation can be used as a tool to improve the company's competitiveness.

Key outcomes of the Dutch study, 2011

In 2010, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment commissioned a large-scale, evidence-based study into the effects of VPL as a process designed to evaluate competencies mastered through professional tasks and responsibilities, civic and volunteering experiences, military and corporate training and independent study. As soon as the evaluated capabilities meet an accredited standard the prior learning can be accredited accordingly with a VPL certificate. Colleges and universities use the VPL procedure as a method for assigning credit to prior learning.

The Dutch government has a clear and enunciated vision on the role of VPL in the labour market. Besides the original function as an intake and exemption procedure for formal education, the VPL certificate is expected to have an autonomous signaling effect indicating the employee's competencies. VPL certificates are anticipated to take on an autonomous value and are intended to function as securities similar to academic degrees and diplomas. A cross-sectional study analyzed the unconditional effects of the VPL certificate compared to the effect of additional training, supplementary certification and the assignment of academic credit or diplomas as a continuation of obtaining the VPL certificate.

The reasons for researching VPL were multiple. More than 90 million euros were until then invested in VPL and work-based learning in the Netherlands with a huge increase in number of VPL participants from 9.000 in 2007 to 23.000 in 2010 as well as in number of VPL providers (> 100). But only qualitative information through case studies on effects of VPL are available and thus there was a real need for more 'hard evidence' and quantitative data on effects.

'Promises, Facts and Unprecedented Opportunities' (2011) was a study describing an investigation into the effects of VPL within 72 Dutch companies. The research team took stock of all expectations and field tested them systematically. Over a thousand VPL participants and a variety of stakeholders of 72 Dutch companies revealed most of the declared effects of VPL do appear in practice. However, the effects of VPL are highly conditional. Thorough analysis demonstrated which effects prevail for who and under what circumstances. This paper summarizes the promises made and conveys enlightening facts, clear-cut analysis and some unprecedented opportunities for VPL.

Based on the reported and observed impact of VPL on more than a thousand Dutch employees that participated in an VPL process, the study denotes several points of departure to accomplish the aspirations of the Dutch policy makers. The researchers suggest evaluating the VPL practice keeping three distinct perspectives in mind: the educational perspective; the career development perspective; the employability perspective.

Although the aims of VPL were well-articulated by the Dutch government, the study revealed that the expectations and desired effects of VPL were not that clear-cut in practice. A thorough investigation of international literature, various Dutch research reports as well as an analysis of the expectations and reported effects of VPL by a variety of stakeholders within 72 Dutch companies, shows both expected and reported outcomes of VPL are dispersed and sometimes elusive.

This first large-scale study into the effects of VPL showed that VPL pans out reasonably well as an intake and exemption tool for formal education. VPL stimulates employees to participate in formal learning activities. The study noted a 150% increase in the assignment of academic degrees under the employees who went through the VPL procedure compared to those employees who did not participate in an VPL procedure. At least 40% of the VPL participants in the study acquire a diploma in the extension of obtaining the VPL certificate. The research however also shows that the effects ascribed to VPL in the literature - like career success[103] and self-perceived employability[104] - are in fact established under the influence of the obtainment of academic degrees. Obtaining a diploma or accreditation of formal learning still outweighs an accreditation of non-formal or work-based learning when it comes to signaling an employee's competency.

For an autonomous role of VPL as a career development tool and a labour market signaling device there is much to gain[105]. Detailed analysis of the data shows that obtaining an VPL certificate pays-off. The study revealed that employees in the age group between 40 and 50 years old, who obtained an VPL certificate, have a more positive perception about their employability than those employees in the same category who did not obtain an VPL certificate. The same goes for those who spent their career with two or less employers. Their self-perceived employability seems to increase under influence of the VPL certificate. The VPL certificate might have signaled certain qualities that were seemingly unknown to themselves. It is hypothesized that recognition of prior learning might have articulated their vocational self-concept[106] and could therefore have strengthened their self-perceived employability. Whether the VPL certificate caused this chain of events or just indicated the people with higher perceived employability is currently under study. A longitudinal study will reveal the causal relationship between VPL and employees perceived employability. The study clearly points out that desired effects of VPL like perceived employability and objective career progression are conditional and only manifest themselves under influence of additional factors like gender, age, education, past job mobility and career management activities. The influence of ten additional factors was scrutinized and revealed which factors in conjunction with VPL have influence on the opportunities people see for themselves in the labour market (self-perceived employability) and the actual number of career-moves they make (objective career progression).

The first significant finding was that the influence of career management by the employee, defined as career self-management behavior and the employer, defined as organizational career management exceeds the desired unconditional impact of the VPL certificate by

103 Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2005). Career success in a boundaryless career world. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*(2), 177–202. *https://doi.org/10.1002/job.290.*
Dries, N., Pepermans, R., & Carlier, O. (2008). Career success: Constructing a multidimensional model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *73*(2), 254–267. *https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.05.005.*
Heslin, P. (2003). Self- and Other-Referent Criteria of Career Success. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *11*(3), 262–286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072703254500.
104 Rothwell, A., & Arnold, J. (2007). Self-perceived employability: development and validation of a scale. *Personnel Review*, *36*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480710716704
105 Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *87*(3), 355–374. Retrieved from http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/87/3/355.short.
106 Barrett, T. C., & Tinsley, H. E. A. (1977). Vocational Self-Concept Crystallization and Vocational Indecision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *24*(4), 301–307.

far.[107].The study however demonstrated that the relationship between career self-management behaviour and career progression is moderated by the outcome of the VPL process. Obtaining an VPL certificate seems to act as a catalyst and appears to strengthen the relationship between career self-management behavior and career progression. The returns subjects with an VPL certificate get from managing their careers, exceeds the returns of those who did not obtain an VPL certificate significantly. Additionally, the study reveals that for those who obtained an VPL certificate the odds of career progression increase if and only if the support of the (direct) manager and HR exceeds average. Finally, it was found that people who obtain a diploma, in continuation of the VPL process, become less dependent on the career guidance they receive from their employer as described.

An interplay between the VPL certificate, career self-management, organizational career management and a diploma constitutes an interesting model which needs further analysis. A longitudinal research will reveal the exact relationship between the factors at play.

The study also revealed that approximately 30% of the people, who started with the VPL process, leave the program without any formal recognition of their prior learning. This particular group that is left behind without a certificate or diploma do have significantly lower scores on most of the effect variables under study. A concern is expressed that if these people in some way by means of the VPL process have been discouraged and therefore given up managing their careers actively, the opposite of the goal of VPL has been attained.

Because the desired effects of VPL are conditional and are likely to be determined by the joint effort of the employee (Career Self-Management Behavior) and the employer (Organizational Career Management), employees, employers and trade unions are called upon to formulate actions to strengthen the role of VPL as a career and labour market instrument.

Based on this research the conclusion is that there is reason enough to welcome the VPL certificate as a credible signaling device conveying information about an employee's capabilities. There are noticeable qualities that are disclosed by means of the VPL-procedure. Gearing the VPL evaluation standards towards the needs of the labour market swiftly, will increase the disclosure of relevant qualifications and enhance the unconditional signaling value of the VPL certificate. Appreciation of the VPL certificate is a matter of trust. It is hypothesized that the use of educational standards for evaluating vocational competencies will keep the VPL endeavor confined to its original form: accrediting learning for the purpose of assigning academic credits. In order to accomplish the unconditional value and appreciation of the VPL certificate, the assessment standards need to reflect the demands of the labour market directly and should not primarily be mediated by educational standards.

Continued research should be aimed at articulating the needs of the labour market and the needs of employees. The study suggests validating the current VPL accreditation standards based on those needs. As both relevancy and accuracy of the VPL accreditation standards increase, the number of unaccredited VPL participants (30%) is expected to decrease. But above all, a thorough adjustment of the VPL standards will increase the appreciation of the

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107 Baruch, Y., & Peiper, M. (2000). Career management practices: An empirical survey and implications. *Human Resource Management*, *39*(4), 347–366.

King, Z. (2004). Career self-management: Its nature, causes and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *65*(1), 112–133. *https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(03)00052-6*

Sturges, J., Conway, N., & Liefooghe, A. (2008). What's the deal? An exploration of career management behaviour in Iceland. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *19*(4), 752–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190801953814.

VPL certificate by the same market. The enhanced VPL accreditation standards will sequentially constitute a cost-efficient process issuing VPL certificates that reflect vocational competencies that are valuable to all stakeholders. As a result, the unconditional value of the VPL certificate desired by the Dutch policy makers will manifest itself in a transparent, resilient and dynamic labour market. An increased level of employability and productivity should be expected.

What next on the European level?
This Dutch study contributed significantly to the continued discussion at European level of the cost and benefits of validation. It suggested evaluating the VPL practice keeping three distinct perspectives in mind: the educational perspective; the career development perspective; the employability perspective.

At the Peer Learning activity on costs and benefits of validation, organized by the Flemish and French Belgian Ministries of Education, representatives of EU Member states agreed that it is important to distinguish between the individual level and the systemic level, as the types of benefits are different at these two levels. According to the participants the costs and benefits of validation can be viewed from four different stakeholder related perspectives: the individual, the providers, the government, and the employers and social partners[108].

The individual may incur costs such as fees, administrative burdens and opportunity costs. The benefits for the individual may be enhanced employability and career prospects, better self-esteem and an improved match of skills and qualifications. The employers may incur costs related to absenteeism of employees and payment of fees. However, employers may experience benefits such as better motivation of employees, better employability of their employees and a better match of skills and qualifications. Furthermore, there are benefits for many other stakeholders, such as employers, unions and providers of education and training. Hence, when it comes to the measurement of costs and benefits of validation many angles and perspectives are in play. Measuring the benefits and effects of validation calls for an inclusive model of what the benefits might mean to different stakeholders taking different contextual factors into account.

It may be very difficult to provide objective answers to the complex question whether the benefits outweigh the costs. Validation involves a lot of intangibles and non-monetary benefits. A proper identification and measurement of the costs and benefits related to validation require more and better data. At the system level, it is important to have a set-up that monitors systems and evidence-based evaluations that can inform politicians and ministries with relevant data. A systemic approach is also essential to identify where the validation system can be improved and made more efficient. Moreover, comparative information from different countries is important for benchmarking as well as exchanging experiences. At the Peer Learning activity, the group also found that another lesson at system level was to build good relations between stakeholders on the labour market as well as within and between ministries involved in the validation systems. Partnerships are important to ensure that the validation systems are improved at systemic level over time.
In formulating a feasible approach to determining the cost and benefits we must realize that what we consider a benefit is stakeholder bound. Hence, the political justification of

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108 Van den Brande, L. (2018). *Summary of the PLA on Funding validation. Costs and benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning*. European Commission.

validation is never the same. The justification of the costs and evaluation of the benefits do function within the values within our society. And these values differ between and within societies. It is a fallacy to hold a cost benefit analysis as the ultimate proof that learning is valuable. Regardless of the comparison of cost and benefits it is also possible to state that learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the individual and for society. And that it therefore, and therefore only needs to be complemented by validation of non-formal and informal learning.

If we consider learning a fundamental value or even a fundamental right of our society, we take another stance or proposition. Our cost benefit challenge shifts from a burden to put a monetary value on learning to the simple question how much evidence we need to justify that learning actually took place. From a methodological point of view, we just need to do is to decide what level of evidence we need. Are we fine with some reasonable indication that learning took place or do we seek proof that specific educational standards are met beyond reasonable doubt? This is an overarching question that is valid for formal, non-formal and informal leaning. Hence, instead of pursuing the exact measurement of costs and benefits of validation, it may be a better political priority to ensure a cohesive society that combats exclusion from the labour market, irrespective of the costs. Viewed from this perspective, it may be more expensive not to have a validation system.

Procedures and Instruments

3

Bodil Husted and Antra Carlsen

With a strong focus on how VPL contributes to individuals' learning, career and education, some basic requirements and aspects for procedures and instruments need to be included in the VPL arrangement. Seven principles support this vision this need.

A. Quality assurance mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that assessment tools and instruments are valid, reliable, fair and sustainable.

Why is it important?
To ensure individuals' benefit and further exploitation of validation results, stakeholders' confidence in the validity and the legitimacy of results are of crucial importance to secure a consistent, accessible VPL arrangement, which is widely recognised across sectors.

Where is it working well?
In Denmark, the national regulation for validation of prior learning (the concept is RKV) has been in place since June 2007.[109] In Denmark, RKV is regarded a key instrument to promote lifelong learning. Within this framework, it is a legal right for individuals to request an assessment of their prior learning in relation to the standards of a given education and training programme no matter where and how competences have been acquired. The branch committees define assessment criteria to secure confidence and trust in the assessment results. The education providers are obliged to ensure quality assurance, which implies that tools and instruments are recognized as valid, reliable and fair across sectors. VPL is free of charge for applicants with an educational background up to - and including level 4 in the NQF.

B. Trusted, recognised and updatable instruments should enable flexible, individualized pathways and accommodate the diversity of candidates and learning paths.

Why is it important?
The basis for a good validation process is systematic quality work before, during and after validation. This is fundamental for achieving legitimacy for validation work in society and among employers, individuals and other stakeholders. Procedures and instruments are a key concern for VPL providers in order to ensure candidates' further usage of VPL results. Transparency of VPL results should help individuals to understand how to benefit from VPL and how to use the results for the career or further education. In order to achieve the goal of high-quality validation it is required that several factors are in place, work and interact.

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109 *http://eng.uvm.dk/*

Where is it working well?
Nordic countries are cooperating in order to improve systematic quality work during the whole validation process. The countries follow up on and implement the results from a research project about a Nordic quality model for validation. The model helps to identify and set focus on strategically import elements and phases in the validation process.[110]

Competence cards are used for the labour market integration of migrants in Germany. 48 competences in 8 languages are identified with the help of the Competence cards. The use of the cards and mapping results has a high degree of flexibility and can be adapted to concrete needs and situations.[111]

C. Validation procedures need to refer to agreed standards, such as NQFs and/or sector specific standards, expressed in terms of learning outcomes

Why is it important?
To contribute to increased flexibility, efficiency and mobility within sectors of Education and Working life, validation results must be available as learning outcomes in linkage with standards: knowledge, skills and competences matching the terms of learning outcomes in the National and the European Qualification Frameworks for lifelong learning (NQF and EQF).

Where is it working well?
In Norway, Virke, a branch organisation on the employers' side for trade and service, has carried out a development project for creating methods linked into a model that allows to describe the competences acquired in working life clearly linked to the functions at workplace - and which can lead to qualifications. The first three steps in this method can be used at individual's level, the fourth step – professional standards, only at the branch level. The Project is applied in IKEA, MENY and KIWI (food store chains) in cooperation with trade unions. The project is financed by the Ministry of Education and is a lead in the national competence strategy in Norway. The model should promote mobility, cooperation between education and working life. The model includes guidance.[112]

Skill-based matching to occupational standards in more than 2900 occupations in the European labour market is a good example of flexible pathways that follow-up on skills assessment. Based on skills assessments, jobseekers are matched with 2942 occupations. All occupations are ranked by their skills match and show any learning opportunities.[113]

D. Validation pathways need to be modular, transparent, and comprehensible at all stages of the process in order to allow for flexible work and education pathways.

Why is it important?
To ensure the individuals inclusion in the entire validation process and hence also to increase the potential of individual's empowerment as well as employability based on the VPL results, transparency in the process is of major importance.

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110 *https://nvl.org/Content/Quality-in-Validation-of-Prior-Learning/*
111 See: presentations track 3, *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*
112 https://www.virke.no/globalassets/var-politikk/andre-dokumenter/18-9923-179146-a-balancing-act-summary-pages-1008227_1_1.pdf
113 See: presentations track 3, *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*

To secure both the individual's comprehension of the VPL modules – aims and methods – *as well as* the legitimacy of results, the relationship between the prior learning elements to be assessed and the formal qualification must appear clear and unambiguous. The principle of modular validation pathways ensures flexibility as the recognised results of prior learning provides a direct access to education and training.

Where is it working well?
In 2018, Sweden, Studieförbunden concluded a three-year project on validation of generic competences for the labour market. During the three-year project about 2 500 people have had their skills and competences validated. The target group is youth 16-24-year-old, young asylum seekers is a special priority. The project gives possibility to validate competences in 60 different learning modules. Generic competences or soft skills – competences that persons develop throughout different life and work situations and are not directly subject related, e.g., managing information, problem solving and cooperation.[114]

E. The outcome of the validation procedure should either grant credits, which allow for exemptions to shorten study time, lead to a full or partial qualification, or open up new routes to education and work.

Why is it important?
Basically, validation of prior learning provides for the individual learner a broad variety of potentials for upskilling. To match the exact choice of upskilling, whether this is for practical learning, job & career change or education, certification in terms of credits as well as full or partial qualification opens up for the individual's realization of plans.

Where is it working well?
To improve validation methods in non-formal adult education, the Nordic Network created a *liberal adult education certificate* as a tool for validation.[115]
Non-formal adult education in Finland is looking at the ways of improving the documentation of learning outcomes in order to support the individual's further learning path.[116]
In Denmark, VPL (RKV) is provided with opportunities for individuals:
- to be granted access to formal education and training programmes if they do not meet the formal entry requirements.
- to get exemptions for parts of a formal education and training programme and**/**or to have an individual tailored education and training programme.
- to acquire a 'certificate of competence' leading to access/ exemptions in adult education & training programmes, including CVET.
- to obtain 'education certificates' for parts of/or a whole education programme on the basis of validation of prior learning.[117]
In Germany the identification of professional competences, acquired informally or non-formally is carried out through the MYSKILLS initiative by the German public employment agency. It is a way of opening up new routes to work.[118]

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114 *https://studieforbunden.se/validering-inom-studieforbunden/*
    Also see presentations track 3, *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*
115 See pp.13-17. in the report *https://nvl.org/Content/Liberal-adult-education-certificate-as-a-tool-for-validation*
116 *https://nvl.org/Content/Fria-bildningen-i-Finland-valideras*
117 *https://www.ug.dk/efteruddannelse/realkompetencer/brug-dine-kompetencer/faa-vurderet-dine-kompetencer*
118 Presentation by Michael Van der Cammen, track 3, *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*

F. Specialist training and certification of assessors is needed in order to ensure an open-minded, competent and a non-discriminatory approach.

Why is it important?
In many respects, validation of prior learning is a complex process for the individual. Guidance is a key instrument to ensure the individual's outcome and benefit of results, regardless the target group. Hence, VPL professionals must possess a wide set of competences for each of the VPL stages. A Professional VPL competence profile should be regarded in terms of both mindset, approach and competences.

Where is it working well?
In 2014-2015 the NVL Validation network mapped the competences and competence development needed for VPL-professionals. All Nordic countries are represented.[119]

G. VPL should be accessible without any pre-requisite level of formal qualification.

Why is it important?
To support individuals in moving a step up, for the career or for accessing further learning and education, the VPL system must provide the approach, methods and guidance to encompass all types of prior learning. This specifically calls for guidance for the individual's mapping of prior learning in order to provide systematic documentation for the assessment.

Where is it working well?
The Scandinavian EU Interreg project, Yggdrasil, supported by the OKS programme, 2015-2018 has developed a procedure for the systematic mapping of competences. The project targets different groups of citizens, who are, for various reasons, on the fringes of labour market, either because of long-term unemployment or because of employment in jobs approaching extinction. The development work was carried out in cooperation with the sectors of education, employment service and labour market.
The procedure for systematic mapping of competences is a three-phase procedure of: (1) mapping of work tasks with learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, (2) transformation and translation to competences to be used in (3) other jobs and tasks or education. The competences are documented in a competence certificate.
The procedure with methods and instruments is described in a Handbook for the professional staff who support the individual's process.[120]

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119 *https://nvl.org/Content/Nordic-competence-profiles-for-validation-staff*
120 Project partners: Region, Central Denmark, VIA UC, Denmark, Validering Väst, Kunskapsförbundet Väst, Sweden and Larvik Kommune, Norway. *https://www.yggdrasil-oks.eu/siteassets/kompetenceattest/handbog-kompetencekortlagning-printbar.pdf* and *https://www.yggdrasil-oks.eu/kompetenceattest/*

Quality in Validation

3.1

A Nordic model and a Nordic study

Per Andersson, Timo Halttunen and Ulla Nistrup

Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) has become a central element in educational policies. VPL has been at the Nordic agenda for the past 20–25 years and is well established. Validation encompasses formal, non-formal as well as informal learning, with an emphasis on non-formal and informal learning. The historical reasons for this development in the Nordic countries are the strong tradition of adult education, strong labour unions and the involvement of the social partners in development of education and lifelong learning initiatives. '*The Nordic countries are vastly different with regard to their way of organising and embedding the validation work, and also in their way of handling each individual prior learning assessment. The Nordic countries, however, show a mutual interest in assuring the quality of the validation work'*.[121] This interest in quality in validation formed the background for the development of a Nordic model for quality in validation.

In this article a study of quality work in validation is presented, based on the Nordic quality model.[122] The quality concept in the context of validation of prior learning as well as the Nordic model for quality are both introduced. Findings from the processes in three cases of validation work in vocational education institutions in Denmark, Finland and Sweden are discussed, and some conclusions are drawn.

The quality concept in validation

Quality assurance of validation is about many factors like legislation, policy, financing and co-operation between institutions and stakeholders. It is also about competence development for the practitioners working professionally with validation. Quality in validation has been defined as *… the establishment of an environment and the implementation of policies, processes and assessment practices that maximize individuals' opportunities to fully and accurately demonstrate relevant knowledge, skills and competencies.[123]*

If we go deeper into the quality concept, it should be acknowledged that what could be seen as 'quality' is actually influenced by the way validation is organised in different contexts.

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121 Grunnet, H. & Dahler, A.M. (eds.). (2013). *Quality Model for Validation in the Nordic Countries - a development project 2012-13*. Oslo: NVL, Nordic Network on Adult Learning, p. 4. *http://nvl.org/Content/Quality-Model-for-Validation-in-the-Nordic-Countries.*

122 This article is a shortened version of the report by Andersson, P., Halttunen, T. & Nistrup, U. (2017). *Quality in Validation of Prior Learning: Experiences from Work with the Nordic Model for Quality in Validation of Prior Learning*. Aarhus, Linköping and Turku: VIA University College, Linköping University, University of Turku & NVL, Nordic Network for Adult Learning. *https://nvl.org/Content/Quality-in-Validation-of-Prior-Learning.*

123 Van Kleef, J. (2014). Quality in PLAR. In: Harris, J., Wihak, C. & Van Kleef, J. (Eds.), *Handbook of the Recognition of Prior Learning: Research into Practice*, pp. 206–232. Leicester, England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

Firstly, there are a number of factors in the context that are important. For example, the educational system is organised in different ways in different countries, and the responsibilities of different actors in the labour market also vary between countries. Important are also the concrete stakeholders in different contexts. Furthermore, the way of defining quality depends on the purpose of a specific validation activity.

Basically, quality is a matter of validity and reliability in the validation practice. Thus, the basic questions to be put are: Does the validation process 'measure' or assess what is intended? And is this done in a reliable way? But what is the intention, and how is this intention negotiated and decided? These last questions show that what defines 'quality' in validation should not be taken for granted, but is rather a matter of negotiation of meaning, which could result in different situation- and context-dependent conceptions of quality. These conceptions could include varying ideas on what (knowledge and skills) should be assessed, and how this could be done in the best way.

One can then see two faces of quality in validation; faces that appear in practices as well as policies and research on validation. On the one hand flexibility, individualisation, and judgement are central concepts. This perspective begins from an intention to give recognition to individual knowledge and skills that have been developed in varying ways, and in different contexts, thus probably situated in specific practices. It is this variation that calls for flexibility and individualisation. A consequence is the need for individualised assessment, made by a qualified assessor who can see, understand and in a fair way value the qualities in knowledge and skills developed through varying – probably informal – prior learning processes.

On the other hand, standardisation, reliability, and measurement are central concepts. This is a different perspective, where good validation is not mainly a matter of fair assessment of the individual and his/her specific knowledge. Rather, the important thing is justice in terms of comparability, where the results have to be comparable, e.g. as the basis for fair ranking and selection processes in relation to higher education or recruitment for a position in the labour market.

On top of this distinction, yet another perspective must be added. In this perspective, a shared understanding is needed in order to develop quality in validation without confusion or misunderstanding between involved actors. Van Kleef (2014) thus emphasizes an approach where learning is seen as situated and as a transitional process. The social nature of assessment has to be recognized, and the candidates should get help in positioning their prior learning in the new context where validation is to take place.

The goal of the specific process is also central for deciding what quality is in a certain context of VPL. A validation activity could be employed for different goals that imply varying ideas of quality. We can identify four different types of goals: a formative, a summative, a predictive and a transformative. Formative validation is intended to act as a diagnosis of prior learning, forming the basis for further learning. Here, quality should mean that the validation process provides the best possible basis. Summative validation is typically performed by simply gathering together grades, certificates etc., summing up the results of prior learning in relation to certain criteria. Thus, with this goal a validation process with high quality should measure or assess in relation to those criteria. With a predictive goal, validation is employed to predict who is most likely to succeed in a certain position – and the main dimension in quality is consequently to what extent this prediction is fulfilled. Finally, using validation with a transformative goal aims at some sort of transformation of the candidate. In other words,

the learning dimension of validation[124] (cf. Andersson, 2017) is central, and quality means that the intended transformation has taken place. Such transformation is often more likely to be a side-effect, and possible 'side-goal', of a validation process. But there are also validation processes where the main goal in making individuals' prior learning visible is to strengthen their self-confidence through making them aware of this learning, and maybe in addition 'topping up' this learning.

The Nordic model

The Nordic model for quality in validation is described as a generic model to be used especially in educational institutions. The model and its eight quality factors can, however, be used by all stakeholders involved in validation processes. The ultimate purpose of quality assurance in validation is to guide the system and assure the individual an equal, transparent and reliable process.

The model includes three perspectives on quality. It is targeted towards quality assurance at an organisational level, at a procedural level and at a guidance and assessment level. It means it is a holistic model including all staff engaged in the validation activities as practitioners working with validation, guiders and leaders in the institution. Furthermore, the model is a dynamic and flexible model, thus an operational model. The model can be used in different institutional and sectoral contexts which differ from country to country.

Eight quality factors

The eight quality factors (see figure 1) are Information, Preconditions, Documentation, Coordination, Guidance, Mapping, Assessment, and Follow-up. These factors have been selected to ensure an awareness of the entire process and essential features in the validation process including the levels of organisation, procedure and guidance and assessment. Each of the factors is connected to a number of indicators that can be used continuously in the validation process. The indicators can also be replaced if other indicators may be more relevant in the context. The intention with the factors and the indicators is to assure a transparent quality strategy for validation and a developing process for strengthening the quality in validation. It means that the validation process can be reflected, evaluated, ensured and continuously improved by the validation staff.

An example of the eight factors is 'preconditions'. This term means the regulatory framework for the validation work, national and local policies in the area, if validation activities are funded, and how they are funded, how co-operation with other stakeholders is organised, and if validation is based on standards or competency criteria that are known. The validation staff and the educational institution cannot change the preconditions. But they can reflect on how preconditions influence the quality of the validations. The indicators used in the model are e.g. described as 'Concepts and terms will be used, which are generally accepted and in accordance with guidelines and standards' and 'Assessments are based on standards/criteria' (Grunnet & Dahler, 2013, p. 25). The idea with this dynamic quality model for validation is that you reflect on the indicators described in connection with each of the eight factors and decide how to use them and moderate them if it is needed in your own

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124 Andersson, P. (2017). *Validation as a learning process*. In: Duvekot, R., Coughlan, D. & Aagaard, K. (Eds.), *The Learner at the centre: Validation of Prior Learning strengthens lifelong learning for all*, pp. 121–127. Houten/Aarhus: European Centre Valuation Prior Learning/VIA University College. *https://ec-vpl.nl/downloads/book-2017-english-vplbiennale-the-learner-at-the-centre.pdf*

context. The eight factors and indicators are described more in detail by Grunnet and Dahler (2013).

Figure 1. The Nordic quality model

Source: Grunnet & Dahler, 2013.

Research aims

The focus of the present study is quality work in relation to validation of prior learning. It is based on the Nordic model for quality in validation presented in the previous section.

The central part of the study is to clarify whether the model can help those who work professionally with validation to get their understanding of quality reinforced and thus develop and qualify their practical work with validation. The study will further highlight the importance of context and the factors that affect quality development, with the aims:

- To identify if and how the Nordic quality model is useful and will strengthen the work of quality in validation.
- To identify factors in the context that influence the quality work in validation.

Studying quality work in validation

Starting from the Nordic model for work with quality in validation, we initiated a study of how this model could be implemented. The study had an interactive approach[125], where we worked in interaction with three institutions in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. This approach means that we, together with representatives for the selected institutions, established a common understanding of the quality model. Building on this understanding we defined areas for development work within the respective institutions. The institutions worked on improving quality in validation within these areas. After a while we met again, for a discussion on experiences and results that far, with an option to redefine or adjust the agreed

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125 Svensson, L., Brulin G., Ellström, P-E. & Widegren, Ö. (Eds.) (2002). *Interaktiv forskning – för utveckling av teori och praktik* [Interactive research – for development of theory and practice], Arbetsliv i omvandling 2002:7. Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet. *http://nile.lub.lu.se/arbarch/aio/2002/aio2002_07.pdf*

Ellström, P-E. (2008). *Knowledge creation through interactive research: A learning approach*. Paper presented at the ECER Conference, Gothenburg, September 10-12, 2008.

development areas. After one more period of development work we met to identify and document experiences from the different institutions.

The interactive approach was chosen exactly for the opportunity of interaction between us as researchers and the validation practitioners from the involved institutions. This interaction was necessary to identify areas of development within the framework of the quality model, as well as initiating the actual development work in the institutions. Furthermore, the interactive approach was also crucial to get a basis for our analysis of the process.

The three institutions with which we interacted, and that were providing the cases presented below, were selected and approached for involvement in the study based on their experiences of validation work. To be able to make comparisons between the cases we chose to involve institutions or cases that had two things in common: they had extensive experience in validation activities, which provided a solid basis for further development work. The focus of the developmental work was validation related to vocational education and training. The different national contexts provided a variation within the material, and in addition to this we got variation through a sample including validation in different vocational areas.

Figure 2. Interactive research as a two-way flow of problems and knowledge
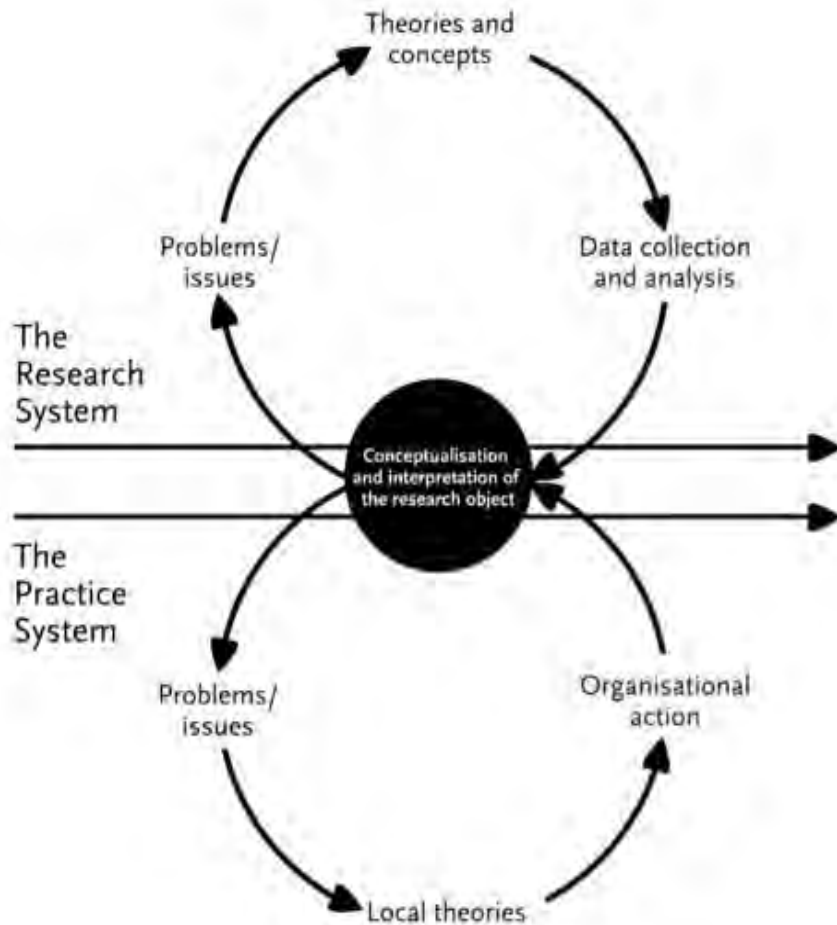
Source: Ellström, 2008, p. 9.

The interactive approach has been described as 'a two-way flow of problems and knowledge' (see figure 2). This means that the approach creates an area of cooperation between the research system and the practice system, in our case research and practice of validation (the area in the middle of the figure). We as researchers and the practitioners from our case institutions met initially to create a common conceptualisation and interpretation of the research object – quality and quality work in validation. On the recurrent occasions when we met again, we developed and re-defined our understanding and realisation of quality work, and between the meetings we worked in our respective systems to develop theories, concepts, and understanding (researchers), and the organisational action to achieve quality of the actual validation work (practitioners).

This article mainly builds upon experiences and findings from this interactive process with the three institutions. In addition to this, the process also included four seminars where we as researchers, and representatives from the involved institutions, met each other as well as representatives from more organisations who work with validation in the Nordic countries. In these seminars, we presented and discussed the quality model, experiences and results from the development work, as well as findings from our analysis of these experiences and results. This contributed to our analysis and a deeper understanding of quality in validation, through the interaction between participants with varying experiences of validation work.

Three cases of quality work in validation
In this study, we employed the interactive research approach in three different cases in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. In each case, we interacted with an institution working with validation. The Nordic quality model was the starting point.

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1. Denmark – Validation in Vocational adult education

The Danish case study was conducted at a major vocational education college in western Denmark. The college had a wide range of training courses spread over more than 20 different vocational programmes and two business colleges. The school had approximately 525 full-time employees and educated approximately 3,350 full-time students.

The project was established through a collaboration with the team leader for the student counselling office for technical education and the coordinator of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). The student counselling office is the first point of contact for VPL and coordination of the VPL task is also conducted through this office. The team leader and coordinator were responsible for appointing a number of managers and trainers in four technical fields.

In response to a new educational reform for vocational education in Denmark in 2015, the college wanted to strengthen the implementation of VPL and further develop the school's VPL practice. In the new law, it is a requirement that everyone over 25 should have a specially organised and shortened adult vocational training programme (EUV). This adult training course begins with a VPL, where the adult student should be able to have prior learning, gained through other education, work and leisure activities, officially recognised.

VPL consists of both an objective assessment and an individual assessment. The criteria for the objective assessment are laid down in the ministerial orders for each vocational training course. They define what previous education, courses and what work experience one can have recognised. The individual assessment may allow for further shortening of the course if the prospective student has experience or education that is not described in the regulations,

but which the college considers relevant to the education the individual wishes to take.

The new law meant that the college had a need to adapt the task of VPL to this law, including application of the VPL task to all subject areas at the college, where previously it had been restricted to only a number of educational areas.

With the background of the implementation of the new law on VPL, the college saw possibilities in having their current VPL practice developed by participating in the testing of the Nordic quality model.

2. Finland – Validation in initial vocational education and adult education

In Finland, a rather large vocational education and training provider in the south was chosen in order to test the different aspects of the Nordic model on validation in a comprehensive way. It was seen as desirable to analyse how the model would work for organisational development in addition to how the model works as a framework of quality dimensions and indicators in VET.

The college provided training in 130 vocational qualifications and in 34 fields of study in general upper secondary level education. Over 20,000 young students and adults studied in the college annually at the time of the study. The college had units in 4 municipalities and over 700 staff members, of which 50 in teaching and 270 in other work tasks. Validation was carried out throughout the organisation, but there were varied ways of implementing the policies in validation for the students. However, the college stressed the importance of going through a comprehensive process of Personal Study Planning (PSP) with each student. This process is used widely in the Finnish education system, starting from preschool and continuing all the way to higher education and adult education. The Personal Study Planning process is also the starting point of the validation process in the college.

The negotiations with the school started with a hearing of the school's key personnel in the validation process. The usefulness of the Nordic quality model could be evaluated in different contexts due to the variety of branches being present in the school. Another feature of the Finnish case was the two tracks of education being provided: Firstly, the upper secondary vocational qualifications that are mostly completed by young learners. Secondly, competence-based qualifications that are usually enrolled by adults.

The first meeting with the college raised the question concerning in what way the branches actually differ from each other. Validation or recognition of prior learning often involves a reflective discussion between the learner and a counsellor or a teacher. In some professions or fields of education this approach is well in line with the other pedagogical approaches. But are teachers and students in wood industry as keen on such a dialogue as their counterparts in the social sector?

The following branches were included in the Finnish case study: Health and Social Services, Wood Processing, Business and Administration, Household and Cleaning Services as well as Hotel, Restaurant and Catering. The professions invited to the interviews were the study counsellors, teachers and training managers.

3. Sweden – Validation in building and construction

The Swedish case was a municipal vocational education institution in a city in western

Sweden. The school had a focus on vocational education and training, and validation, in the area of building and construction, and it was the largest school in this vocational area in Sweden. The institution had about 500 students, mostly youths in upper secondary school but also around 40 adults.

This institution had a long experience of validation work in building and construction. The main part of their validation work was commissioned from the Public employment office (PEO), but the extent of this depended on demand and on procurement processes where different validation institutions 'compete' to be a provider for the PEO. The main target group was immigrants with experiences from the building and construction sector in their home countries. In addition to this they also worked with validation as part of vocational municipal adult education, and with validation processes for employed workers and commissioned from the building and construction industry.

The approach to validation differed depending on type of validation. When it is part of the formal vocational education, there is a national curriculum and grading system which governs validation too, and the result could be exemptions within the vocational programme. Validation commissioned from the PEO is designed depending on the requirements from the PEO, which has as its main task to work for employability and employment. Therefore, the PEO models are likely to be related to the industry models, which are designed to identify competence among active workers in the industry.

Finally, the validation work here was not only part of the building and construction school but also closely connected to a regional organisation for coordination and support in development of and work with validation in the region. This organisation had a general responsibility in the area of validation, independent of e.g. vocational area. Their work with validation has a history dating back to the late 1990s when the idea of validation was introduced in Sweden.

The region for the case was chosen based on the long experience and history of validation work, which is well-known in the context of validation in Sweden. Here we chose the specific case in dialogue with the regional organisation, to find a specific case with experiences to build upon in the work with the quality model.

About the three cases
The study took place in three different VET institutions, in three Nordic countries with different legislations of VPL. In Finland and Sweden there were National guidelines for the VPL work. In Denmark there were no national guidelines, but there were quality strategies in the regional vocational training centres for adults.

The size of the VET institutions varied between the cases as well as the number of branches involved in the development process and the number of participants in the three cases. Furthermore, there was also a variation in aim. In the Swedish case the aim of VPL was mainly employment and the target group were adults (mainly immigrants). In the Danish case the aim of VPL was further education with a personal study plan for adults. It was similar in the Finnish case except for the fact that the target group could be both adults and young students. It should also be noted that all VPL actors in the three cases had extensive experiences of validation work.

The Nordic model was introduced in all three case studies and the studies had the same aim: of (1) to identifying if and how the Nordic quality model is useful and will strengthen the work

of quality in validation and (2) identifying factors in the context that influence the quality work in validation. We had an interactive approach in all three case studies, even though we conducted the studies in somewhat different ways (see Table 1). In Sweden and Denmark, we started with workshops based on dialogues on the quality model and with the aim to identify improvements in the VPL work. We ended up with interviews about the quality developing process and the model. In Finland we started with interviews based on the indicators of the quality model, continued with a SWOT analysis of the data, and ended with a workshop aiming at development of the quality in validation work. The different contexts and the variety in the processes did not seem to influence the usefulness of the Nordic quality model. This will be further discussed below.

Table 1. Variation between the three cases

	Danish case	Finnish case	Swedish case
VET institutions	4 branches	5 branches	1 branch
Aim in VPL	Plan for further education	Personal study plan	Employment
Motivation for the project	Improving and implementing new VPL legalisation	Improving VPL practice in general	Improving practice for new target group
The interactive process	2 workshops identifying needs and development needs 1 follow up meeting incl. interviews after testing new VPL practice	2 interviews SWOT analysis Workshop identifying developing areas for new practice	2 workshops identifying needs and developing new practice 1 follow up meeting
The group – numbers	6–7	6–8	6
The group – staff members	Managers, teachers/assessors counsellors	Managers at different levels, teachers/ assessors, counsellors	Manager, teachers/ assessors, counsellors

Discussion
The three case studies speak for the usefulness of the Nordic quality model for validation as a comprehensive structure for developing the validation system. At the same time the process visualised awareness of the different aspects of what quality in validation includes. The model was very useful to understand the complexity of the VPL process, and the different actors involved in the quality work and their roles and responsibilities. It made them see the whole 'VPL picture' and clarified the purpose of a validation process.
Working with the model showed how motivated managers and staff members were for quality management of validation and to identify development areas in their policies and practices. The model seemed to give a structure and frame for the work that facilitated the quality work.

The following general conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors and quality indicators presented in the Nordic quality model:
- The eight factors are relevant for a holistic approach to validation
- The use of the quality model in interaction between the managers and the practitioners helped to identify areas of development
- The case studies gave implications for the model to be used also as a means for competence development in the educational institutions
- Systematic *documentation* is paramount for the individual's VPL case
- *Coordination* of validation ensures that the policies and practices are carried throughout the various branches and fields of study of the institutions
- The *follow-up* factor can be seen as a broader review of the educational processes related to validation, covering performance in the organisational level
- The *precondition* factor could be seen as both an internal organisational and external national regulatory framework

The three cases show a variety concerning the chosen factors or development areas when we compare them (see Table 2). In the Danish case the involved actors worked with all factors except for the *guidance* factor. They developed both at a branch (educational programmes) level and at an organisational level. They focused on standards and flexibility in the quality process and became aware of the formative or transformative aspect of the validation process. In the Swedish case the main focus was work with and preparing for a partly new target group. Their quality work focused on the information, mapping and assessment process for this target group. In the Finnish case there was a very organisational view on the quality work. They compared the VPL practice in the different branches (education programmes) in order to standardise the practice for the whole organisation.

Table 2. Variation between the three cases: prioritized factors or development areas

	Danish case	Finnish case	Swedish case
Information	X	x	x
Precondition	X	x	x
Documentation	(x)	x	
Coordination	X	x	
Guidance		x	
Mapping	x		X
Assessment	x		x
Follow up	X	x	x

X = *particular priority*

So, we have seen how a general model can be used in different contexts and with different aims. The quality workers chose to work with the factors and indicators that were meaningful

in their respective situations. But relating a general model to a specific context and situation has to be considered, and there needs to be time spent on discussion for clarification of the factors. The indicators could also need clarification – in what ways do actors/models in a local context actually fulfil an indicator, and how could the quality model be developed further?

We recognized in the study that the concepts used in the model vary from the concepts used in the national contexts in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. In Sweden and Finland there are national guidelines for validation, and the Nordic quality model does not adapt fully to these. Maybe a better adaptation or flexibility in relation to national guidelines would be possible in a new edition of the Nordic model?

In the Nordic quality model, the individual is in the centre. The participants in the study found this very helpful, but at the same time they suggested that the model should include the context or background of the individual, e.g. if she/he is an immigrant, un-employed, employed, student or drop-out from earlier studies. That would improve the model, according to some of our informants.

We have found that the Nordic quality model is very useful, but it can also be improved, if it adapts to national conditions, guidelines, concepts and is translated into all the Nordic languages. That will make it easier to understand and use in all the Nordic countries.

Conclusions

Going back to the aims of our study, the three cases from Denmark, Finland, and Sweden have shown that the Nordic quality model could be useful in and also strengthen the work with quality in validation. The interactive approach was also a rewarding way to work with quality in validation based on the quality model. We have also found factors in the context that influence the quality work. This context consists of national educational systems with varying policies and practices, different branches when it comes to validation of vocational competence, regional and local institutions, and not least the aim of a validation effort in relation to an individual participant and her or his life context.

The different factors of quality in validation were presented at the beginning of this study. The educational systems differ between the Nordic countries and correspondingly the validation in VET in Denmark, Finland and Sweden represent the national educational systems. Regarding the situation and context-depending conceptions of quality, the branches studied in this research also have varying intentions in negotiating meaning in validation. At the institutional level teachers or assessors working in a specific branch may have different ways to carry out formative validation, that is to diagnose prior learning. However, the variation between actors is diminished if a variety of methods of assessment is used. Summative validation, e.g. validation with the aim to grant the individual formal credentials like grades or certificates with a national validity, is usually more coherent across the institutions.

National policies may strengthen the uniformity of formative and summative validation within an institution. The national qualification requirements for vocational qualifications form a basis for vocational education and a benchmark for validation of prior learning. Policies also form practices, such as the Personal Study Planning (PSP) process in Finland that is used in each educational institution to draw up a personalized curriculum for the student. These practices support validation by providing the student with the flexibility and individualised judgement they need yet support coherence between the involved actors at the institutional level by providing a framework to work within.

The factors presented in the Nordic quality model strengthen this framework by encouraging

the actors to discuss standardisation, reliability and measurement in validation. The factor 'Preconditions' in the model quite accurately refers to the regulatory framework for the validation work. These frameworks were further discussed with the institutions involved in the study in relation to the quality criteria presented under the factors of 'Documentation' and 'Coordination' in the model. Judging from the piloting phase, it can be said that the mentioned factors are very much in line with the validity and reliability demands for quality in validation. Are the policies brought into practice within the institution? Clear procedures, guidelines and work processes call for a certain amount of coordination, teamwork and a strategic view on the validation work. With resources and priority of the quality work the educational institutions can ensure procedural and organisational quality.

The contextuality of validation was also discussed in this study by paying attention to the social nature of assessment. Learning is situated and a transitional process, hence validation can help the actors to make prior learning visible and to strengthen self-confidence for future learning achievements. Based on the piloting, it can be said that the transformative goal in validation may have a meaning especially to those adult learners in VET who return to education from working life or to those who are changing careers. Transformative validation could also motivate younger learners who have learning from experience through evening and weekend jobs. Students may have adopted low self-confidence as learners due to negative experiences from education. Policies and practices that show appreciation to learning from experience may develop a learning culture where actors work for the transformative goal in validation. This may increase further the motivation to study and reduce dropping out of VET. The quality criteria in the Nordic quality model prompt the actors to maintain focus on skills and competencies from working life, not only on educational targets and educational curricula.

The Nordic countries are known for their commitment for providing education and learning opportunities for all, including adults. The learner is in the centre of the educational process, as in the quality model. Lifelong learning is seen as a way for progress both for the individual and for the society at large. These values are also represented in the cases selected for the research. This research may give further implications for the interplay between the quality model of validation and the communities and societies where it will be applied, in the Nordic countries, in Europe, and beyond.

LEVER UP

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3.2

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Levering transversal competences up for increasing mobility and employability across Europe

Lorenza Leita

The Spanish philosopher Maria Zambrano claimed '*we are born halfway. All life serves us to be born completely.'*[126] We actually spend our life exploring, experimenting, doing, changing and re-doing, continuously influencing and shaping our minds, feelings, beliefs, behaviours, and skills. In practice, we all learn lifelong. The school and the education play an important role in giving us chances, but we practically learn from any experience we go through.[127] An issue that we develop, without being so aware of, precisely concerns the emotions, the thinking, and the way of perceiving ourselves, the environment, the others around us.[128]

LEVER UP-project 2017-2019
The LEVER UP-project[129] aimed at "Valuing informal learning and transversal competences experienced in the voluntary service to increase employability, social responsibility and mobility". The voluntary service provides a rich non-formal and informal learning environment where people develop and practice transversal skills and acquire competences in the field. 70-94% of adult learning is informal learning. The aim was to have these learning outcomes recognized within reference frameworks of VET and to have them valued by companies. For VET it can mean easier access, higher qualification and possibilities for exemption of (part of) a VET-path. For companies, it can mean to provide profit and non-profit organisations with a very effective way to nurture and improve the transversal competences that may influence on both personal and business performance. For individuals, it can help people getting aware of the personal key competences and focusing on specific life opportunities in work, social life and education for personal and professional development. The experiences in volunteering and other similar non-formal contexts foster the social skills, the social inclusion and strengthen the citizenship. To value competences acquired in such contexts according to a common reference frame facilitates mutual recognition, employability and mobility at local, national and international level.

The LEVER UP project pursued three objectives:
- The enhancement of a mutual trust area, where the partnership and the stakeholders at local and European level can share a common framework when dealing with significant transversal competences and their validation.

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126 *https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjsc20/16/4*
127 Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall.
128 Davidson, R. J., & Begley, S. (2012). *The Emotional Life of Your Brain.* New York: Hudson Street Press.
129 *www.leverproject.eu*, Erasmus + KA2-VET LEVER (2014 – 2016) and LEVER UP (2017-2019).

- The development of a model able to value transversal competences in full transparency and transferability between VET, volunteering and the labour market.
- The implementation of a dedicated Service, able to provide the operative infrastructure, to foster the whole system at international and national level and to run at full speed.

The project carried out activities of model design, starting from the first version of the LEVER model developed in a previous project. For that, LEVER UP created a network with national and international teams linked to ECVET, EQF and Europass, in order to highlight and define the new elements to include. Then, it evolved and finalized the model. It was implemented and translated into English, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Dutch and French. The project-partners tested and, gradually, deployed the model into real contexts, with the aim to develop a *Triangle System* with VET, labour market and voluntary sector effectively interacting. Capacitation was an important issue to be implemented in order to train the required roles of assessors, tutors and the other validation centres staff functions.
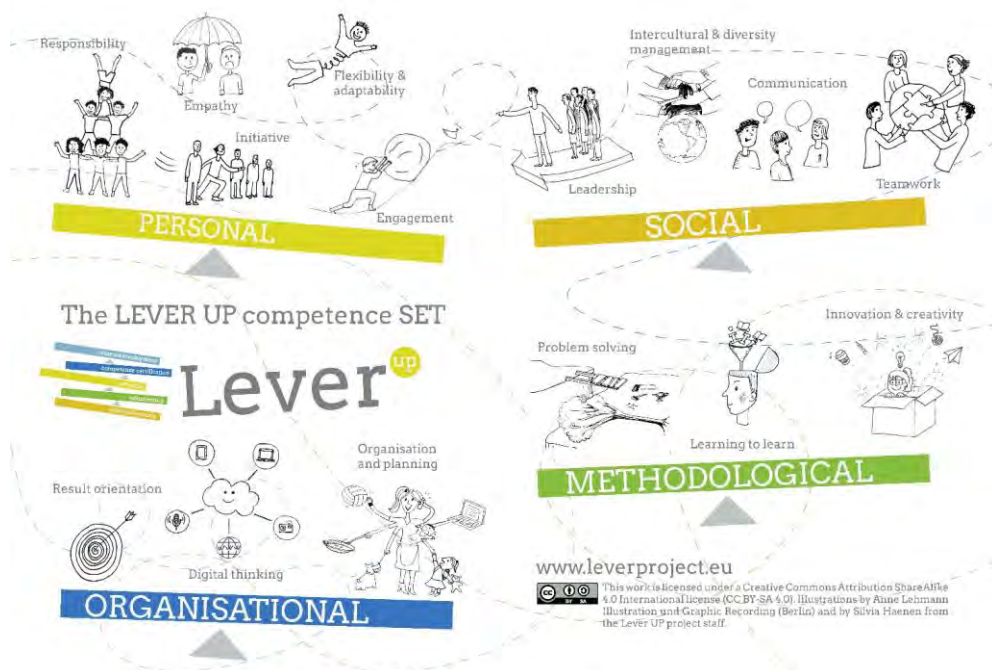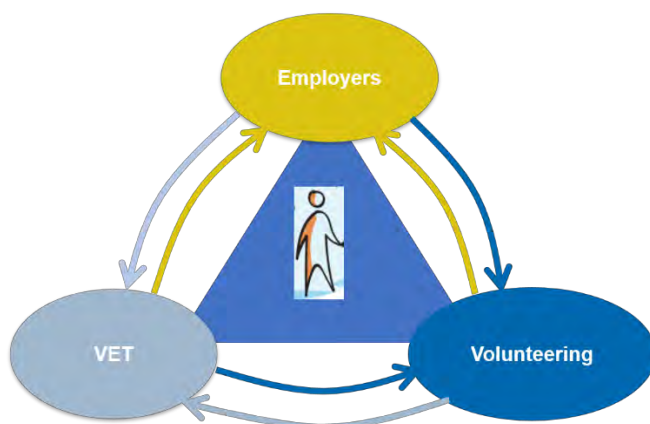

Source: www.leverproject.eu

The results and outcomes of the project are tangible and can be applied in many learning and working contexts:
1. The LEVER UP Model, made up of (1) a competence standard and (2) a validation process description. The former defines the catalogue of transversal competences that volunteering can deliver and broader labour market utilization significantly requires. It includes references to the EQF. The latter defines the steps and the procedure to carry out the competence validation, in full compliance with the European guidelines for validation of informal and non-formal learning, the requirements of National Qualification Frameworks and the ECVET system.

2. The LEVER UP toolkit with methods and tools to be used by volunteers, tutors and assessors, developed in English, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch and Polish.
3. The e-LEVER Space as the dedicated web-space where all the applications concerning LEVER UP are available, namely the webtool for supporting the management of the validation process, the e-learning platform, the additional features to search and match information such as the related Open Badge and the training certifications released and the available validation centres.
4. The Training Service is a blended learning facility required to capitate and quality-assure tutors, assessors and trainers. It releases Open Badges following international policy.
5. The LEVER UP Service Centre is the final service, acting as an operative contact point to support/assure effective deployment of the LEVER UP system at (inter)national level.

Focus

Personal, social, organisational and methodological skills are the focus of LEVER UP, a VPL model and practice that was designed, tested and evaluated within the two Erasmus[+] projects of LEVER and LEVER UP. Initially addressing volunteering as a fertile and challenging environment where individuals explore and enrich their transversal competences, LEVER UP actually aimed at embracing any potential context that can nurture transversal competences or be supportive in making their value explicit such as schools, companies, job agencies and third sector organisations. At present, the model includes 15 competences such as *teamwork, communication,*

Source: www.leverproject.eu

problem solving, adaptability, critical thinking, initiative and creativity, which are some of the transversal skills that the labour market explicitly demands. However, having the attention pointed to the same direction and skills is not sufficient for creating a real bridging between Volunteering, Labour Market and the Vocational Education and Training. In order to set up a real *Triangle System*, LEVER UP also provides a *standard*, a *process*, and a *full set of resources and tools* to support all the designed steps towards a plain validation.

The *standard* helps to define these skills in a comprehensive way, coherent with the major reference frameworks that underpin the concepts of competence, like EQF and the EU LLL Key Competences, and with those that sustain the European mobility such as ECVET and EUROPASS. Each competence is described in terms of learning outcomes, related knowledge and more detailed abilities, assessment indicators that help to detect it when applied in real contexts, and a few more additional information. The measure of the competence is related, on one side, to the fullfillment of the learning outcomes that describe it (*General/ Accomplished/Expert*), and, on the other side, to the level of complexity an individual is able to cope with when the competence is applied in a real context (*low/ mid- low/mid-high/high*.

The reason to split the measure into two values stands on the fact that any individual actually has these competences at a certain extent, as they are strictly related to the human being. The performance depends both on the individual and on external variables.
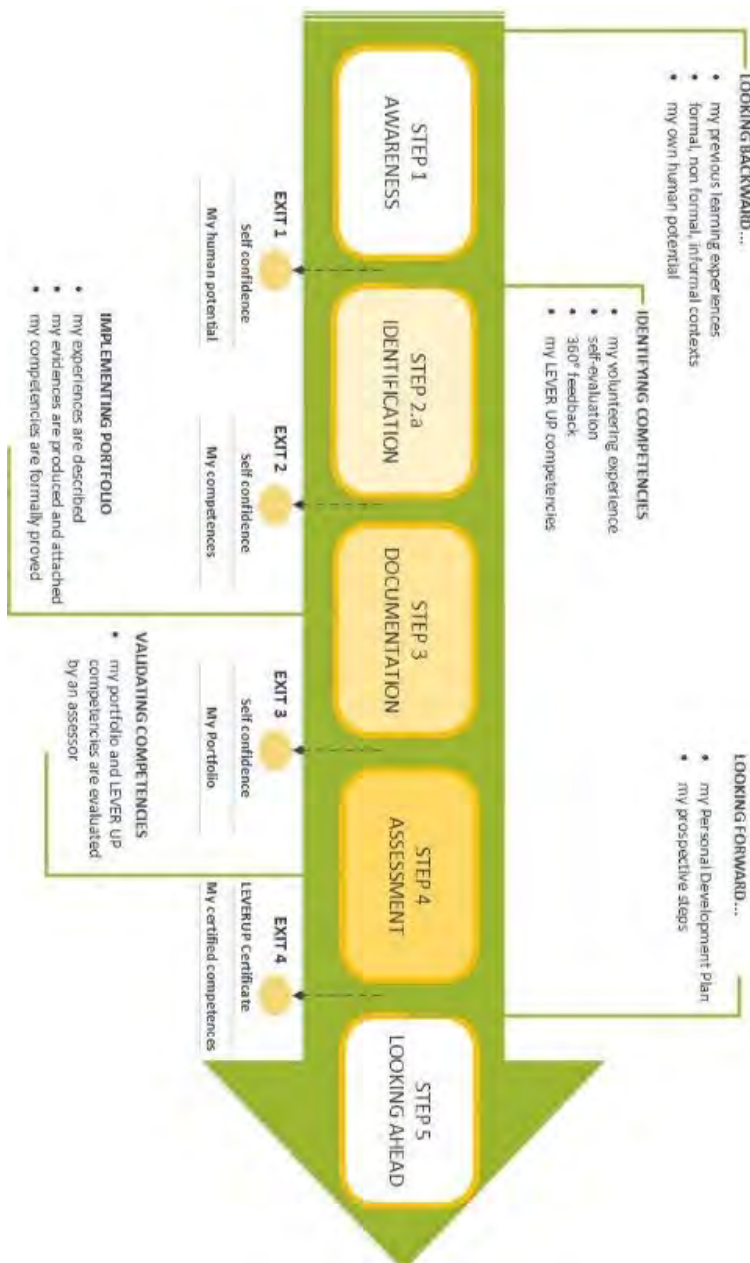
Source: www.leverproject.eu

It's hard to analyse them separately, as they are mutually related and affect each other. They are unstable, as they often depend on the context they are applied; and they also are in continuous evolution, depending on personal progress, maturity and experience. Therefore,

the validation should respect all that can not be unveiled and delimit its scope on all that can be seen, shown and attested in practice through the pieces of evidence provided.

The *process* defines the main steps for guiding the learners through the validation, firstly raising awareness of themselves, then identifying and documenting their own competences, and finally assessing and certifying them. Anyway, if these steps identify a modular, transparent and sequential validation pathway, they must be seen as flexible as the learners need. The project pilots testified as the success entirely depends on the level of engagement of the individuals in the process and on the actual aims they have. Sometimes, giving value to prior learning does not coincide with the attainment of a certification, but rather with the raise of self confidence and of clear visions. Therefore, the LEVERUP process identifies visible and multiple exit points to the validation scheme at discretion of the learner.

The *toolkit* provides more than 35 resources addressed to the roles involved in the process: learners, tutors and assessors. The toolkit supports all requests for validation and, provides a set of multiple resources that can be flexibly used in pathways as individualised as possible. Competence cards, practice activities, self assessment forms, guidelines for developing evidence are some of the tools available to learners; in addition, semi-automated assessment tools and a Portfolio Quality Check List are other resources at use of assessors.

The tools are instruments that make learning outcomes visible and help to assess them; nevertheless, support is fundamental to have VPL widely advocated and accessible to all. Guidance is a key instrument for the individual's outcome and benefit; practitioners must ensure open-mindedness, non-discriminatory approach and above all a real competence on the instruments and procedures. Hence, LEVER UP decided to provide a specialist training for assessors, tutors and future LEVER UP trainers.[130] The digital platform makes it sharable across countries, while the blended activities open to the needed local flexibility. Similarly, to the candidates that sustain a validation path, the certification also ensures that practitioners actually possess the set of knowledge and skills meant by LEVER UP and introduces a quality mechanism to ensure that the awareness and assessment tools are reliably used.

Source: www.leverproject.eu

LEVER UP certification grants *open badges* to practitioners and candidates. This kind of credentials support visibility, but also demonstrate the quality boundaries of a community where practitioners share common values and goals, and candidates share a common style of empowerment and upskilling with institutions and potential stakeholders.

In conclusion

The LEVER UP project proved to have successfully managed to fulfil most of its promises. In qualitative terms the LEVER UP model with all its tools and application-opportunities has

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130 *https://youtu.be/Uewp_93mUKk* or *http://www.leverproject.eu/e-learning/* video on LEVER UP training.

been implemented in the partner-countries in a diverse but always potentially structured way and with regard to the various national learning contexts. In quantitative terms the promised numbers for the piloting have been scored substantial but not yet decisive. Nevertheless, the follow-up of LEVER UP through the National Service Centres (NSCs) and their sector- or region-based Service Centres (LSCs) in the respective countries holds a big promise of successfully supplying the LEVER UP model to the many target groups in the European society that can benefit from the LEVER UP mission since its start in 2014. At the brink of 2020, a solid infrastructure is ready for embedding and structurally implementing the LEVER UP model with its training options, assessment and tutoring modes, the LEVER UP badges for certification, the LSCs in place and the e-LEVER UP space, and much more.

The main target for the LEVER UP partners was to establish national LEVER UP Service Centres (LSCs) in order to be able to make the shift from a project-based and product-oriented focus to the integral management of the LEVER UP project outcomes in local, regional and national contexts. National LSC 's can safeguard the quality of the LEVER UP model and make it work sustainable over time.

The variety on national level in the focus on the LEVER UP approach in the partner countries showed a clear potential for creating autonomous, national centres for managing the LEVER UP model within the country. A good way to give such a centre a visible and valuable role is setting up trustworthy quality-assurance by means of (1) registration and provision of certification (through LEVER UP certificates or open badges) for candidates and LEVER UP professionals, (2) the accrediting and auditing of LEVER UP providers in the national context and (3) continuous knowledge-development of the LEVER UP model and the monitoring of its ways of working. These National LSCs work best when:
- At European level, an International LSC will be responsible for coordinating, supporting and managing the knowledge exchange/development of the national LSC's activities. Also monitoring the policy-developments in legal, political, financial and educational fields for (further) facilitating the LEVER UP model, is a European task.
- At national level, a variety of sector-based or regionally oriented partners disseminate and exploit the LEVER UP model in their own context, organisations and/or target groups. The project already demonstrated that such focused LSCs are available in organisations with a mission for target groups, sectors and regional, covering profit, not-for-profit and education/training type organisations.
- At national level, the LSCs tune in with the available policy, learning and funding measures in: (1) target group-oriented spheres, like inclusion programmes for refugees and migrants, measures for filling-in vacancies in labour market sectors with labour shortages (education, health care, IT, etc.), (2) the rights of citizens to invest in themselves, as promoted on sector levels in HR-measures, and for job-seekers in national job re-allocation programmes, and (3) – in general - empowering the autonomous citizens in their further development and employability, thanks to the LEVER UP lifelong learning roadmap and the awareness of the already available potential of transversal competences of the citizen.

In its five year-long developmental process, LEVER UP set up activities, tools, quality mechanisms and procedures. It laid the ground floor for services to support candidates, practitioners and the stakeholders in getting familiar with and opening up to the LEVER UP process. Organisational arrangements, procedures, instruments and support structures are all aspects needed for a VPL practice to succeed. As firmly stated in the Berlin Declaration, they are overarching principles for achieving a robust and effective VPL-system.

Facilitating Educational Opportunities for Pilots using Cohort RPL

3.3

Pio Fenton and Deirdre Goggin

The lifestyle and, indeed workstyle, of pilots has long proved an impediment to the attainment of third level qualifications while maintaining active and full participation in the workforce. Equally, the significant investment in pilot training has been poorly reflected in mechanisms of advanced entry to college and university programmes. This poses a quandary for those of us in Higher Education which requires quick resolution for this critical element of the airline industry.

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) has developed a programme which, by design, reflects the training foundations and career trajectories of qualified pilots in a more holistic way. Through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) the programme recognises the extensive learning involved in becoming a pilot at commercial level. The underpinning technical expertise, the competences developed and tested along the way, and the attendant awareness of the industry are critical pieces of learning comparable to that developed in many degrees. The RPL process accepts the value of this learning and through a rigorous and quality-assured means equates this to years 1 and 2 of a 4-year Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in International Business with Aviation Studies.[131]

The degree programme

The Department of Marketing and International Business at CIT was initially approached by the Atlantic Flight Training Academy[132] (AFTA) to consider the development of a business programme that would provide cross-skilling opportunities for graduates of their pilot training programmes. This paper outlines how validation was central in the development of the programme which valued the learning previously acquired. AFTA are, by virtue of their success, well embedded in the aviation sector in Ireland which itself successful beyond what the country's size would suggest[133]. This is as a result of two large players Aer Lingus and Ryanair. The latter were involved in the development of this programme and recognised the important role of VPL very early on.

The outcome of the process saw the Department of Marketing and International Business validate a specially designed international business degree programme for airline pilots that reflected their training background, trajectories and career ambitions. The degree programme was developed to incorporate the key tenets of internationalisation with respect to business with emphasis on cultures, operations, logistics and strategy. The programme is delivered online and allows for progression through the programme in a timely manner reflecting the demands of careers within the aviation industry.

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131 *www.cit.ie/businesswithaviation*

132 *www.afta.ie*

133 *https://www.irishtimes.com/special-reports/aviation-finance/high-flying-aviation-industry-one-of-ireland-s-big-successes-1.3760055*

Entry criteria for the programme recognises the training of qualified airline pilots and through Recognition of Prior learning acknowledges their significant effort and learning at Level 6, 7 and 8 of the NFQ[134]. The institute is considered a thought-leader in RPL and has considerable experience in its application[135]. The qualification provides, through a conversion lens, key insight into issues confronting International Business. Candidates interested in the proposed programme are motivated by the need to have business qualifications as essential elements of their career progression opportunities.

Background to Collaboration
AFTA is a Cork-based Flight Training Organisation approved by the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) with a main base in Cork International Airport and satellite operations in Waterford and Shannon. Their main operations involve 2 significant hangars, 18-aircraft fueling facility, a 5,000sqft Administration Centre (incorporating classrooms) and Simulator Centre including two state of the art simulators. Established in 1995 it has 51 instructors currently with 220 enrolled trainees with 70-100 graduates each year.

Training programmes include pre-registration aptitude testing, Integrated Airline Transport Pilot's Licence (ATPL) and at the other end of the spectrum Multi-crew Pilot Licence (MPL) Training. Training for the ATPL takes 16 months and includes 208 hours of flight and flight simulation, 843 hours of theoretical training amongst other self-directed and directed activities.

AFTA attracts a significant number of graduates owing to the co-location of the classroom and aircraft based training activities (this is somewhat unusual), the advantages offered by real-weather training as available in Cork and a VAT regime that ensures Pilot Training is exempt from charges that are applied in other countries. Equally, they place emphasis on their Professional Development Programme which aims to produce employable professional pilots rather than licence holders.

The need for the programme was established through an open-minded expansive engagement with AFTA. Initially, AFTA outlined the challenges of the aviation sector, its value to Ireland and beyond and the intensity and rigour of the training required to be undertaken to become a pilot. It became more and more obvious that the choice to become a pilot comes with some sacrifice. There is a start upfront cost outlay. Secondly, the lifestyle of pilots is such that access to third level on-campus courses is almost impossible without tailored delivery.

CIT's engagement with AFTA established a need for a programme that aided pilots in developing careers with certain carriers and within that to ensure appropriate promotion opportunities as required. Through the Department of Marketing & International Business further consultation sessions were held with AFTA in order to further elucidate their requirements. Internal discussions within CIT coupled with external engagement with key players such as Ryanair progressed the proposal to completion input from the Technology Enhanced Learning unit with respect to the proposed online delivery and Extended Campus with respect to the significant Recognition of Prior Learning elements.

Extended Campus Model
Recognising the need for responsive third level institutes and seeking to enhance the practice and potential of external engagement interactions by changing the way we interact with, and

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134 *https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx*
135 *https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/new-report-a-current-overview-of-recognition-of-prior-learning-rpl-in-irish-higher-education/*

are viewed by, enterprise partners, internal changes have been implemented in Cork Institute of Technology to seek to join up and maximize the benefits of an already actively-engaged institution. Ensuring that the institution does not just teach entrepreneurship or support entrepreneurs but collects and uses business intelligence to, itself, act entrepreneurially. This led to a restructuring within CIT. This objective of the restructuring was to:

- Make it easier for external organizations to engage in mutually beneficial interactions with CIT academics and researchers.
- Develop a clear view of the extent and depth of existing and desirable engagement interactions to feed into institutional strategy and decision-making.
- Stimulate more interactions and measurably support regional economic development.
- Ensure that the variety of interactions with companies are collated and built on to develop broader supportive long-term mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Support enhanced practice development by exploration of processes and sharing of good practices.

The CIT Extended Campus was developed and launched as an interface to support interactions with all the various parts of the institution. CIT Extended Campus model built directly on the strategic importance of engagement for CIT, the knowledge, experiences and expertise gained through the leadership of the REAP project and an exploration of practice internationally. The role of the Extended Campus is to facilitate initial needs analysis and consultation sessions for external organisations with a view to matching them with appropriate internal units and individuals. Following this initial phase, the external organisation is introduced to the appropriate internal unit(s). At all stages in the interactions a customer relationship management system supports the collation of appropriate information and the compilation of information on queries and interactions provides a rich source of business intelligence for the strategic management of the institution.

In the context of this interaction CIT Extended Campus worked with the Department of Marketing and International Business on responding to the initial query received from Atlantic Flight Training Academy (AFTA). Their initial need was to secure upskilling opportunities for trained pilots seeking additional opportunities in the aviation industry or employment in the top five airlines internationally. An honours degree was the benchmark set by the industry for these opportunities.

Overview of Airline Industry and Pilot Training – The Challenges and Opportunities
This section provides an overview of the likely demand within the aviation sector for pilots over the next 10 years taking stock of the current situation and incorporating factors such as demographics, regional growth and lifestyle changes as afforded by rising global average incomes. The programme which was developed has qualified pilots as its exclusive intended target cohort. As such, the information presented herein paints a picture of the scale of this group and the obstacles that pilots have to surmount in order to undertake educational opportunities.

The general trajectory for a pilot's career tends to include the following training aspects:
- Aptitude testing for suitability assessment
- Initial ground training
- Simulator and flight training (sometimes ground and flight training are integrated as in AFTA).
- Private Pilot Licence

- Commercial Licence
- MPL Licence

At the end of this (or earlier in some cases) a trained pilot often commences their career with cargo carriers or low-cost carriers before taking up roles in time with flag-carriers as first officers and (after a significant period of time) subsequently to Captain.[136]

Demand within the Airline Industry

Recent issues within certain airlines have brought the shortage of pilots available for the positions open to light in the public mind[137]. While complex, the challenges experienced by these airlines present a perspective on the opportunities within the industry and the changing nature of the industry. The issues, though highlighted in limited recent examples, are certain to affect the entire aviation market. That said, there is evidence of increased provision through the major pathways for pilot training. These pathways include:

- Airline-focused flight training academies.
- Universities, military and business aviation schools.
- Small regional flight clubs and schools.

Between now and 2027 IATA predicts that 4.2% annual growth culminating in 4.8 billion air passengers with a doubling of unique city pairs to 18,000 and 37,000 commercial aircraft composing the global fleet. The demand for new pilots is also driven by several other factors:

- An increase in aircraft size[138] – aircraft size dictates the number of crew required. The average aircraft size is increasing.
- Pilot retirement and attrition[139] – this is a more significant issue in America but as the aviation business is inherently global the ramifications for Europe and Asia are likely to be potent. Pilot migration from Europe to the burgeoning Asian market has resulted in Europe having the lowest average pilot age of anywhere in the world.

CAE [140](a training company) predicts that the airline industry will need to produce 70 pilots per day to meet global demand with the need for 80,000 pilots within Europe, Middle East and Africa with the regions' low-cost carriers being a significant driver of demand.

The growth in demand will then require the advancement of career progression in timelines which were unheard of up until recently. Progression within airlines is often predicated on experience coupled with third-level degrees. The airlines seek to identify individuals who have extended beyond their technical expertise and demonstrated the roundedness that sometimes comes with learning at this level. The skills required at First-officer level are such that a business degree (or similar qualifications) are good indicators of ability. The CAE states:
Airlines are not just looking for first officers to fill the right seat. They're looking for candidates with the potential to become captains within their organizations. As an industry, we must continuously improve and adapt our assessment and selection processes for different regions and airlines to reflect pilot competency requirements.

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136 A video can be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6cXwg8mo5Y&feature=youtu.be
137 *https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/17/boeing-ceo-says-global-pilot-shortage-is-one-of-the-biggest-challenges.html*
138 *https://science.howstuffworks.com/transport/flight/modern/airline-crew1.htm*
139 *https://www.forbes.com/sites/marisagarcia/2018/07/27/a-perfect-storm-pilot-shortage-threatens-global-aviation-even-private-jets/#1c32ae351549*
140 *https://www.cae.com/media/documents/Civil_Aviation/CAE-Airline-Pilot-Demand-Outlook-Spread.pdf*

It is perhaps this sentiment that best encapsulates the drivers of the programme that we are describing here. The airline industry is going to face unprecedented development in the coming years. Within that, the opportunities for those that wish to progress their careers, reflective of their groundings, are immense. This programme has at its heart an idea of complementarity as it couples two significant skillsets that are required for the expected profile of the aviation industry (business and technical knowledge of the area of operation). Essential to the design of a suitable programme was begin able to recognise the significant and challenging training that pilots have to undertake. Oddly, such training has been poorly recognised in educational circles. The programme we developed sought to ingrain that recognition through its RPL policies.

Recognition of Prior Learning in CIT

2019 marks 20 years of RPL in CIT, it begun as an EU project in 1996 with an industry partner and became part of the central functions of the institution in 1999. This strategic decision by the management of the institution was fundamental to the development and subsequent evolvement of RPL. Recent data gathered by the CIT Extended Campus regarding the breadth and depth of RPL practice within the institution has identified in excess of 6,000 successful RPL module applications, 37 full academic awards through validation, 696 modules have been applied for in 151 programmes. Advanced entry has been granted into 112 CIT programmes and in all disciplines and all levels of the NFQ.

In addition to the individual learner seeking validation for their prior learning, the institution has also worked with cohorts of students with a similar prior learning profile. The process adopted in these instances has been to do a mapping of the common learning elements linking to the standard of the national framework it relates to or to the content of a particular academic programme. RPL has been incorporated into customised course developments with industry to facilitate upskilling requirements without the necessity for repeating existing learning relevant to a programme.

RPL within the AFTA programme

As previously outlined, the focus of the programme development is on securing an opportunity for qualified pilots seeking an Honours Degree in International Business. The process of developing a customised course incorporating RPL was an extensive one where the content of the AFTA pilot training was analysed and mapped to levels 6 ,7 and 8 on the Irish NFQ equating to levels 5 and 6 on the EQF by the Head of Department and course team. In addition to the pilot's licence, due to changes in the aviation industry and laws pilots are now required to undertake additional training reflective of increased security measures and work practices. It was determined through this extensive review and mapping exercise that the prior learning of the pilots equated to 120 ECTS credits. This mapping allowed us to present a 4-year programme where the first two years equated to that mapped content. The mapping built upon some precedent as well as a critical process of evaluation of the learning involved in various aspects of pilot training. These aspects combined provide the context of the RPL aspects and are detailed here.

The training provided by AFTA is used as a means to provide a yardstick within which to measure the general training provided by other pilot training schools and entails activities that have been previously recognised as equivalent to modules on the NFQ based on a mapping exercise performed in other universities primarily in the early 2000's. The total equivalent credit is 95 ECTS. New additions to pilot training that have emerged or been formalised since that time are detailed subsequently.

Table 2 Overview of recognised modules

Module Name	Credits	Level	Brief Description
Private Pilot's Licence	20	6	Essentials of Single Engine Flying
Flight & Aviation Studies 1	20	6	Further Flying (& Obtain Theoretical Exams)
Flight & Aviation Studies 2	20	7	Operate under visual flight rules
Commercial Licence	10	7	Operate under commercial pilots licence conditions
Practical Flying Multi Engine-Instrument Rating	10	8	Single Pilot Multi-Engine
Modern Aircraft Systems	10	8	Jet Orientation Control
Multi Crew Co-operation	5	8	Operate in Multi-crew Environment

The following is a summary of key training which has since become a regulatory or commercial requirement:

- Performance Based Navigation (PBN) - The course is designed to provide pilots with the required theoretical knowledge to fly GNSS approaches safely. Before starting RNAV (GPS/GNSS) approach or LPV approach practical training of the pilot must be qualified to fly RNAV1 (P-RNAV) arrivals and departures in accordance with OM-D and also to fly Overlay approaches.

  It is permissible to combine these courses so that a pilot receives all the required elements of each course and therefore qualifies for RNAV (GPS/GNSS) approached and LPV approaches concurrently. The syllabus for this is 379 pages long and entails the type of language that emphasises decision making about complex situations within multi-faceted environments as well as the application of decisions that inherently require situational awareness.

- Upset Prevention & Recovery Training (UPRT) – This module provides comprehensive academic training that covers the broad spectrum of issues surrounding aeroplane upsets at the earliest stages of commercial pilot development; during type-rating training; and continued throughout the professional career at scheduled recurrent training intervals. It has largely been introduced since 2013 in response to a number of incidences within the industry. The syllabus is a significant document which is practically tested in training. The learning involved requires application of decision making and situational awareness, communication, leadership & teamwork.

These significant additions to the learning and CPD requirements of a pilot are amongst the developments of recent years which also include other elements such as Fatigue Risk Management (FRN). The latter is newer area of focus with significant emphasis on risk management and prevention.

Training within the aviation industry has evolved in recent years and now emphasises the development of competencies when assessing student ability. For example, a student's ability to land an aeroplane is not assessed in a tick-box fashion but in evidence of the application of various competencies to that activity. In this case, for example the following might be considered:

- Workload Management.
- Application of Procedures.
- Situational Awareness.
- Problem-solving and decision-making.
- Leadership.
- Teamwork.
- Communication.

Between the formally recognised credit bearing activity of the modules that have been mapped to the NFQ and the training requirements of the newer training facets (particularly with respect to the evidence of competencies) a validation panel deemed there to be sufficient evidence of learning to merit recognition of 120 credit equivalent.

The programme
The programme was proposed with several innovative features which are reflective of the needs expressed by AFTA and further tested within the Airline industry through surveys, interviews and focus groups. In summary, the programme will be designed as a two-year add on at Level 8, delivered online, with 10-credit modules. The programme award is designed to be classified as 120-credit stage.

Table 3 Overview of Programme

Feature	Detail
Duration	2 years – 20 credits per semester over 6 semesters
Nature of Award	Bachelor of Arts
Level	8
Number of Modules	12
Delivery Mode	Online
Department	Marketing & International Business

The design of the programme has been considered to offer flexibility and to reflect the nature of careers as pilots within the airline industry. Online delivery is essential for pilots who are unable to commit to on-campus programmes that are delivered in the traditional manner. Intensive programmes have a value but were not considered suitable for long-term reflective learning. CIT's well-regarded Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Department offers a solution that meets the demands of this programme.

The programme is designed as a furthering of an existing technical learning experience under the classification of Bachelor of Arts. The pedagogical opportunities afforded by online delivery have resulted in the design incorporating 10-credit modules exclusively. Based on initial feedback during the design stage it seems that online delivery combined with the desire to have a cogent learning experience suggest that modules of this size might enhance the learning experience, and this has been supported by the lived experience as the programme runs. The modules are designed with 3-hour deliveries with specific resources designed for each module as part of the self-directed component of each module. The specialism of the programme is International Business. Prospective students of this programme are inherently global in outlook. Equally, they seek employment in a variety of countries and settings – this programme aims to provide a solid bedrock of awareness around politics, culture and internationalisation which will support graduates in meeting that end.

Figure 10 Programme Structure

Source: https://www.cit.ie

The Student Experience – Transparency around RPL

We believe that RPL should be a transparent aspect of the student experience. The entry learning portfolio captures the formal and informal learning of the applicant in a succinct portfolio that will be focused on assessing the students' ability to cope with the type of learning associated with a level 8 programme. The entry portfolio will therefore include:

- Documentary evidence of qualifications and training.
- Extended CV.
- Reflective log on learning to date.
- Short essay contrasting various business models within the aviation industry (for example).

The intention of the portfolio is not to act as hard go/no-go but to determine entrance suitability in line with the standard entry criteria. It will be used as a means to confirm student's interest and motivation while acting as a means to relay any challenging feedback at an early juncture.

Formal Entry Criteria

1. Successful completion of a commercial pilot's license and the associated training equivalent in nature to that detailed within this document.

2. Submission of an appropriate Entry Learning Portfolio.
3. Applicants will be expected to have an IELTS of 6.0 for English language proficiency (or equivalent) where deemed necessary by the Head of Department.

The entire process is designed to ensure that the student has the best chance of completion. As the programme has run there have been some tweaks made to the advisory aspect of the application process but the RPL process has remained largely the same.

Figure 11 Student Journey
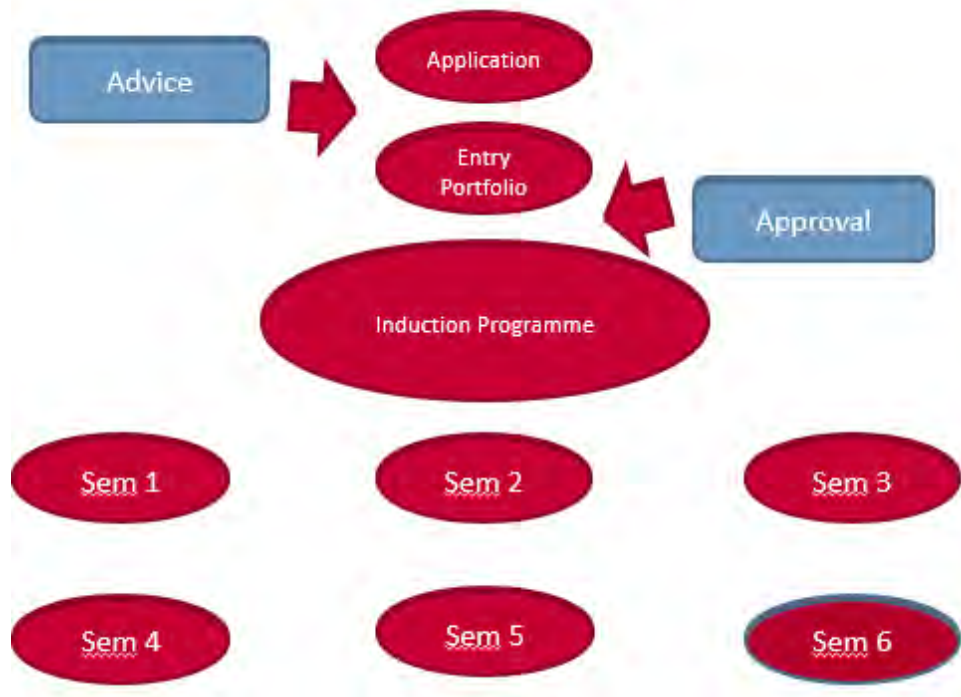
Initial results

The programme was launched in June 2018 at Cork Institute of Technology with applications open for a September 2018 intake. By then 35 applications were made with 8 applicants withdrawing or disengaging during the initial application process. Of those that commence the programme a number did not progress with the programme beyond the first few weeks due to the workload involved in their own careers. A second intake commenced the programme in September 2019 with an eventual 37 applications being successful. The pilots have a range of roles from First Officer to Base captains. There is a significant gender imbalance in the programme with males outnumbering females substantially. An entire quantitative analysis is being undertaken but initial qualitative data suggest a very positive experience with students. The following table highlights some of the feedback gathered (it should be noted that positive reaction regarding VPL tends to arise at application stage.

Table 4 Initial Feedback

Senior First Officer	When the BA (Hons) International Business with Aviation Studies at CIT was announced, I immediately looked into it as I had been looking to start a degree over the last few years. The ability to do all lectures online is the only way I could have undertaken such a degree. All of the lecturers have vast experience in their respective fields and are very responsive to any questions we have. There is flexibility in course work deadlines which is also a huge help as my roster can be challenging at times. I would highly recommend that anyone interested should apply for the course. It has broadened my mind and opens up a lot of doors down the line.
Captain	I am a captain with Ryanair and started the course at CIT last summer. It is very interesting to get to see what is going on in the offices of your airline and how business decisions are made, since as pilots we mainly work on the frontline. During the first semester we learned about management styles and techniques, comparing traditional and more contemporary styles, and getting to see how these are implemented in your own company. As an airline captain with a young family, time management can be difficult. Which is why the online course CIT is offering works out for me. I get to study when and where I want. Courses can be followed live at set times, or you can choose to view the recordings at a later time. I find myself switching between the different options per week, depending on my schedule. Workload can be high at times, especially when assignments are due, but so far the work has been really rewarding and I definitely feel obtaining a bachelor's degree covering all the different business aspects of aviation will contribute to the career of a commercial pilot. The level of the lecturers at CIT is very high, all of them have experience outside of the classroom, you can tell by the way they use real life examples that make the courses very engaging.
Base Captain	Starting a new degree whilst maintaining a full-time job seemed daunting when I undertook the course, however despite my earliest reservations I have found it manageable. The ability to complete the course 100% online allows for flexibility when unable to attend lectures and it also means that reviewing material can be done from anywhere! The content is well delivered by great lecturers and topics cover an array of material that help give me the knowledge and ability in management and beyond!

Berlin Declaration and key reflections for the future

This programme firmly reflects the trajectory prompted by the spirit of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning in terms of the organisational arrangements, procedures and instruments and support structures. As a significant cohort-based approach it has worked with an identified group for which educational opportunities are scarce given the nature of the working life of pilots. The lack of opportunity is all the more challenging to fathom given the high outlay involved in becoming a pilot, the significant learning tasks in developing one's skillsets and the ongoing demands of a highly regulated working environment. The programme validation process and the organisational arrangements put in place reflect best practice. There is high transparency and clear links to the NFQ in Ireland. Financially, it is seamless with a reduced cost factor as a result of the innovative designed when compared to programmes that have not taken this approach. The visibility of the entry mode pushes the VPL aspect to the fore of the student mind and this is reflected in the student journey. In essence however, this programme represents a step-change in mindset – in the eyes of the learner – in the accessibility of an educational opportunity. That step-change has been facilitated by an approach to VPL that is imbued by the spirit of the Berlin Declaration.

Digital Open Badge-Driven Learning **3.4**

Practical applications to support Validation of Prior Learning

Sanna Brauer

In the future, digital open badges can be integrated into different studies in order to support "the process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying the learning outcomes of individuals acquired within and outside formal education and training," as presented in the preamble of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning (3rd VPL Biennale, 2019, p. 1). They also provide "visibility and value to all forms of learning and seek to uncover and unlock latent talent in the workforce and in society" (3rd VPL Biennale, 2019, p. 1). Students' personal badge repositories may include different badges from a variety of badge issuers from distinct study programmes with varying evidence of achievements. The open badge management system allows one to acquire competences in formal, non-formal and informal studies. Skills and knowledge may be recognised in small fractions as well as in large sets. Badges describe achievements in greater detail, complementing degree certificates and transforming curricula into personalised degree programs. The process will enable multidimensional dialogue between badge earners, employers, educational institutions and education developers (Brauer, Ruhalahti, & Pakanen, 2018). The criteria for future skills and knowledge are developing and evolving while staying compatible with the nationwide administration and learning management systems. A common European standard allows one to link badges acquired from different places using the International Europass of Lifelong Learning. Badges offer a way to inform and improve learning outcomes in a transferable form, as well as to scaffold and assess learning, thus allowing efficient use of learning analytics. The student is in charge of his/her own ongoing learning process, which is thus scaffolded by professionals just in time instead of just in case. Meanwhile, the flow of learning is supported by inspiring gamification. (Brauer, 2019, p. 91)

The narration above aligns with the description of the path towards advanced digital learning ecosystems and blockchain technology in Finland represented in my recently published doctoral dissertation, "Digital Open Badge-Driven Learning - Competence-Based Professional Development for Vocational Teachers" (Brauer, 2019). None of the above illustrates possible future scenarios, but all of the presented issues relate to ongoing or upcoming development projects.

The ongoing changes in the paradigm of continuing professional development (Kools & Stoll, 2016) necessitate supportive technological and digital pedagogical models. The current development and research related to digital open badge-driven learning (Brauer, 2019; Brauer, Kettunen, & Hallikainen, 2018; Brauer, Korhonen, & Siklander, 2019; Brauer, Siklander, & Ruhalahti, 2017; Brauer, Ruhalahti, & Hallikainen, 2018; Kullaslahti, Ruhalahti, & Brauer, 2019) contributes to the educational discourse on competence-based approaches, assessment and professional development. Moreover, the recent findings allow a definition
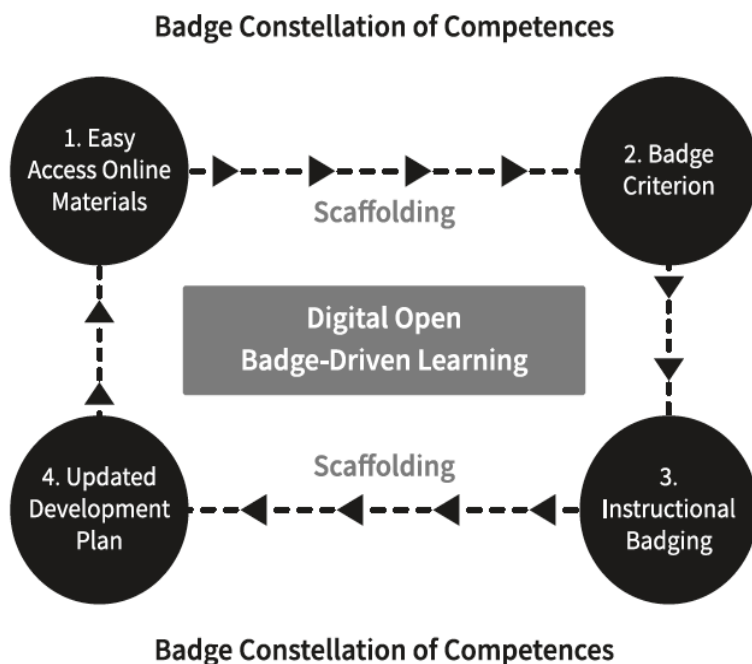
of the process of badge-driven learning, facilitate the identification of open badge management platforms as new learning environments and suggest an application to design badge-driven learning. Additionally, the process approach brings to the fore the significance of customisation and personalisation of study paths in order to meet unique professional needs. My doctoral dissertation focuses on the challenge of supporting teachers' professional development. The nationally exceptional success of the studied professional development programme (PDP) draws heightened attention to digital badging and gamification in educational contexts. The programme's outstanding learning outcomes have led Finland to develop the model on a national level within different degrees and various disciplines.

Advanced Digital Badging to Support Validation of Prior Learning
Previously acquired competences are important to the individual in the pedagogical process; when educational institutions increase their capacity to engage in the ongoing assessment of competences, remarkable improvements can be achieved. However, the official guidelines are not always the best tool for individuals seeking to identify personal competences or to comprehend the needs of development in practice. Based on five years of experience in the development of a competence-based PDP and research into digital badging, I suggest that digital open badges be explored and applied in different disciplines.

The main research question of my doctoral dissertation was focused on how digital open badges structure the gamified competence-based learning process in the continuing professional development of vocational pre- and in-service teachers. The study results allowed me to identify the different qualities of digital open badge-driven learning and describe the overall structure of the badge-driven learning process (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Identified structure for the gamified digital open badge-driven learning process

Badge Constellation of Competences

Source: Brauer, 2019

The study findings have allowed me to reach a definition of digital open badge-driven learning as a competence-based learning process grounded in the badge constellation of competences. The process includes identifying and recognising different competences using digital open badges. The entity of digital open badge-driven learning involves learning materials, badge criteria, instructional badging, scaffolding and peer support. The related learning process supports the gamification of professional competence development (Figure 1). Further, the triggers of the learning process are more versatile than the triggers of gamification or online learning alone. The trigger for digital open badge-driven learning might be realised at different stages of the learning process and in various forms, including community building and collaboration facilitated by gamification, scaffolding or criterion-based challenges.

The main principles of digital open badge-driven learning allow the design model to be focused to meet unique personal needs, progression to be made towards peer and community learning and excellence to be recognised within working communities. Previous research related to this learning type has focused on the initial process of digital badging, the essence of issuing and receiving badges (Hrastinski et al., 2018). However, digital open badges offer a way to recognise "the expanded landscape of learning" (Grant, 2014, p. 5) and empower alternative ways of acquiring knowledge and skills (Brauer et al., 2017; Devedžić & Jovanović, 2015; Knight & Casilli, 2012). Effective badge design is complex by nature, with different mechanics and psychological factors affecting the identification and recognition of competences and the eventual earning of badges (McDaniel & Fanfarelli, 2016).

Knight and Casilli (2012) describe the scale of customisation required for such learning processes as a connected learning ecology serving as a bridge between contexts and alternative learning channels. The world of digital badging is growing, as anyone can create badges and recognise the achievements of others (Mozilla Open Badges, 2017); consequently, there is strong demand for guidelines and digital pedagogical models for educators to follow and apply. In the future, more research is needed to improve flexible professional competence development and cultivate a trustworthy way to identify, validate and recognise different competences.

Emerging Digital Learning Ecosystems in Finland

Different Finnish educational institutions and training providers have been applying digital open badges in learning processes. Trainers in vocational teacher programs (Isacsson, Stigmar, & Amhag, 2018) are in charge of the pre- and in-service training of professional teachers working in vocational education and training (VET). In Finland, these trainers have been the first to deliver educational reform and to observe the effects of digitalisation on different disciplines (Brauer, 2019; Koramo, Brauer, & Jauhola, 2018). As a focus group piloting digital open badge-driven learning, their experiences, views and ideas are more than noteworthy. In practice, digital open badges offer to inform and improve both professional development and professional knowledge constructions to develop different competences.

It is essential that standards and guidelines are developed on both a national and a European level (Kullaslahti et al., 2019); however, to best serve students, trainers need to learn how to apply the competence-based approach in practice and further develop their digital pedagogical competences and practical applications. The following chapters explain the latest developments related to open badges in Finland, originating from the significant success of the first massive open online badge-driven programme of continuing professional

development (CPD) for VET teachers. It also covers national professional development initiatives developed based on the most advantageous lessons learned in the past five years.

Learning Online – Professional Development for Vocational Teachers

In 2014, two schools of professional teacher education (Oulu University of Applied Sciences and HAMK University of Applied Sciences) joined forces with VET provider Omnia, the Joint Authority of Education in Espoo. Together, the partners sought to restructure CPD to design a competence-based PDP that would support teachers in building working-life Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills and knowledge.

As as result, they co-created Learning Online PDP, a gamified, open badge-based massive open online course (MOOC). The aim of Learning Online is to support VET teachers in applying new technologies and strategies for teaching and learning in online, hybrid and face-to-face learning environments (Brauer et al., 2017). In Learning Online, digital open badges offer novel possibilities for identifying and recognising digital pedagogical competences independent of how they were acquired. The design also considers several other aspects of modern culture, including digitalisation, the meaningful use of gamification in learning and the public sharing of expertise in order to support shared learning within work communities. The Learning Online concept was built as part of an OsaOppi project funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Edufi) in 2014 and has been in development ever since.

As the scheme of continuing professional development should reflect the sum of competences required from teachers (Day, 2017), the foundation of the PDP rests on competence criteria that adhere to the national guidelines (Ope.fi) adapted from Unesco's ICT-CFT (Unesco, 2011). As different digital pedagogical competence frameworks support teaching personnel, in Learning Online, the three successive stages follow a level structure: SoMe-Novice, SoMe-Expert and SoMe-Developer (I, II and III, with SoMe referring to social media). The levels refer to the skill sets of personal development, shared expertise and strategic development on the organisational level.

One cornerstone of the design involved creating an educational setting that would encourage participants to apply acquired skills and knowledge immediately in practice (Brauer, Kettunen, & Hallikainen, 2018). In Learning Online, digital open badges visualise the requisite skill-set levels in a way that allows the participants to plan and customise their personal study paths (see also Brauer, 2019, p. 36-39). The participants apply for competence-based digital badges by providing the required evidence of the competence in question. The assessment process is transparent and egalitarian, as teacher trainers from different schools of professional teacher education collaboratively facilitate the application and issuing process in the open badge management system (Open Badge Factory). Scaffolding related to the remediation and rejection of badge applications is also provided, and participants are engaged in a Facebook-based study group.

The original aim of the Learning Online initiative was to develop inspiring in-service training for vocational teachers by implementing new methods of easy-access online learning. In Learning Online, learning materials and badges are readily accessible 24/7 online and are open to anyone interested in developing digital pedagogy and vocational training. All contents are openly licensed with Creative Commons. Themed learning materials supplement instructional badge criteria and are tagged for different search options. One goal for the initial pilot was to offer an economical example of an open online education implementation designed by average teacher trainers without specific technological expertise (such as coding skills) using free online products and services. The Learning Online

landing site is simply a free WordPress blog (http://www.oppiminenonline.com/), and the tools used to monitor learning were built from different gadgets available on the WordPress site and tools such as Google Forms.

The working group was also keen on applying gamification in online learning. In Learning Online, digital open badges represent a major tool for game design (Brauer & Siklander, 2017; Deterding, 2015). After conducting thorough research on and comparisons between different technical settings, designers settled on Mozilla Open Badges and Open Badge Factory to power the game engine of Learning Online. Badges visualise the requisite skill sets levels: "I-III...bronze, silver and gold and are earned by achieving 10, 25 and 45 badges, respectively" (Stockley, Lius, & Brauer, 2017, n. p.). Each basic badge belongs to a constellation of similarly themed badges encouraging teachers to continue to develop their competences and reach the next skill-set level. Further, the design is intended to support a community experience and inclusion through online study groups and competition between locational teams. A live leaderboard is displayed on the site to motivate competitors to go the extra mile, while high-ranking teams seek to keep their lead (Stockley et al., 2017, n. p.). Badges also provide a chance to promote a meaningful learning experience, a sense of community and the experience of inclusion and equality (Mäki et al., 2015).

Over the years, the project grew to provide an open-access educational setting available to anyone interested in developing vocational education and training, teachers' ICT competences and digital open badging. Since 2015, badges have been piloted in professional teacher education qualification programs for VET pre-service teachers, and the results speak for themselves. As of August 2019, users have applied for (and received evaluations for) 21,687 Learning Online badges. Of these, 1,847 applications (~9%) were rejected and 1,792 (~8%) were pending; teacher trainers have guided those applicants who were marked pending towards the intended learning outcomes. The acceptance rates (where the badge receiver transfers the badge to a badge repository) are currently at 92%.

The goal was to develop the use of open badges as an accreditation of teachers' ICT competence development and to execute an inspiring form of gamification. The programme exceeded all intended learning outcomes in the first year in terms of both quantity and quality. Moreover, the PDP was awarded the 2015 eEemeli Quality Prize in an annual e-learning competition organised by the Association of Finnish eLearning Centre (https://www.eoppimiskeskus.fi/en/) for improving the quality of e-learning operations and activities in Finland. Obviously, digital open badges have become a successful tool in Finland for fostering vocational teachers' professional development.

Teachers' Badges Initiative
Interest in badging shows no sign of slowing down in the immediate future as the National Initiative of Teacher's Badges follows in the footsteps of Learning Online by offering to create and establish a national digital badge system to support the recognition and acknowledgment of professional competences for vocational teachers (HAMK, 2018). The project is run on a national level within several higher education institutions and is intended to establish a formalised recognition ecosystem supervised by Finland's Ministry of Education, as well as to further explore the broader sociotechnical contexts in which the badge constellations could exist.

The great autonomy of Finnish teachers highlights their responsibility for maintaining their own competences. The skills and knowledge acquired during professional teacher training (60 ECTS credits to gain a teacher's qualification) are insufficient for the lifetime career of a

vocational teacher. However, current CPD methods do not inspire teachers to continually advance their own knowledge and skills for their professional lives (Kools & Stoll, 2016).

To ensure teachers' professional development, their training should be considered a competence-development continuum supporting professional growth (Mahlamäki-Kultanen et al., 2014). The challenge in opening up such a continuum in continuing professional development rests in how to support pre-service teachers in creating a personal plan for CPD. This plan should inspire them to develop their competences as future in-service teachers and to strengthen their self-motivation as well. The Teacher's Badges Project aims to create and establish "a national digital badges system to support the recognition and acknowledgi ement of professional competences of vocational teachers during their teacher studies as well as their entire professional career" (HAMK, 2018).

Badges to Meet the Requirements of Working Life
Digital open badges encapsulate the individual learning experience and tie performance and achievement to documentation and evidence of learning (Ahn, Pellicone, & Butler, 2014; Gamrat, Bixler, and Raish, 2016; Reid, Paster, & Abramovich, 2015). They also offer a method of supporting a shared understanding of required and desired competences between different stakeholders.

The Chips for Game Skills project (Brauer, Ruhalahti, & Pakanen, 2018) aims to define criteria for future skills in the gaming industry and to cross the boundaries of educational institutions. The goal is to provide badges based on the needs of working life as proof of the required level of mastery in specific areas of expertise. The badge constellation of competences is focused on promoting the identification and recognition of working life opportunities (the needs of working life) while helping the student to plan the development of competences (optional study paths) as a future professional in the gaming industry.

'Work-Integrated Pedagogy in Higher Education' (Workpeda), a new nationwide project, aims to pilot digital open badges in academic universities and higher education contexts to improve students' working life competences and enhance alumni cooperation. Workpeda is intended to build the first national pilot of digital open badge-driven learning within the problem-solving case studies of the University of Oulu's Learning, Education and Technology (LET) master's programme in close connection with the latest research. Working-life connections are highlighted throughout the master's studies. The aim is to determine desired competences in relation to students' individual interests and the recognised needs of working life, as well as to define the concept of desired competences in digital open badge-driven learning and the competence-based approach based on students' point of view. (Brauer & Talonen, 2019)

Competitive Skills - National Open Badge Constellation of Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments
In Finland, we have already learned that digital open badges substantially support the competence-development continuum of professional growth in the contexts of vocational teacher programs, professional development and higher education. The latest major investment in Finland is aimed at developing a nationwide open badge constellation for the field of vocational education and training (secondary degrees). This enables the verification of adults' problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments (PSTRE) by identifying and recognising competences acquired outside the formal education system, at different levels of education and in transitional phases of the education structure. Additionally, the project

provides a required framework of competence (determining the composition of objectives, core content and assessment criteria) for securing ICT-related problem-solving skills (PIAAC) in formal and non-formal education.

The project will create a competence-based skill set for people with inadequate ICT and data management abilities and a national competence constellation for problem-solving skills in information technology, to be piloted with different target groups within vocational and adult education. The training takes advantage of modules created in previous projects, e.g. 'Digital path to work,' where the competence-based digital badges visualise the learning outcomes and guide the competence-based learning process as a tool for assessment.

The pilot projects will ensure the students involved in the pilots develop basic ICT and data management skills and will familiarise trainers and teachers with digital open badge-driven learning. In the pilot projects of liberal adult education, the skills of trainers are also verified with special competence-based badges. The badge constellation of competences will be readjusted based on the experiences of pilot project instructors, teachers and students until published.

The 'Competitive Skills' process and structures of the national open badge constellation will be described in forthcoming research publications, and the model will be published via The Finnish Information Society Development Centre (Tieke), through which the system will also be centrally updated and managed in the future. The Tieke website will also contain the required framework of competence (determining the composition of learning objectives, core content and assessment criteria) for securing ICT-related problem-solving skills in non-degree-based training. This will allow an equal, egalitarian and transparent way of ensuring future ICT-skills in different types of training and different organisations. The model will be published with a Creative Commons licence and will be freely available to various training providers for noncommercial purposes.

Views to and Recommendations for the Future of VPL

In the digital era, VET institutions have emerged as transformational and flexible development environments. Several projects are developing and evolving, including a revision of the Europass framework, the New Europass and a standard to allow Europe-wide administration and learning management systems (European Union, 2018). The New Skills Agenda for Europe invites member States, social partners, industry and other stakeholders to work together on ten actions to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation, to make skills more visible and comparable and to improve skills intelligence and especially information for better career choices (European Union, 2018, p. 2).

In Finland, the CompLeap – A Learner Centered Digital Ecosystem of Competence Development -project (CSC, 2019) is answering the call to seek out better career choices with gamification. The list of related projects could continue indefinitely; change is evident. Finns are even building artificial intelligence (AI) applications in the public sector (Ministry of Finance, 2018) to serve digital learning ecosystems that allow learning to be omnipresent.

Digitalisation itself refers to a process in which analogue information and processes are converted into digital format (Brenner & Kreiss, 2014). Day-to-day digital technologies blur the everyday lives of individuals and communities. Digitalisation is transforming society, changing how we work, communicate, learn and share knowledge. The literature is replete with evidence examining these changes in working life, with concurrent investigations occurring in all disciplines. Due to these significant changes, it has become increasingly important to develop solutions that meet the requirements of digitised working life. Such

applications must increase individuals' capabilities using a sustainable form of competence-based education and training. We simply can no longer afford to begin training from ground zero. (Brauer, 2019, p. 20)

The Berlin Declaration and open badges
To finalise this discussion of different examples, I will collate the Berlin Declaration of VPL sections 1–5 (*in italics*) to the process model of digital open badge-driven learning (Brauer, 2019).

1.1 *VPL should have clear entry points for the individual which are widely advocated and accessible for all.*
Digital open badge-driven learning should provide a home base with easily accessible learning materials and instructions for the badge application process available 24/7 online. However, different stakeholders have various value expectations of badges. In digital open badge-driven learning, scaffolding is not considered to be a stage, but an ongoing activity penetrating different stages, structures and layers of the entire process. In practice, digital open badges offer to inform and improve both professional development and professional knowledge constructions.
Learning pathways should include collaboration between different badge stakeholders *so that VPL and its results hold value and are highly recognised in society.* Frameworks of knowledge provide differing interpretations of national and personal development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). Finland aims to create and establish different national digital badge systems to support the recognition and acknowledgment of professional competences in different disciplines.

2.4 *The costs and benefits of VPL, including its social and economic impact, should be monitored, analysed and shared with stakeholders.*
Digital open badges and the competence-based approach seek to meet the requirements of social and technological change while tackling economic challenges (Vähäsantanen, 2015) by means of effective and meaningful criterion-based competence development. Piloted badges are open to anyone interested in developing digital pedagogy and vocational training. Badges introduce new ways to validate learning outcomes already on the learning pathway, e.g. in liberal education.
"...lifelong learners to take modules at different institutions and obtain their degree. Flexible education is no longer based on educational programmes with a fixed curriculum" (Kerver & Riksen, 2016, p. 6). The whole concept of education management and its principles of funding should be reviewed. The Teacher's Badges Project aims to create and establish a national digital badge system to support information management in Finland.

3.1 *Quality assurance mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that assessment tools and instruments are valid, reliable, fair and sustainable.*
The assessment process is transparent and egalitarian as trainers collaboratively facilitate the application and issuing process in the open badge management system. *Trusted, recognised and updatable instruments should enable flexible, individualised pathways and accommodate the diversity of candidates and learning paths.* A carefully designed badge constellation promotes the student's progress, allowing remarkable customisation. Knight and Casilli (2012) describe the scale of customisation required for

such learning processes as a connected learning ecology serving as a bridge between contexts and alternative learning channels. *Validation procedures need to refer to agreed standards, such as NQFs and/or sector-specific standards, expressed in terms of learning outcomes.*

3.4   *Validation pathways need to be modular, transparent and comprehensible at all stages of the process in order to allow for flexible work and education pathways.*
The outcome of the digital badging *should grant credits which allow for exemptions to shorten study time, lead to a full or partial qualification or open up new routes to education and work. Specialist training and certification of assessors is needed in order to ensure an open-minded, competent and non-discriminatory approach.* However, badges may also be granted by different peer-review processes and in working life cooperatation. Identification, recognition and validation of different competences by badging *should be accessible without any prerequisite level of formal qualification.*

4.1   *Information provision and raised awareness of the value of people's informal learning experiences should be embedded in learning, career guidance and work.*
Accessible guidance and support needs to be provided before, during and after all phases of validation in the badge-driven learning process. Badges provide *visible entry points to the validation scheme which are available both online and offline. Specialist training and certification/validation for VPL* and badging *practitioners is necessary. Assessors should ensure an objective, fair and transparent process during the assessment and certification phases.*

5.1.   *VPL should facilitate an individual's personal development and mobility horizontally, vertically and diagonally within and between organisations, sectors and/or countries.*
Digital open badges should be *transparent, reliable and trustworthy for all stakeholders.* Where relevant, badges *need to be equivalent to formal learning certificates so that they hold the same value in the job market and education system and form solid building blocks for further learning and work pathways. Based on the achieved badges, further learning options can be offered and adapted to the individual's learning preferences. The individual learner is empowered through being an active agent in the creation of functional learning and working pathways, alongside the responsibilities of the education system, employers and social partners.*
Further, *laws and regulations need to be reviewed on a regular basis to allow the evolution of the VPL system* and digital open badging practices.

Closing Remarks
In conclusion, digital open badges promise to empower VPL further. They also permit efficient use of learning analytics and inspire gamification that supports consistent competence development as a continuum in the post-validation process. A hybrid model of competence recognition and gamified learning applications could maximize impacts on learner achievement and enhance intrinsic motivation for competence development (Brauer et al., 2017; Reid et al., 2015). As Devedžić and Jovanović (2015) point out, digital badges are "fully aligned with and supportive of the notion of Digital Learning Ecosystems (Laanpere, Pata, Normak, & Poldoja, 2014) and the practice of Connected Learning (Ito et al., 2013) that put the learner in the center and give them significant freedom and flexibility in shaping their learning environments" (p. 605). This should be in line also with the future development of

assessment practices that would identify the skills acquired in working and everyday life while acknowledging the whole set of competences acquired e.g. within the new EuroPass - documentary.

There is an evident need to develop knowledge regarding novel approaches to professional learning and competence development. Networked European research efforts are needed to develop accredited badging practices as a pan-European or even global system for "identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying the learning outcomes of individuals acquired within and outside formal education and training" as presented in the preamble of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning (3rd VPL Biennale, 2019, p. 1). The development of badging practices is still in the hands of a few. I wish to invite everyone involved with digital open badges and related research to join shared efforts to promote the new era of competence-based approach and digital open badges.

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#Showyourskills **3.5**

Analogue and digital multilingual tools for validating transversal and professional skills with low-skilled, migrants and refugees in Germany

Martin Noack and Lena Wittenbrink

Germany's dual vocational education and training system links learning occupations at companies with learning in vocational schools. Successfully completing the dual vocational training leads to a certified qualification that is highly valuable for labour market entry. This system of dual vocational training is highly recognized worldwide and hardly found outside of Europe. Nevertheless, this makes it more difficult to enter the German labour market for those who lack a recognized VET or HE qualification, such as immigrants and formally low-skilled workers.

Over the past five years, more than 1.1 million immigrants from non-European countries have fled to Germany. Around two-thirds of them are of working age (Brücker, 2018) and many of them have gained valuable experiences in their countries of origin. However, most of them cannot prove their work experience and job-specific competences with formal certifications (Libau & Salikutluk, 2016).

At the same time, not only immigrants face difficulties on the German labour market. In 2018, the German labour market included 5.22 million formally low-skilled workers between the ages of 25 and 65, representing 13.8 percent of the German working population in this age range (BMBF Datenportal, 2020). Just like migrants formally low-skilled workers also have problems entering the labour market, which is also reflected in their unemployment rate: in 2018, the unemployment rate of people with low levels of formal qualification was five times as high as that of people who held a formal VET or HE qualification (17.4 and 3.4 percent respectively; IAB, 2019).

For both, migrants and formally low-skilled Germans, integration into the German labour market is essential for securing their own livelihood as well as for social participation and sustainable integration. Therefore, recognising the skills and competences these people have – regardless of how they acquired them, seems increasingly important.

Currently there is no common framework or standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning across educational sectors in Germany. To encourage this recognition process, tools and instruments are needed that reliably identify, document and assess the candidates' skills and competences. Although different instruments have been developed in the past, they greatly differ with respect to quality, transparency and the relevance of the results. Most of these instruments were found to be too theoretical, language-heavy, time-consuming and complex for use with migrants and formally low-skilled workers. Also, instruments have to meet the requirements of counsellors, who often have tight timeframes and diverse purposes for their sessions (Döring et al., 2015). This is where

the four validation tools developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung come in: they shed light on migrants' and formally low-skilled workers' competences and, being multilingual and flexible, they help improve individual career guidance practice.

Two of these instruments are analogue and support direct, face-to-face interaction between the candidate and counsellor. The other two tools are digital and can support assessment independently from a guided situation.

See a video with the introduction to the four *#showyourskills instruments: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7q8Y4KJkJM0*

Figure 1: The four #showyourskills instruments

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Each instrument can be applied individually. However, all four tools complement one another and can therefore also be used sequentially: with the analogue set of *Competence Cards*, the candidate and counsellor can identify and document the candidate's personal, social and further transversal skills. Based on this individual profile the *Career Cards* help identifying suitable occupational domains that should be considered for a more in-depth assessment of the candidate's occupational skills. Apart from this aim to validate the candidate's skills and competences, the Competence and Career Cards can serve a second function: they can also be used as a guidance tool for orientation on the German labour market, particularly with respect to candidates who have not yet gained substantial working experience. The third tool, *my-professional-experience.org* offers an easy and quick self-assessment of vocational skills in thirty VET occupations. The digital self-assessment of prior experience is based on pictures that show job-related activities in all occupational fields of the respective occupation. This 5-minute self-check shows whether and where a further objective assessment is warranted, which is where the digital competence test, *MYSKILLS*, comes into play. Requiring 3-4 hours, it offers a reliable and scientifically well-founded assessment of the candidates' occupational knowledge based on about 125 to 150 technical questions. These four instruments are combined under the label #showyourskills and are illustrated in Figure 1. In the following, the tools and their development will be described in detail. At the end of this chapter, we will

examine them with regard to the criteria stated in § 3 of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning, which addresses instruments and procedures.

Competence Cards

The set of forty-nine Competence Cards were developed in cooperation with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). The set is a flexible, low-threshold and strengths-oriented tool that helps identify a candidate's social, personal and transversal methodological competences. Each skill or competence is represented by one card. The front side, oriented towards the client, gives a description of the competence, a visualisation and a translation into eight languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Farsi, and Tigrinya. Therefore, this tool is also very valuable for overcoming language barriers. On the back side, which is oriented towards the guide, the cards provide a second description in simple language, plausibility check questions and references to other related cards in the set. An example of a Competence Card is shown in Figure 2. The whole set consists of:

- 19 cards for personal skills (e.g. decision-making abilities, resilience)
- 10 cards for social skills (e.g. helpfulness, communication skills)
- 20 cards for methodological skills (e.g. analytical skills, time management)
- 11 cards for interests
- 13 supplemental cards
  - o Additional information on language tests, individual skills, etc.
  - o Rating cards for proficiency level (+, ++, +++)
- 2-page user manual
- 2 documentation templates

Figure 2: Front and back of the "Teamwork skills" Competence Card
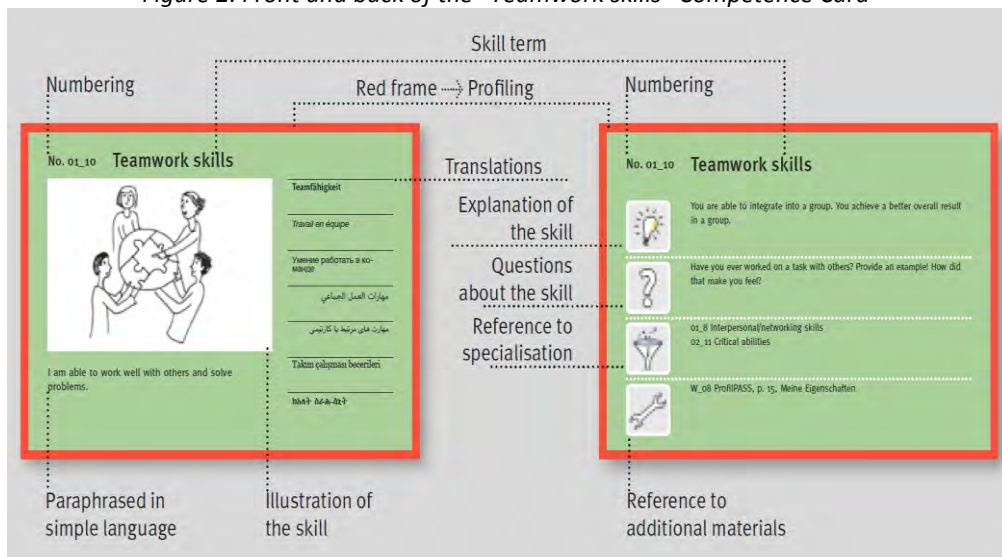
© Bertelsmann Stiftung

One way of applying these cards is handing all Competence Cards to the candidate and asking him/her to arrange them in rows defined by the three rating cards +, ++ and +++, which reflect the individual level of competence. Competences that do not apply to the candidate can be

put aside and are not considered further. This creates a strengths-oriented profile. During this process, the counsellor can ask the questions on the back or ask for specific situations in which a certain competence became relevant in order to evaluate the plausibility of the self-assessment. This is especially important as some candidates tend to overestimate their skills while others tend to underestimate them.

A second approach is to ask the candidate to simply choose seven skills that apply most to him/her, which is especially useful if limited time is available for the process. The interest cards may be used in the beginning of a session as an ice breaker, as it is often easier for clients to talk about their hobbies and interests than about their distinctive competences. Through this, the candidate can get familiar with the cards and the counsellor can explain that the aim of the session is not to rate as many competences with +++ as possible, but to create a realistic individual profile of competences. Only this makes it possible to find the best individually suitable work and learning pathway for the candidate.

In the end, the skills and competences (and their levels) are recorded in a documentation template which the candidate can keep and, for example, attach to an application. After this counselling session, a next step may be an appointment with a public employment agent. To facilitate this next counselling as well as the placement on the labour market, those skills and competences from the Competence Cards that also form part of the Public Employment Services (PES) profiling are highlighted by a red frame on the respective cards. The documentation template can highlight these, in order to help the PES-agents input these skills into their candidate management tool.

After competences have been identified and documented with the Competence Cards, the candidate's positive list of transversal skills and competences builds a foundation for further orientation. Applying the Career Cards can now provide detailed information about which occupations may be suitable for the candidate.

See a video on the Competence Cards training video for counsellors: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-wKoXlLBfA*

Development process

The Competence Cards were developed in cooperation with the seven non-statutory welfare organisations responsible for providing immigration counselling to adult immigrants (Arbeiterwohlfahrt (Worker's Welfare), Deutscher Caritasverband (German Caritas Association), Paritätischer Gesamtverband (General Association for Equality), Deutsches Rotes Kreuz (German Red Cross), Diakonie (social Protestant church welfare organisation), Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland (Central Welfare Office of Jews in Germany), Bund der Vertriebenen (Federation of Expellees)), and with the support of the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). Over the course of one and a half years, around 60 migration counsellors, labour market integration practitioners and skills assessment experts were involved. The development process started with a needs analysis and covered multiple focus group workshops. After a test phase, the prototype was finalised.

Evaluation and outreach

A survey at the end of the test phase with about sixty practitioners and experts showed that in the large majority of cases, clients correctly interpreted the visualisations and explanatory descriptions. It also revealed that the additional explanations, questions, and references were very helpful during the skills identification process. A subsequent external evaluation

based on a survey of 202 users and consecutive in-depth interviews confirmed the added value of the Competence Cards far beyond the initial target context of immigration counselling for adults. The Competence Cards are not only used in immigration counselling for adult immigrants. They are also applied in public employment services and further public offices with a focus on refugee coordination, education management, or welfare management. Beyond this, education providers as well as adult education centres (e.g., in courses for German as a second language or in education counselling) and volunteer initiatives use the Competence Cards.

At the time of the study, the vast majority of counsellors had already used the cards in one in four guidance sessions and fifty-seven percent planned to use them more frequently in the future (Grebe, Schüren & Ekert, 2016). Other feedback included "Working with the Competence Cards, …
… I got to know clients faster and better." (65%)
… improved documentation of identified competences." (63%)
… prepared clients very well for consecutive profiling by the PES." (61%)
… allowed for more practical counselling." (57%)
… allowed for more flexible arrangement of counselling." (48%)
… offered concrete support, e.g., in compiling applications or CVs." (48%)
… allowed for more time-effective counselling." (40%)

Useful feedback for further improving the Competence Cards, like the inclusion of a number of additional cards, the exchange of a few visualisations and the optimisation of the translations was incorporated into the second edition of the Competence Cards.
The last user survey , performed at the beginning of 2017 and which included 549 practitioners (Täntzler, 2017), provided additional insights, specifying that the Competence Cards were mainly used for professional orientation (74%), placement in jobs or education (68%), identification and documentation of competences (34%), with migrants (73%), non-migrants (65%) and refugees (22%), low-skilled (88%) and high-skilled (32%), unemployed (91%) and employed (16%) clients. These results are reflected in the current widespread use of the Competence Cards. Currently, the 6th edition is available and almost 14,000 sets have been ordered and distributed since December 2015. In addition, the free set of cut-out cards has been downloaded more than 6,500 times. In response to requests from abroad, we have already translated the Competence Cards into English and, in cooperation with Fondazione Brodolini, Italian. A Slovakian and Czech version were developed by the EU-funded Competence Caleidoscope project. The Competence Cards are now available in Spanish, Russian, French, and Turkish and can be downloaded on the website *www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/competence-cards*. Also, the European Commission's EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country nationals now includes some of the Competence Card visualisations in its transversal skills section.

Focus on 30 occupations with defined occupational fields of application
The remaining three instruments pertain specifically to occupational competences and focus particularly on thirty VET occupations. In selecting these thirty occupations, we took both the likely, previous experience of the target groups and the demand on the German labour market into account. The thirty occupations are shown in Figure 3.

Automotive and Logistics		Hospitality, Foodstuffs, Textiles and Trade	
1	Driver (bus and lorry)	16	Alteration tailor
2	Motor vehicle mechatronics technician – specialising in automotive technology	17	Baker
3	Specialist for furniture, kitchen and relocation services	18	Cook
4	Warehouse operator	19	Sales assistant for retail services
Construction, Wood, Agriculture and Landscaping		20	Salesperson specialising in foodstuffs (bakery)
5	Building and object coater	21	Specialist in food technology
6	Building construction worker – specialising in masonry work	22	Specialist in the hospitality services industry
7	Construction finishing worker – specialising in tiles and mosaics	**IT and Electronics**	
8	Civil engineering worker – specialising in road building	23	Electronics technician – specialised in energy and building technology
9	Farmer	24	Industrial electrician – specialising in industrial engineering
10	Gardener – specialising in horticulture and landscaping	25	Information technology specialist – specialising in systems integration
11	Joiner	**Metal and plastic**	
Health, Personal Hygiene and Cleaning		26	Mechanic in plastics and rubber processing
12	Care assistant to older people	27	Machine and plant operator
13	Hairdresser	28	Plant mechanic for sanitary, heating and air conditioning systems
14	Housekeeper	29	Skilled metal worker – specialising in structural engineering
15	Industrial cleaner	30	Tinsmith

Competence models were developed for all thirty occupations. These occcupations were split up into modules and all required skills were allocated from the formal VET regulation to the modules. These modules represent occupational fields of application. They are loosely oriented on existing partial qualifications defined by a variety of educational providers and, in sum, cover the full vocational proficiency as specified in the VET frameworks. These occupational fields of application are separate and independent occupational areas of work and correspond to typical assignments at companies. For example, the profession "Cook" is divided into the following occupational fields:

- Dishwashing and cleaning tasks
- Preparing and making salads and starters (appetisers)
- Making side dishes and soups
- Making desserts
- Preparing meat and fish dishes
- Supervising kitchen operations
- Waiting tables

Each competence model was developed by a team of experts from the respective profession, such as master tradespersons, trainers and vocational schoolteachers. After determining the occupational fields of application, the developers defined typical occupational situations comprised of action and work processes that take place within these fields. Then, they assigned the work-specific competences relevant in these situations. Afterwards, representatives of companies validated the competence models, including the occupational fields of application, representative situations of action and work processes, as well as the respective competences. They particularly examined whether these were occupationally relevant and comprehensive. Based on the results of these validation workshops, the competence models were finalised. The resulting job-specific competence models are the basis of the remaining three instruments.

Career Cards
The Career Cards compliment the Competence Cards by identifying occupational working fields and concrete occupations that match the candidate's competence profile. Therefore, the Career Cards offer orientation on the labour market and are the basis of further vocational skills assessment. Like the Competence Cards, they were also developed in cooperation with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb).
The Career Cards consist of 5 elements:
- – 48 Sector Cards
- – 30 Occupation Cards
- – 23 Supplemental cards:
  - o potential scenarios for how to use the cards
  - o rating cards for
    - ▪ proficiency level (+, ++, +++)
    - ▪ duration of experience (< year, 1-5 years, 5 years +)
    - ▪ desire to work in the sector or occupation (☺, ☺ ☺, ☺ ☺ ☺)
  - o information about the German VET system
  - o useful links to further information
- – 2-page user manual
- – 2 documentation templates

The Sector Cards provide an overview of all occupational fields in the German VET system. Figure 4 shows an example of a Sector Card. The pictures on the front of the illustrate sample activities from four different occupations in that sector. As on the Competence Cards, the sectors on the cards have also been translated into English, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Farsi, and Tigrinya. On the back of the Sector Cards, the counsellor will find further information, for example, regarding different sub-areas of activity and sample occupations as well as existing occupational qualifications from I-VET to C-VET, through to academic professions in the respective field.
The Occupation Cards provide more detailed information about specific occupations. The front of the Occupation Cards shows pictures of activities in four occupational fields of application in the specific occupation and provide a translation of the occupation into the aforementioned languages. The back provides further information about these occupations, such as typical types of employers, workplaces and further training possibilities, as well as the ten most relevant transversal skills for this occupation form the set of Competence Cards, according to employers and experts. This makes it easy to combine the two instruments and

to provide a clearer perspective for the next career path steps. In addition, the respective occupational fields of application are listed on the back of the Occupation Cards. An example of an Occupation Card is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Front and back of the "Chemistry, Pharmacy" Sector Card

Figure 5: Front & back of "Specialist in the hotel and restaurant industry", Occupation Card

The application of the Career Cards is most promising in a one-on-one consulting context with a counsellor. However, both the Competence and the Career Cards can be used in group settings. Based on suggestions from the Competence Card evaluation, PowerPoint slides with the cards have been made available on the Bertelsmann Stiftung website for this purpose.

The Scenario Cards provide a wide variety of examples of how the Career Cards (and Competence Cards) can be applied. Instructions on the back of each Scenario Card explain the aim of the application, the required cards and how the scenario is conducted step by step. In scenarios I, II, and III, the Career Cards play the main role as they are rated in terms of preferences, duration of work experience and proficiency level. In scenario II, for example, the rating cards for the proficiency level (+, ++, +++) and the duration of prior experience (< year, 1-5 years, 5 years +) are arranged on vertical and horizontal axes. The candidate uses the Sector Cards to visualise the individual employment history. Thus, this scenario reveals the extent of the general occupational experiences. The backside of the Sector Cards may reveal individual occupations relevant for further analysis. In contrast, scenario IV and V combine the use of the Career and Competence Cards and focus on matches between occupations and required competences, while scenario VI and VIII concentrate on competence analyses with the Competence Cards alone. After each scenario, the respective documentation templates for the Career and/or Competence Cards can be used to record the results.

The interactive process of assessing individual competences and skills, as well as matching professions, can be followed by a more detailed digital self-assessment of the work experience in the thirty different occupations on the *www.my-professional-experience.org* website as described in the next section.

Development process

The Career Cards were developed in cooperation with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). Similar to the development process for the Competence Cards, a series of three practitioner workshops that followed a needs analysis survey with over 500 respondents (Täntzler, 2017) were also the basis of the development of the set of Career Cards.

Evaluation and outreach

In the development of the Career Cards, twenty-one test users confirmed that, using the Career Cards, they were better able to discover the professional potential of clients (81%), the cards were helpful for everyday counselling practice (71%) and the cards helped overcome language barriers (67%). This is also reflected in the demand for the cards; since their publication in April 2019, more than 2,000 sets of Career Cards have been ordered and distributed.

My-professional-experience.org

After having identified which German VET professions correspond best to the candidates work biography, the digital self-assessment tool, *my-professional-experience.org*, can provide deeper insight into the extent of prior experience in the respective occupational fields of application. The self-assessment can be guided by an employment agent or counsellor but can also be conducted autonomously. On the free website, the candidate can currently choose between the following languages: German, English, Turkish, Russian, Arabic and Farsi. The self-assessment can be conducted on a computer as well as on a smart phone or tablet PC. On the website, the candidate can, as with the Career Cards, choose from thirty occupations. A filter system with broad economic sectors from agriculture and landscaping to textiles and trade helps the candidate find and select the suitable occupation(s). Going through the occupations, the candidate can add as many occupations to his/her personal self-check list as they like.

After selecting an occupation and clicking "Start now", the candidate is guided through the self-assessment. Each self-assessment captures work experience in four to seven occupational fields of application. For each field the candidate is shown a number of pictures of typical job-specific tasks. Along with a short description of this vocational activity, the candidate is asked the question, "How often have you done this?" The answer is provided on a four-level scale ranging from "0: never", "1 to 9 times: not often", "10 to 49 times: often" to "50+ times: very often". A question from the "Motor vehicle mechatronics technician" occupation is illustrated in Figure 6. There is no time limit, and the candidate can jump back one question to change the last answer, if necessary. In total, the candidate answers between twenty and forty of these questions, depending on the selected occupation. The candidate can switch the language at any time during the self-assessment. The self-assessment takes around five minutes to complete. Then a summary of the self-assessment is shown. This represents the personal results in each of the four to seven occupational fields of application of the respective occupation. An example of this summary in the "Sales assistant for retail services" occupation is provided in Figure 7. From here, the candidate can either save the results, in any of the six languages, as a PDF, print or email them or share them on social media.

Figure 6: Question from the "Motor vehicle mechatronics technician" occupation from my-professional-experience.org

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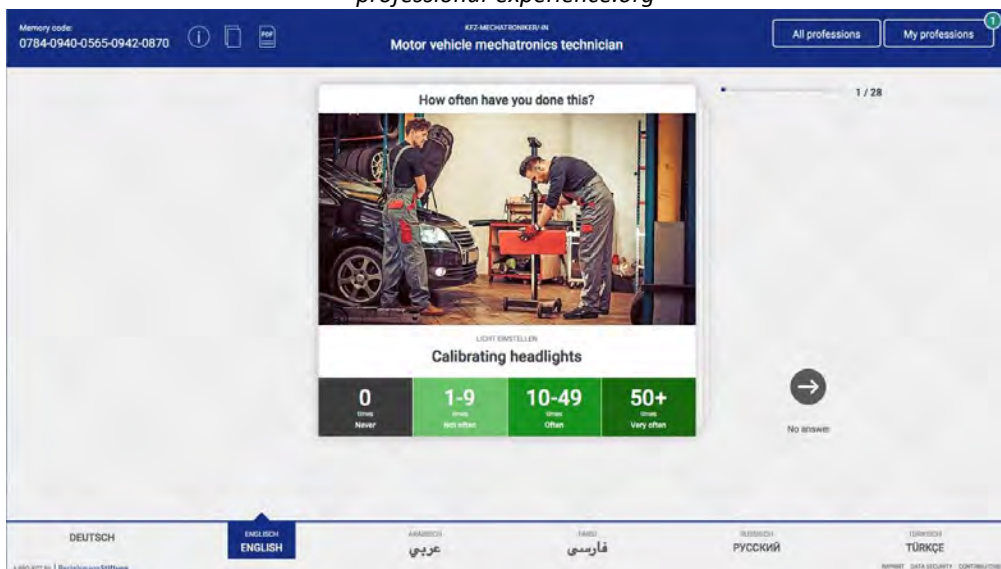
As this assessment is very time-efficient, the client can complete the self-assessment in various occupations in which he or she believes they have experience. This easy and quick self-assessment provides a valuable indication of whether (and in which occupation) a further, in-depth competence assessment is warranted for the candidate. The MYSKILLS competence test is recommended when the candidate has carried out the job-specific activities "often" in at least one of the occupational fields of application. The MYSKILLS test then will provide hard proof of the self-assessment.

Figure 7: Self-assessment for the "Sales assistant for retail services" occupation
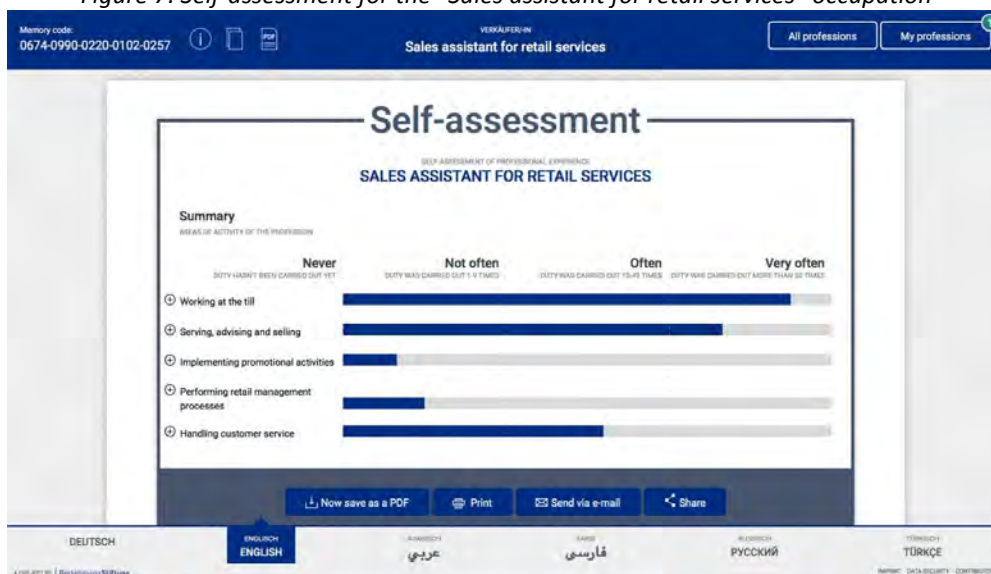
Development process

The development of my-professional-experience.org was also a user-guided process. Bertelsmann Stiftung started the conception of the website in close collaboration with two counsellors from AWO and the PES and in cooperation with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). Two series of short telephone interviews with ten counsellors, each from different guidance contexts, provided additional feedback on two preliminary versions of the tool. The pictures and descriptions were each quality assured by at least three professional experts.

Evaluation and outreach

The digital tool was tested by forty counsellors who confirmed the added value and provided positive feedback on the usability and impact of the tool. Their clients had, on average, a poor command of the German language (A2), one to three years of professional experience and three quarters of them were formally low-skilled workers. The results of the survey showed that clients enjoyed working with the tool (91%) and that it allowed for a faster evaluation of clients' professional experience (94%). Moreover, they demonstrated that the tool facilitated decisions regarding further competence diagnostics (93%) and helped with respect to finding internships and jobs for clients (93%). Therefore, 94% of the testers stated that they would recommend the tool to others. These positive initial results are reflected in the strong interest and wide use of the tool. Since its go-live with the first eight occupations in December 2017, my-professional-experience.org has been visited by more than 49,000 unique users. A further survey of website users is planned for 2020/2021. In 2019, in partnership with GIZ, the tool was adapted and localized for the Kosovan system and transferred to the local website, *https://pervoja-ime-profesionale.org/.* Further adaptation and localisation opportunities are currently being explored.

Video 3 shows a short introduction to my-professional-experience.org: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aUem_Hr1xA*

In contrast to the Competence and Career Cards as well as the my-professional-experience.org tool, MYSKILLS is neither a potential analysis nor a self-assessment. The MYSKILLS competence tests capture specific practical knowledge in thirty occupations. The candidate needs to apply (informally and non-formally) acquired competences in order to answer job-specific questions from real operational situations. Therefore, these tests are meant for people with several years of work experience, ideally verified by applying the Career Cards and via my-professional-experience.org. MYSKILLS was developed in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*).

After having completed the prior steps of (guided) self-assessment, the candidate can review the results with an employment agent. At this appointment, based, for example, on the recommendation of my-professional-experience.org, the agent will advise the client as to whether the MYSKILLS test might be a meaningful next step. Together, they decide which test for which of the thirty occupations the candidate should take and in which language; again, the options include German, English, Turkish, Russian, Arabic and Farsi. Then, the candidate is invited to take the test which is administered in the local area at one of the 156 German Federal Employment Agency locations. The test is proctored by a member of the Occupational Psychological Service and takes up to four hours plus breaks. During the objective testing, no technical aids (e.g., smartphones) are allowed. An introductory video and tutorial preceding the test introduce the context and test procedure and explain the question formats using simple sample questions. This is to ensure the candidate is familiar with the digital technology and the test process.

Figure 8: Sample question from the "Building and object coater" occupation from MYSKILLS

A wall with wallpaper has stains and open seams. You want to repair this. What tools do you need?
Please click on **2 to 4 areas.**

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As with my-professional-experience.org, the MYSKILLS tests are also based on competence models that split the occupation in four to seven occupational fields of application. These fields also constitute the test sections the candidate is automatically guided through. Every occupational field consists of four to six typical work situations. Every situation is visualised

with a short video clip that shows a specific job-related action. The following questions pertain to this situation. Many questions also include pictures which make the test easier to understand and less language intensive. The candidate answers between twenty-five to thirty questions in each field. Therefore, one test is comprised of around 125 to 150 questions. These are "closed" question formats and the candidate is asked, for example, to put the work steps into the right order, identify errors in the illustrated situations, or answer technical questions about the work equipment or occupational safety. During the test, the candidate can take breaks. Figure 8 shows a sample question in which the correct answer needs to be selected on an image.

After completing the test, the results are automatically calculated, and are then discussed by the candidate and the PES agent in a follow-up appointment. The test results are documented for each occupational field on a five-level scale ranging from zero to four points. Sample results are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Sample results from the "Building construction worker – specialised in masonry work" occupation from MYSKILLS

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A result of one point corresponds to the competences of a trained assistant. In this case, a probationary period, working with an employer, may be useful in order to get a deeper insight of the candidate's skills. A result of two points suggests that the candidate can be employed as an experienced worker. Three and four points indicate that the candidate is a qualified worker or specialist. Thus, the results explicitly show in which occupational field(s) a candidate is ready to work. At the same time, they illustrate in which occupational field(s) he/she needs further training. This opens up the opportunity for specific further qualification that ideally closes the individual gap to the full qualification in the respective occupation in a step-by-step process. In this respect, the system of partial qualification, which now is growing in Germany and developing towards greater national and cross-provider integration, is particularly valuable.

See Video 4 - Introduction to MYSKILLS: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8NOIbA2gjg

Development process

MYSKILLS was developed in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit). The development of the MYSKILLS tests was based on quality standards that were defined by the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). The development process involved over 400 experts from chambers, VET schools, companies, and industry associations. The process is illustrated in Figure 10. Based on the competence models, the development teams developed test items before they produced photos and films for the tests. In a validation workshop, the items were discussed and finalised with further experts. After this, researchers from Humboldt University and the Free University of Berlin checked the psychometric quality of the items. The development teams then finalised the test items based on the psychometric feedback before they were translated into the five foreign languages. After the technical implementation, we conducted a field test with the target group in which the language accuracy and comprehensibility of the items were checked. Based on this, the items were adjusted accordingly where necessary. Then, the Federal Employment Agency conducted a pre-test and collected data on each of the thirty tests. Based on this, statistical analyses were conducted by the German Institute for International Educational Research in order to verify the test quality. In a final step, we selected the final items in terms of statistics and content and finalised the tests by defining the thresholds for the scale of the results, again in workshops with field experts.

Figure 10: Development process of the MYSKILLS tests

1. Selection of experts (development teams) for each test
2. Development of the competence model
3. Validation of the competence model with further professional experts
4. Development of test items and production of videos and pictures
5. Validation of the items with further professional experts
6. Checking items for psychometric quality
7. Translation of the tests into five languages and technical implementation
8. Field test with the target group
9. Pre-test and data collection for statistical verification of the test quality
10. Selection of final items and definition of thresholds for grading

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Evaluation and outreach

To date, complex and resource-intensive skills validation procedures were difficult to scale up to large numbers of clients. Whereas most instruments are based on a one-on-one setting, with MYSKILLS the test proctoring ratio is significantly lower: up to around twenty persons can be tested at once. Testing started in November 2017, with eight occupations, and was

expanded in batches to include all thirty occupations by May 2019, resulting in more than 12,000 candidates having been tested with MYSKILLS by June 2019. Each month, around 500 clients take a MYSKILLS test, proving their occupational knowledge in their native language, and thus, gain better access to training and the labour market. In principle, MYSKILLS has the potential to be upscaled to tens of thousands of candidates per year, as the tests are available at all 156 German PES offices (plus 600 branch offices) and 408 Job Centres. A comprehensive external evaluation is planned for 2020/2021.

Outlook

All instruments are continuously further developed and are explored with new target groups. An experiment with GIZ Turkey training counsellor from the Red Crescent to use the first three instruments is planned for 2020. A localisation of the Competence and Career Cards for Spain is also currently being explored by the Fundación Bertelsmann. The website my-professional-experience.org will be further developed and more features will be added. Moreover, we have received requests to extend the tool so it can not only be used to assess individual work experiences, but also job requirements. We are currently looking into that possibility.

To increase the potential target group, we are about to translate the two digital tools, my-professional-experience.org and MYSKILLS, into six additional languages (Bulgarian, French, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish). Apart from the German Federal Employment agency, the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) is also now piloting the MYSKILLS tests in Vienna with a variety of target groups aiming towards either qualification or placement. In addition, the German-speaking community in Belgium has successfully piloted MYSKILLS and is interested in further application.

The approach of focussing on occupational fields of application is most promising when combined with further training that fill the gap between the individual proficiency level and the requirements to fully qualify for an occupation. Therefore, we are collaborating with educational institutions and are currently developing similar competence models in 16 further occupations, including occupations in the commerce sector. The educational institutions will develop partial qualification modules based on the occupational fields of application, which will enable candidates to gradually qualify in all occupational fields of an occupation. Thus, completing these partial qualifications, followed by finishing the external examination (administered, for example, by the chambers of crafts, industry and trade), may bridge the gap to full, formal certification, which will support candidates in sustainably participating in working life and truly integrate into society.

Appraisal of the #showyourskills instruments in the context of the Berlin Declaration

We summarise how the described instruments can be evaluated in terms of fulfilling the requirements specified in § 3 "Procedures and Instruments" of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning. The demands are summarised below:

3.1 Quality assurance for validity, reliability, fairness, and sustainability.
3.2 Individual pathways for candidates through trusted, updatable instruments.
3.3 Agreed upon standards of validation procedures.
3.4 Modular, transparent, and comprehensible validation pathways.
3.5 Outcome in the form of qualification or new routes into work and education.
3.6 Certification of assessors.
3.7 Accessibility without a prerequisite level of formal qualification.

Table 1 summarises the information from the prior sections and shows firstly, that particularly the approach of focussing on occupational fields of application contributes greatly towards improving the impact of the validation process on the individual's continued education and career path. Secondly, the uptake has benefitted from the instruments' multilingual nature, the user-driven development and the rigorous quality assurance processes that make it possible for disadvantaged learners in particular to profit from the great potential of validation. These tools do lack one important quality: that they do not directly provide formal certification. However, formal education institutions in charge of certification in Germany can use these tools, or their results, respectively, to inform their formal recognition practices.

Table 1: Evaluation of the four instruments with respect to § 3 "Procedures and Instruments" of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning

	Competence Cards	Career Cards	My-professional-experience.org	MYSKILLS
3.1	• Development based on expert interviews and comparison of existing instruments • Practitioner involvement via 3 focus groups (Workshop-Cycle) • Translation with dual control • Finalising cards based on test phase and online survey (n = 60) 2015 • Optimising cards based on online evaluation survey (n = 196) 2016 • Further refinement based on second online evaluation survey (n = 549) 2017	• Development based on survey of potential users (n = 549) 2017 • 3 practitioner workshops (3x n = 20) for concept development, prototype testing, and final adaptation • Translation with dual control • Field test • Quality assurance of depicted situations and images by 3 independent experts • Assignment of required competences to Occupation Cards by cross-referencing expert ratings, ESCO skills classification and analysis of 63,800 online job postings • Evaluation/ usability test (n = 22) 2018	• Development based on MYSKILLS competence models and practitioner interviews (n = 10) • Quality assurance of images by at least 3 job-specific experts • Selection of depicted situations with at least 3 job-specific experts • Translation with dual control • Field test in all 6 languages • Survey of testers (n = 39) • Formative evaluation with preliminary version of 8 occupations (n = 222) 2018	• Involvement of 400 occupational experts • Development based on scientific quality standards defined by the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb) • 2 validation workshops with experts in every occupation • Training item writing for developers with professors from 2 universities • Psychometric review of items by professors and scientists • Translation with dual control • Field test in all 6 languages • Pre-testing with 200-300 participants per occupation, by statistical data-analysis • Selection final items and definition of thresholds based on statistical properties
3.2	• 14,000 sets in use Germany-wide by public	• 2,000 sets in use Germany-wide by public	• Nearly 50,000 unique users already	• All 156 public employment service

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	Competence Cards	Career Cards	My-professional-experience.org	MYSKILLS
	employment agents, adult education providers, migration counsellor and others • 6,500 downloads • CC-BY-SA license allows for adaptation of cards, images and languages at any time • Already transferred to multiple countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Australia, Kosovo, Italy, and others)	employment agents, adult education providers, migration counsellor and others	• Additional occupations and languages can be added following the same standardized procedure • Transfer to Kosovo complete • Transfer to Turkey in progress • 6 additional languages are currently being implemented	agencies are providing the MYSKILLS tests • Employer associations are promoting the tests • Large enterprises report successful application • New items can be developed with limited effort based on the standardized item development process • 12,000 tests already conducted • Transfer to Austria and Belgium in progress • 6 additional languages are currently being implemented
3.3	• Set includes 20 transversal skills used in public employment services profiling (these competences are highlighted with red frames)		• Represent content of official VET frameworks and regulations	
3.4	• Documentation template allows for assigning possible next steps after transversal competence documentation, e.g. contact with PES agent, writing CV or progress to further analysis (incl. using Career Cards)	• Scenarios describe different applications, e.g. combination with transversal skills documentation (Competence Cards) • Occupation Cards contain links to self-assessment tool my-professional-experience.org for further in-depth analysis of vocational skills	• Results page contains recommendation regarding potential further testing through MYSKILLS	• Separate results for 4-7 occupational fields of application per occupation • Guidance manuals help PES agent to decide which next steps to recommend to the client
3.5	• Identification and documentation: higher awareness of competences and skills • Labour market orientation		• Documented individual self-assessment of vocational …	• 2 pages test results describe level of proficiency in 4-7 occupational fields …
	Competence Cards	**Career Cards**	**My-professional-experience.org**	**MYSKILLS**

continued **3.5**	• Support in writing CVs	… experience in 30 occupations • Results for 4-7 occupational fields of application per occupation in multiple languages can be downloaded separately • Next steps page contains links to job portals, formal recognition institutions, training providers and others	… of application • Possible next steps: internship, job placement, further partial qualification training, recommendation to follow pathway to formal recognition
3.6	• 2-page user manual • Instructions videos • Scenario cards support the counselling process • Training available from experienced counsellors • Prior experience as a counsellor is beneficial but not necessarily required	• 2 instruction videos • Tool can be used also independently by client	• Highly standardised testing • Supervision by a qualified member of the Occupational Psychological Service
3.7	All 4 instruments were specially developed for people without formal education. All instruments are multilingual and available to a wide variety of clients. All 4 instruments are free of charge to the candidate.		

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Support Structures

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Ernesto Villalba

Access to guidance is essential for learners navigating validation procedures. A combination of face-to-face support and online tools and information form a core component of any functioning VPL system. Supporting structures include also training for practitioners.

Five principles cover the support structures for designing and utilizing the systematics of Validation of Prior Learning.

A. Information provision and awareness raising of the value of people's informal and non-formal learning experiences should be embedded in learning, career guidance and work.

Why is it important?

Validation constitutes a fundamental pillar of lifelong learning. It makes education and training pathways more flexible and provides a bridge between education, third sector and labour market organisations (Cedefop, 2015; Villalba and Bjornavold, 2017). Validation arrangements, in order to realise their full potential, need to be an integral part of the countries' infrastructure for learning and employment.

Validation works alongside other social services in supporting individuals to fulfil their potential. Coordinating validation and other services, specially career guidance services, would benefit from setting up clear links between the different services. This requires political will, agreement between political partners and broad societal support (Cedefop, 2019). Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns need to work at national, regional and local levels. Referrals from guidance services and public employment services help recruitment and prepare individuals for validation. NGOs and third sector organisations are instrumental in making validation available to disadvantaged individuals. The integration of validation with other services will determine the value and usefulness of its outcomes for learning and career progression.

Where is it working well?

In the majority of EU countries, the institution carrying out the validation provides the supporting guidance for validation (European Commission, Cedefop and ICF international, 2019). In several countries, Public Employment Services (PES) and other organisations cooperate or are involved in the validation process. Cité des Métiers[141] is an example of a space for advice and resource materials providing career advice and professional development for individuals, including referrals to validation. Cité des Métiers exists in nine

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[141] *http://www.reseaucitesdesmetiers.com/eng/index.php*

countries: France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Canada, Chile, Mauritius and Belgium. In Finland, competence-based qualifications are integrated into guidance and career counselling (Karttunnen, 2019). In the French-speaking part of Belgium, partnerships exist with guidance professionals from PES (Popovic, 2019).

B. Accessible guidance and support need to be provided before, during and after all phases of validation.

Why is it important?
Validation is a process that requires support not only through the identification, documentation, assessment and certification phases, but also before and after validation has been carried out. Guidance helps people to make the best use of the possibilities valuation offers with the purpose of supporting individual autonomy and career development. Individuals, especially those disadvantaged, need support at all stages of the process. They need to be informed on what to expect and the potential benefits as well as to manage expectations for the validation outcomes. Individuals need guidance in identifying relevant learning experiences. They need assistance in translating their variety of experiences into learning outcomes that can be documented and assessed. They need help in creating adequate documentation. They need to prepare for assessment and understand the certification process. They need to be prepared to make full use of their knowledge, skills and competences validated.

The different information and support on services, stages, tools, formats should be presented to the individual on a need-to-know basis, without unnecessary complications when their case does not require. Guidance needs to be adapted with a different level of complexity and professional involvement depending on individual's needs (Cedefop, 2019). It is also important to note that the individual should be able to stop the process of validation at any point in time, without prejudice of losing all the work already done (Cedefop, 2015). Accessible guidance means that people can access, independently of age, employment or activity status the services, which implies that cost should not be a barrier either.

Where is it working well?
Validation arrangements tend to be established with some support structures and some guidance associated with it. In Europe, practically all countries which offer validation provide it with guidance and counselling. In many cases it is compulsory to have guidance for the candidates (European Commission, Cedefop and ICF international, 2019). In Switzerland, for example, before entering the validation procedure, two compulsory information events must be attended. Guidance is normally offered on an individual basis adapted to the specific needs of the individual (Salini, 2019). In France, the regional information points (PRC) provide guidance and counselling in an integrated manner that is personalised and free. Based on the advice given by PRCs, individuals can be oriented towards validation or other types of mechanisms (Mathou, 2019).

C. There should be visible entry points to the validation scheme, which are available both online and offline.

Why is it important?
Individual need to experience the validation process without unnecessary hurdles in their way. It is important to keep the administrative burden and barriers to a minimum, to make

validation more accessible and easier. Visible entry points are important requirements, but they need to work within a coherent structure, in which coordination and coherence across different services is assured. The different phases of the process should work together in a unified manner, in the best possible way to realise individual's full potential (Cedefop, 2019). Validation support should be made available in different forms and formats, through different channels. Different modes of delivery will better adapt to the specific individual's needs. Having the possibility to have both on-line and off-line support will increase the possibilities for individuals to engage in validation. In order to reach the most disadvantaged it is necessary to involve local communities and to have support available locally. At the same time, difficult to reach and less densely populated areas would benefit from having on-line access to support.

Where is it working well?
A combination of on-line and off-line support tools exists for validation in several countries. On-line services tend to be the first way of becoming acquainted with validation. In Denmark, a guidance web portal[142] provides general information about validation of prior learning (Husted, 2019). In the Flemish speaking region of Belgium, a website[143], informs the public about the different opportunities for validation (De Rick, 2019). The canton of Zurich offers candidates a supporting online instrument, which navigates them through the entire procedure and can be used to list their competences. These online tools are accompanied by local support and guidance in the centres that provide the validation (Salini, 2019). In Portugal, the Qualifica centres are local-level structures that are embedded in a wide range of entities (i.e. public, private, profit-making organisations as well as non-governmental/civil society organisations). They offer services of guidance and validation within the framework for the recognition, validation and certification of competencies, RVCC (Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências) (Guimarães, 2019).

D. Specialist training and certification/validation for VPL practitioners is necessary

Why is it important?
Trust in validation largely depends on the work carried out by the practitioners and professionals directly involved with validation candidates. Trust can only be achieved through training and professionalization of practitioners that assure the quality of the process. Thus, one of the crucial supporting structures for validation is the training and certification of practitioners.
Different practitioners will need different specialised skills, while having a good understanding and vision of the overall process and its connection to other services (including career guidance). Making visible the learning acquired through experience outside formal education institutions requires a deep understanding of learning and existing qualification standards, the context in which validation is taking place and the possible outcomes achievable. The VPL practitioner has to be prepared to provide information on the process as well as prepare the individual for the assessment phase, supporting the individual in the collection of evidence and assisting them in deciding when to advance to the next phase.

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142 https://www.ug.dk
143 http://www.erkennenvancompetenties.be

In addition, practitioners are faced with a multitude of individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences. It is important for them to be trained in multi-cultural understanding and other soft skills that allow them to provide adequate support.

Where is it working well?
Provision of training for validation practitioners is something that still needs to be further developed. In Europe, requirements are more usual in validation whereas in guidance there is a more diversified situation across countries (European Commission, Cedefop, ICF International, 2019). Training is compulsory in Belgium. In the Flemish speaking community higher education associations organise in-house training and provide in-house support to validation practitioners. Training is carried out annually both for assessors and for guidance practitioners. (De Rick, 2019). In the French-speaking community, the Consortium on validation delivers training to evaluators and staff involved in management (Popovic, 2019). In France and Luxembourg, there is specific training for guidance and counsellors (Mathou, 2019; Duchemin, 2019). In Portugal, some practitioners are trying to organise themselves in order to form communities of practice and to develop sessions for reflecting upon work achieved (Guimarães, 2019).

A. Assessors should ensure an objective, fair and transparent process during the assessment and certification phases.

Why is it important?
It is important that procedures are of high quality and credible. Credibility of the validation output depends to a large extent on the validity, reliability and quality of the assessment. In the assessment phase, the individuals' learning outcomes are confirmed against relevant standards by an authorised body. This process of confirmation requires neutrality of the assessor(s). Professionalization and training for the assessor (see point 4.4) becomes a crucial element of a quality validation process. The assessor should not be linked in any way to the individual being assessed, reducing the possibilities for bias (Cedefop, 2015).
The process of validation is also a process of self-awareness and realisation; while delving deeper into one's experiences, emotional links might develop inevitably between the advisor and the individual. Separating the roles of the assessor and the advisor at the stages of assessment and certification might create a better distinction between formative and summative assessments. While the guidance practitioner can focus on supporting the individual and making learning a priority in the identification and documentation phases, in the assessment and certification phases the assessor can focus on evaluating learning outcomes against standards. This differentiation also reduces the amount of time that assessors need to invest per individual and will allow for further specialization of both assessors and guidance practitioner. At the same time, having both working together will permit that fair treatment and individualisation of the procedure is assured.
In addition, the process needs to be transparent and clear from the beginning and individuals and society need to understand the process of certification. Stakeholder involvement in designing and implementing validation will facilitate their trust in the system and confidence on its results.

Where is it working well?
Most of the countries differentiate between counsellors and assessors. They tend to have different skills profiles and qualifications. At the same time, certain amount of common

understanding of validation procedure is required (Cedefop, 2019). In Spain, guidance practitioners cannot participate as assessors in the same call for validation; they provide advice to applicants and write a report for the evaluation committee that is not binding for the evaluation team (Vale, 2019). In the *Haute Ecoles* in francophone Belgium, guidance practitioners are trained to accompany VAE candidates throughout the process and they sit in the jury as observers and might provide additional information in the application being examined (Popovic, 2019).

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Further information and sources*: www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation/inventory*

The VPL option for Adults in Switzerland

4.1

Support on the pathway to a formal vocational qualification

Deli Salini and Patrizia Salzmann

Skilled and knowledgeable citizens are essential not just from a social and socio-political perspective, but also economically. Individuals lacking formal qualifications at the upper-secondary VET level are at high risk of becoming unemployed, and they are more often dependent on social welfare than are those with such qualifications (OFS, 2015). Although the percentage of individuals without formal qualifications has decreased in recent years, in Switzerland, about 400,000 adults aged 25 to 54 did not hold a formal vocational qualification in 2014 (SEFRI, 2014; Wettstein, 2015). Given that certain sectors, such as the healthcare sector (Conseil federal, 2017), are suffering from significant workforce shortages, it has become a priority of Swiss educational policy to improve the conditions for adults to obtain a formal vocational qualification.

Validation of Prior Learning[144] (VPL) is one of several pathways for adults in Switzerland to obtain a formal qualification of initial vocational education and training[145] (IVET), that is, a Federal VET diploma (FDVET) or a Federal VET certificate (FCVET). This contribution will describe the VPL option and how it is embedded in the broader framework of IVET for adults in Switzerland. In particular, we will address forms of support offered to adults who choose the VPL option. First, we will outline the Swiss educational system. Secondly, we will discuss policies relevant to VPL procedures in Switzerland, both in general and in IVET, and describe the different pathways for adults in Switzerland to obtain a formal IVET qualification at the upper-secondary level. The VPL procedure will be presented and then we will describe the forms of support offered to adults who choose this option. In the conclusion, we discuss how VPL practices and in particular, the support structure for applicants are consistent with the principles of the Berlin Declaration.

The Swiss educational system

From an organisational and decision-making point of view, the Swiss educational system is very complex. This also applies to VPL practices. Furthermore, a number of key national factors should be taken into account when considering the Swiss perspective on validation: the federalism, the quadrilingualism[146] and the shared responsibility for education between the Confederation and the cantons (OFS/BFS, 2002).

In the Swiss educational system, at the upper-secondary level, people attend either vocational education and training (VET) or a general education school (i.e. a baccalaureate school or a specialised school; see Figure 1).

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144 In Switzerland, this option is officially called 'Validation of non-formal and informal learning' (VNIL; SERI, 2019).
145 In Switzerland, this corresponds to the upper secondary VET level.
146 The four official languages in Switzerland are German, French, Italian and Romansh.

Figure 1. The Swiss education system
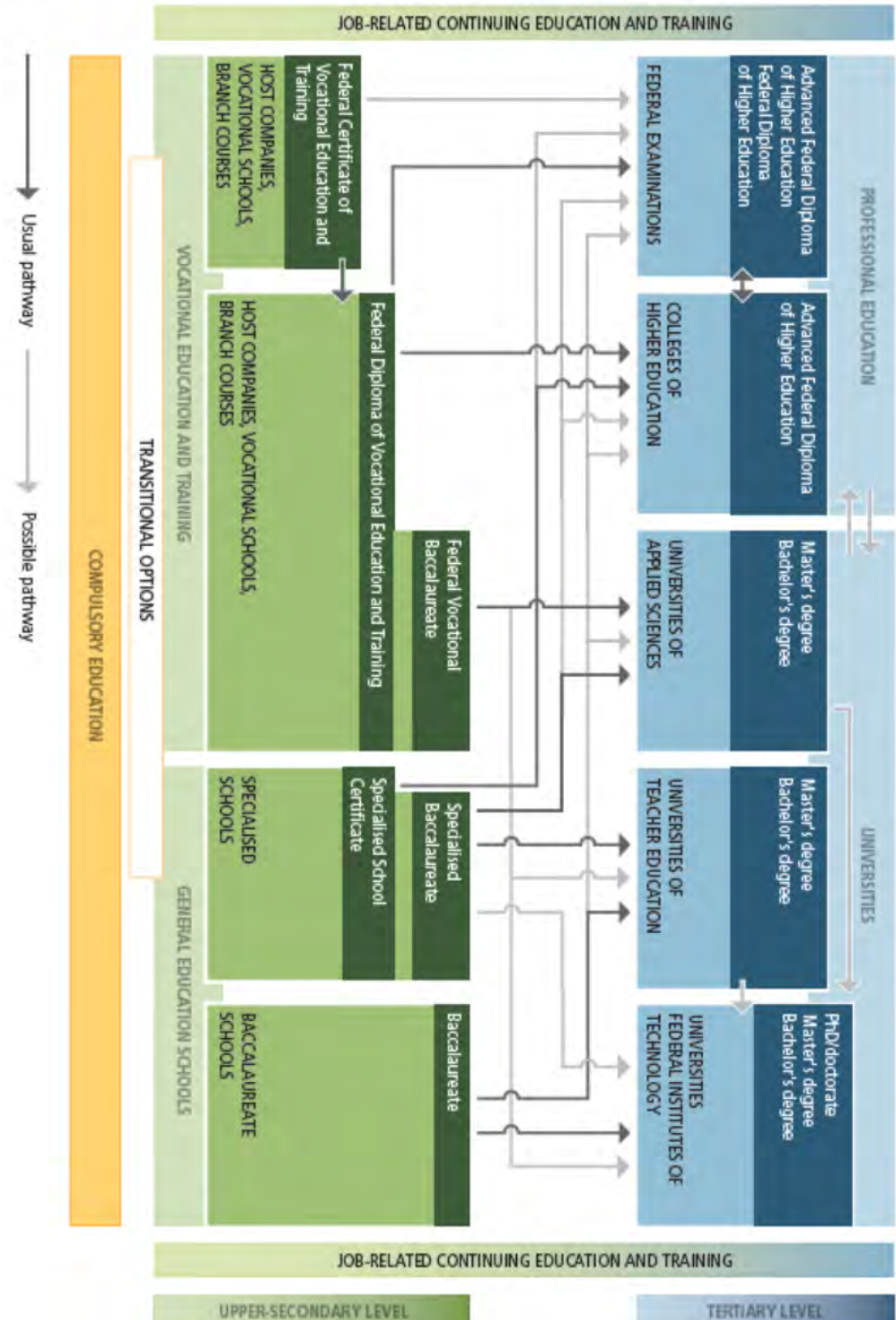
Source: SERI, 2019

VET provides learners with the competencies needed to work in a specific occupation. Three or four-year VET programmes lead to the FDVET and two-year VET programmes lead to the FCVET (with the option to enrol directly in a three- or four-year VET programme). Swiss tertiary-level education is composed of professional education sector and university sector (i.e. cantonal universities, two federal institutes of technology, universities of teacher education and universities of applied sciences). The professional education and training sector is intended for professionals who wish to specialise in a given field after completion of the upper-secondary VET with an FDVET, and hold managerial positions. This sector allows access to different Federal or Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education. Also, people holding a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate can direct access universities of applied sciences and take an examination to enter a university or a federal institute of technology.

The Swiss educational system is highly permeable. It allows switching between vocational/professional pathways and general education/university pathways. It also offers a wide range of job-related continuing education and training courses at all levels (SERI, 2019). The Confederation, the cantons and professional organisations are collectively responsible for the provision of vocational and professional education and training (VPET).

Recognition and validation of prior learning as an inherent part of Swiss educational politics
In Switzerland, VPL has increasingly been incorporated as an inherent part of educational policies (Salini, Weber Guisan & Tsandev, 2020). Various documents and initiatives (policy guidelines and objectives for promotion of education, research and innovation for 2013–2016 and 2017–2020, defined by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI); the 2017 Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training; and the Vision 2030 of VPET) stress the importance of recognising prior non-formal and informal learning outcomes, regardless of how they have been achieved.

From 2013 to 2017, the SERI conducted a project, entitled 'Vocational Qualification and Career Change for Adults', aimed at improving the conditions for adults to obtain a formal vocational qualification and at increasing the number of vocational qualifications awarded to adults at the upper-secondary level. VPL was embedded in the context of this project. This project focused not only on the VPL option to obtain a Federal VET diploma or certificate without having to complete a regular VET programme with final examinations, but also on all pathways available to adults to obtain a formal vocational qualification.

VPL procedures are applied in each part of the educational system, especially in VET, but not in the third sector or in labour policies. The national legal framework in VET is based on a) the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA, SR 412.10) and the Federal Vocational and Professional Education and Training Ordinance (VPETO, SR 412.101), which came into force on January 1, 2004. The VPETA (art. 9.2, 17.5, 33, 34.2 and 35) opened the way for validation, which by law is an 'other qualification procedure'. That is, besides qualification procedures with final examinations, the SERI recognises 'other qualification procedures', which include procedures that are generally not covered by VET ordinances but are nevertheless suitable for competency assessment. These may be standardised for specific groups of people and regulated in corresponding VET ordinances (VPETO, art. 31).

Based on the VPETA and the VPETO, as well as on a national validation project (Salini, Voit & ICF, 2016), national validation guidelines for IVET (upper-secondary level) were established

in 2010 (OFFT[147], 2010). These guidelines constituted a very important step in developing and implementing VPL in the IVET sector. They were abrogated and have currently been replaced by the handbook 'Initial Vocational Education and Training for Adults' (SEFRI, 2017) and the new 'Guide for the Recognition of Prior Learning' (SEFRI, 2018). These new documents stress that while the VPL option is a specific way for experienced adults to obtain a Federal VET diploma or certificate without having to complete a regular VET programme with final examinations, different forms of recognition and validation of prior learning (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal) are possible in VPET. These modalities can also be combined (e.g. dispensation from parts of the VET programme or the qualification procedure) and are not only reserved for experienced adults (SERI, 2019). In this sense, it should be stressed that recognition and validation of prior learning that does not lead to certification (i.e. partial accreditation) exist in all IVET courses.

The process for adults to obtain a formal IVET qualification

Adults who wish to obtain a formal IVET qualification have at their disposal a range of different pathways, following the three steps presented in Figure 2: Education and training, Admission to a qualification procedure and the Qualification procedure. The Education and Training step is differentiated according to whether the process takes place within a formal/regulated VET programme or through work experience, plus preparatory courses or individual education. Qualification procedures can be divided into qualification procedures with a final examination, following an apprenticeship training or a preparatory course, and so-called 'other qualification procedures'. Two types of 'other qualification procedures' are currently regulated in Switzerland: split examinations and VPL.

Figure 2. The qualification process for adults
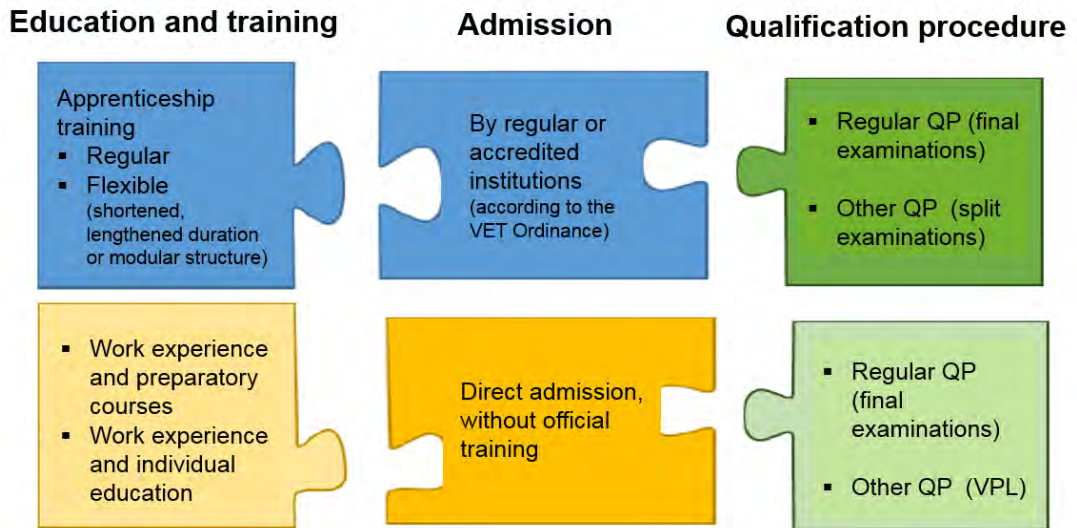
Elaborated from: SEFRI, 2017

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147 OFFT is the acronym of the "Office fédéral de la formation professionnelle et de la technologie", formerly coordinating the VET in Switzerland till 2012.

In the *split examination's qualification procedure*, the acquisition of required action competencies is not assessed in one final examination, but in several separate/split examinations. These can take place, for example, as part of modular training courses, at the end of each module. Specific success criteria must be defined. Split examinations are possible in vocational courses only, for which the responsible body has developed regulations and enforcement provisions recognised by the SERI.

Adults who choose the *validation of prior learning* option, officially called 'Validation of non-formal and informal learning' (VNIL) in Switzerland, do not enrol in a VET programme, nor do they take the final examination; instead, they work out a validation dossier (portfolio) or other demonstration modalities by means of which they provide evidence of their already-acquired competencies (SEFRI, 2018a). The VPL option was developed specifically for adults who have already gained at least five years of work experience and it is only available for a limited number of qualifications (SEFRI, 2018a; SERI, 2019). It is worthwhile noting that VPL is possible in professions for which the professional body responsible has formulated regulation and implementing provisions recognised by the SERI.

The general process of recognising prior learning outcomes

The process of recognising prior learning outcomes, defined by the SEFRI (2018), is valid not only for the VPL option reserved for adults with at least five years of work experience but also for all forms of recognition of prior learning (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal) that are possible in IVET. The cantonal adult qualification services support the adults throughout the process, which comprises four phases (also see Figure 3):

1. In the first phase, the cantonal adult qualification services help candidates to draw up an inventory of their non-formal (NF) and informal (IF) prior learning and to compile a file with their proofs of qualification.

2. In the second phase, the inventory created in the first phase is analysed by the candidates with the support of a specialist from the consultation service in order to identify already-acquired competencies (formal, non-formal, informal) relevant to the chosen vocational qualification that may be recognised and validated. The consultation service makes a recommendation on the possibilities of recognition of prior learning.

3. In the third phase, the candidates submit applications to the competent authorities for recognition of their already-acquired competencies. Depending on the form of recognition of prior learning, the competent authority may be the training institution, the vocational school or the canton. The inventory created in the first phase and the recommendation of the consultation service serve as the basis for the applications.

4. In the fourth phase, the applications are examined and, depending on the decision, recognition of prior learning take place.

Figure 3. Recognition of prior learning process.

Elaborated from SEFRI, 2018a

The VPL procedure

The VPL option is embedded in the recognition of the prior learning process, as shown in Figure 3. However, it involves specific steps (see Figure 4):

1. After the initial inventory phase (in the recognition of prior learning process described above), if the candidates have sufficient prerequisites for validation, and are intent on using that path, they draw up a dossier-*portfolio*, which may be complemented by other forms of demonstration, depending on the canton and profession. In this dossier, the candidate's already-acquired professional competencies and understanding of Language, Communication and Society (LCS)[148] are documented. These already-acquired learning outcomes may have been obtained through practical, professional or extra-professional experience or through specialised or general training.

2. The applicants submit a *VPL request*, which specifies the areas of competency that they want to have validated.

3. In the *assessment* phase, the documented professional and LCS competencies are evaluated and discussed with candidates during an interview. In the case of ambiguities or uncertainties as to the relevance of the dossier or the outcome of the interview, additional verification methods may be used. The results are recorded in the report.

4. On the basis of the assessment report, the competent cantonal authority decides on the validation of the already-acquired professional competencies and LCS competencies, indicating in a learning outcome certificate which competencies have been assessed as fulfilled or not fulfilled. If all goes well (which happens for the majority), applicants receive a validation of part of the competencies of the targeted qualification (they rarely get the whole title, even if it is possible). Competencies not fulfilled have to be completed by supplementary training. Together with the learning outcome certificate, candidates receive a recommendation on how to fill the gaps for competencies not fulfilled. However, they are free to decide how to fill these gaps. A new application for VPL may be submitted a maximum of two times after an initial failure in the qualification procedure. Fulfilled professional competencies and LCS competencies are taken into account and do not need to be reassessed.

Figure 4. Articulation between recognition and validation prior learning processes
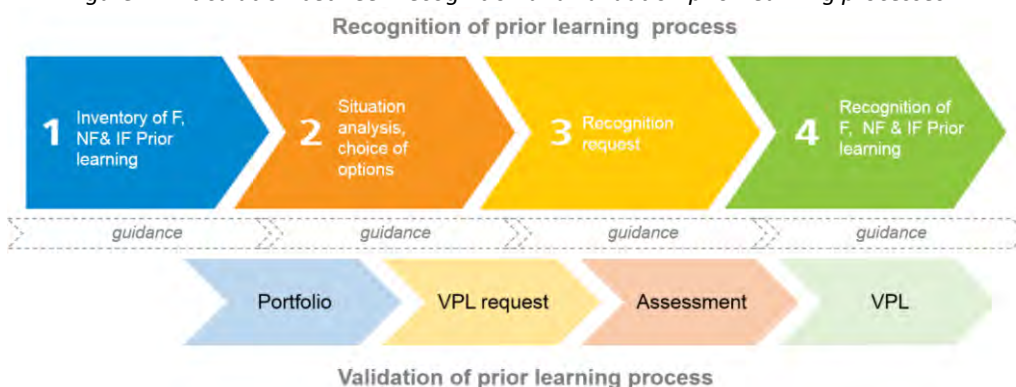
Elaborated from SEFRI, 2018a

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148 LCS subjects are taught within the framework of VET programmes to acquire skills in the area of 'Language', 'Communication' and 'Society'. This framework should not be confused with the term 'general education', which refers specifically to the academic subjects taught at baccalaureate schools, specialised schools and, to a much lesser extent, at federal vocational baccalaureate schools.

When all required professional competencies and LCS competencies have been evidenced and accredited, candidates are awarded the FDVET or FCVET. There is no difference between this diploma and a diploma obtained through formal VET.

Support structure for VPL applicants
The support structure for VPL applicants (for Swiss IVET qualifications) is organised in two frameworks:
- The VPL institutional framework on organisation, responsibilities, finances, official documents, standards and quality assurance.
- The VPL guidance framework, involving professionals, methods and tools.

1. *The VPL institutional framework*
As mentioned earlier, because of the law and the ordinance described above, there are two federal guidelines specifying strategies for the qualification procedures for adults in IVET: the 'Initial VET for Adults Handbook' (SEFRI, 2017) and the new 'Guide for the Recognition of Prior Learning' (SEFRI, 2018a). The guide describes the recognition and validation process and contains recommendations for the cantons and other responsible bodies, such as consulting services, vocational schools and training companies, as well as for the competent bodies responsible for training. Other specific documents are also available to promote concrete implementation of the different steps of VPL (e.g. SEFRI, 2018b).

The organisations and institutions involved in the Initial VET qualifications are a) cantonal or intercantonal consultation centres (portals) in charge of adult qualification procedures, which follow the applicants throughout the procedure; b) cantonal or delegate centres for guidance and skills audit, which support applicants in the preparation of the competencies dossier-portfolio; and c) professional organisations, which define and supervise the qualification standards.
Every canton has to set up an adult qualification service that follows and supports a candidate from the beginning until the end of the process. This service is in charge of coordinating all the other organisations and institutions that take part in the qualification process. Each canton also has to welcome adults who wish to obtain a VET diploma, regardless of pathway; inform them about the existing possibilities of all qualification procedures; advise them about the relevance of these procedures; inform them about the necessary prerequisites and financing methods; inform them about what is expected of them to complete a qualification procedure (including validation); organise the various phases thereof; and ensure contact with the VET cantonal services and all the professional organisations involved.
The qualification service can differ from canton to canton in size, operational methods and type of services. However, each canton has to guarantee service financing so that the informational aspect is free of charge on the national level. In addition, the service has to be located in an accessible location within an existing structure and to be highly visible to the interested public. The staff is made up of consulting and guidance professionals or by individuals with an equivalent education, all having an excellent knowledge of the qualification procedures. Lastly, the service has to be able to offer advice not only on validation procedures but also on the other possible qualification pathways.
The national professional organisations are responsible for defining the standards; ensuring the quality of vocational qualifications; reformulating the content of ordinances in terms of competencies, if necessary; establishing qualification profiles; and defining equitable and objective assessment criteria.

The quality assurance for validation is linked to general quality assurance mechanisms in the education system. The political structures, related legal bodies (Confederation, cantons) and professional organisations who are involved in vocational training are committed to quality control across the entire Swiss education system, as well as evaluation and review. In compliance with Article 61a of the Federal Constitution, the Confederation and the cantons undertake, within the limits of their respective competencies, to care jointly for the quality and the permeability of the Swiss education and training sector.

Finally, the funding of the validation practices in IVET is connected to the general funding VET framework. According to Article 53 of the VPETA, the 'other qualification procedures' are included in the federal lump sum subsidy that the cantons receive. This means that the validation procedures are funded under the same budget as VET formal programmes for young people. For the applicants, the recommendations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP/EDK 2005) state that basic occupational, educational and career guidance services are completely free of charge and that only the special or extended services can be charged to individuals. In this regard, the Swiss Conference of VET Offices suggests that cantons should bear the costs of the entire VPL procedure (including potential supplementary training) when the candidate does not hold any qualifications. In cases where validation is used to obtain an additional qualification, a part of the costs can be charged to the candidate (OFFT, 2010; CSFP/SBBK, 2007a & b). In fact, the majority of cantons follow these recommendations, but some cantons apply registration fees to the procedure and/or fees to access complementary training or certification, or for the methodological advice.

2. The VPL guidance framework

In Switzerland, guidance practices for the VPL are part of Lifelong Guidance's general adult-oriented practices, as is evident from both the general adult qualification policies and the recognition and validation specific policies for low-skilled adults. Usually, the professionals involved are experts both in general guidance and in specific guidance for VPL.

With variations at the cantonal level, which means that some cantons are more proactive than others are, the validation providers and stakeholders generally organise information events, conferences and workshops about validation practices. Furthermore, every year since 2013, the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) has organised a study day on the theme of validation, to which some actors from these practices (including advisors and interested adult educators) are invited. However, there is no active measure at the national level to improve awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners. It has been acknowledged, however, that those who are involved in validation procedures generally have a higher level of acceptance of them (Salini, Petrini & Voit, 2012).

With regard to the roles and qualification of VPL practitioners, there are counsellors (from guidance psychology or from adult education) and assessors. Their roles are clearly separated: the counsellor does not evaluate, and the assessor is not involved in the guidance phase. Currently, these professionals are mostly trained at the SFIVET. In addition, various institutions involved in the VPL offer some short training courses on the subject.

The counsellors follow the SFIVET CAS in Recognition and VPL for practitioners in information and advising. This qualification is based on a competency profile (in five fields) developed by SFIVET Research (Salini, Ghisla & Bonini, 2010). The training is organised into four modules: a) Methods of Demonstrating Prior Learning and Competencies; b) Ethics and Analysis of Professional Practices; c) Support, Design, Advice and Evaluation; and d) Professional Experience, acquired through internship or work experience in qualification or guidance centres.

The assessor training is addressed to professionals who are already trained in the standard qualification procedures. Their training structure is compulsory and has been developed through a federal project. It is based on a mixed format, which includes school training and preliminary or subsequent individual learning phases, and a strong interlink between theory and practice, based on the analysis and assessment of authentic VPL dossiers.

VPL guidance can vary in duration from service to service and is based on the needs of the public. Generally, it is offered on an individual basis. However, it is sometimes possible for small groups that wish to obtain the same title to receive guidance in a group. The guidance gives the candidate methodological indications on how to prepare the validation dossier, but it does not enter into the specifics of the content that has to be validated. The canton of Zurich (2017a; 2017b) offers candidates a supporting online instrument that takes them through the entire procedure and can be used to list their competencies. Before entering the procedure, two compulsory information events must be attended, however. At the first event, interested parties receive information on how to obtain a Federal VET Diploma and some general information about the validation procedure. At the second information event, they are given information on how best to compile the required validation portfolio.

On the subject of methodology, we underline that a specific methodology to make learning visible and reliable is necessary. This is because establishing a VPL portfolio is sometimes a baffling task for applicants. They have to switch from a declarative approach, which is typical of a classroom scenario, to a procedural approach, where it is necessary to demonstrate their competencies and experience. In this sense, the dossier-portfolio approach is a central (but not the only) methodology to demonstrate and evaluate competencies acquired by experience. In particular, this methodology enables the use of two types of evaluation: formative and summative.

Support instruments for the validation procedures (SEFRI, 2010) include guidelines to write the validation dossier, summarised below, and guidelines for the other demonstration and assessment methods, which we will explain below. In particular, the validation dossier-portfolio is a collection of descriptions and documents showing what the candidate has learned in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. At a minimum, it has to include:
- A request form specifying the candidate's personal data and the areas of the competency profile for which the candidate requests validation.
- A curriculum vitae.
- A systematic description of the experiences relating to the competencies to be validated and their correspondence with the professional area and general culture.
- Attachments: declarations from employers, training certificates, work certificates, or other accounts, such as examples of personal work.

In order to relate the candidates' experiences to the professional competencies of the qualification aimed for, the counsellors use particular interview forms to help the candidates identify and describe in the dossier-portfolio the implicit skills acquired in non-formal and informal situations. In fact, candidates are often unaware of those skills. In this regard, the VPL counsellors face two challenges:
- To get applicants to describe their experience in order to make the learning they acquired visible, using 'explication' techniques.
- To support the applicants in linking their experience to the competencies profile of the required diploma.

The particular interview forms used by the VPL counsellors are based on French and other international approaches to developing awareness and reflexivity in experiential learning situations. A synthesis is presented below of the suggestions given to candidates in the Geneva validation service and the indications given in the training of counsellors in validation at the SFIVET (Salini & ICF, 2014) to facilitate the written description of experiences.

- Select one or more meaningful examples of the competencies that have to be validated.
- Indicate the time and place in which the experience took place.
- Write in the first person: I did, I saw, I thought, I decided.
- Describe what in fact happened; also mention if choices were made and describe the other possibilities.
- Avoid generalisations ('in general', 'usually', 'you should').
- If there are regulations (rules, recipes, guidelines), explain how those were followed or adapted during the experience.
- Describe the instruments used (if any), and the people with whom you interacted. Specify how you interacted with them in the experience.
- Explain each step of the experience and underline each step.
- Show which documents (if any) constitute evidence of the experience (photos, notes, souvenirs, official documents, materials, etc.).

In addition to the dossier-portfolio, other forms of demonstration are used to support candidates who have more difficulty writing (Wöhler & Senn, 2015). These modalities are particularly developed by the Zurich cantonal adult qualification service (Salzmann, Salini, Tsandev & Weber Guisan, 2017). Thus, for some competency areas of the qualification concerned, candidates may demonstrate their competence by an oral report of experience, an on-the-job visit, or by project and order documentation.

With an *oral report of experience*, candidates can demonstrate a competency by means of the same tasks as those in a dossier-portfolio. The presentation consists of three elements: 1) description, 2) justification and 3) reflection. Candidates have 30 minutes for each task (20 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes to answer clarification questions). They may use presentation tools (such as PowerPoint, flipcharts or pin boards) as they like. The presentation dates are set up via the validation tool. There are two experts present for each oral report. The minutes of the presentation and conversation are kept by one of the experts. For the assessment, the same criteria apply as in the dossier-portfolio (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 17).

At an *on-the-job visit*, candidates can demonstrate specific professional competencies on the job. An expert will make the assessment on-site. At the end of the visit, the expert will ask questions based on the assessment criteria and, if necessary, ask for clarification regarding the content. It is possible for several such visits to be scheduled. Anywhere from two to four modules can be assessed per visit. Each module requires 30 minutes of observation plus a maximum of 5 minutes for questions. Minutes of the visit are kept. The expert will make one assessment per module (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 21). In order to conduct an on-the-job visit, the employer's consent must be obtained. Appointments are made via the validation tool. Before the start of the visit, a work plan must be prepared for the expert (a planning aid is available as a template).

The *project and order documentation* comprise a description of the professional and goal-oriented planning, execution and evaluation of a project or an order that requires networked application of several competencies (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, p.25).

Conclusions

In Switzerland, the importance of promoting VPL opportunities in the initial vocational training sector is embedded in all levels of national training policies and regulated by law. This means that the most important practices and efforts of the government for the implementation of VPL procedures take place in the IVET sector in particular, which has a high degree of formalisation of practices. This also explains why it is in this sector that the number of titles accessible by VPL – as well as the number of titles acquired by validation – is higher than in other sectors, although the qualification number acquired by validation is always rather low (Salini, Weber Guisan & Tsandev, 2020)

In particular, it should be stressed that in IVET all the full titles awarded for VPL are worded in the same way as those awarded for formal training. Consequently, their award does not lead to differences in the treatment of users in terms of social recognition on the basis of the access route to the title. With regard to the support structures of VPL, particularly in light of the Berlin Declaration, we underline that information provision and awareness raising of the value of people's informal and non-formal learning experiences are adequately embedded in career guidance but not yet in the school and work fields, except for specific sectors, such as health.

However, information about validation practices has still not been widely disseminated at the national and local levels, or in all of the sectors where they are possible. Therefore, the possibility of obtaining validation of professional experience is still relatively unknown to the general public. Moreover, there are dissimilarities across regions and sectors regarding the possibility of obtaining a qualification via validation, as well as in the way they are promoted and publicised. Some regions and sectors are proactive, while others tend to be more cautious and conservative.

In addition, the discussion surrounding validation often remains limited to the professionals involved, and it is not sufficiently shared with the public who might benefit from it. Furthermore, youth policies, employment strategies and policies for migrants do not systematically consider validation as a tool for social inclusion and unemployment prevention. Furthermore, if in the IVET sector the competences and roles of the assessors are clearly stated, the qualifications of those who work in information and guidance are generically defined, and do not permit the identification of the necessary level of competence. In this sense, a national forum for the discussion, sharing, elaboration and regulation of validation practices in all sectors seems to be required and should involve all stakeholders (including the third sector). Finally, except for rare exceptions, as in the canton of Zurich, ICT resources are not sufficiently used in validation practices.

In view of all the elements that we have reported on in this article, it follows that VPL practices in Switzerland, especially those relevant to the low-qualified public, are coherent with the principles of the Berlin Declaration. However, to improve the support structures for VPL candidates, it is necessary to a) improve the national information regarding recognition and validation practices, which is accessible mainly to 'stakeholder experts'; b) reduce the disparity between cantons with respect to the recognition and validation information and guidance; and c) augment the number of qualifications accessible by VPL.

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Coordinating Validation and Career Guidance

4.2

Ernesto Villalba and Antonio Ranieri [149]

Validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance can be considered as part of a set of services supporting people in their professional life and working transitions in a lifelong learning perspective. Considering the rapidly changing developments in technology, economy and labour markets and the continuous need to re-skill, change jobs and have career transitions for a large share of the population, ensuring synergies between validation and guidance policies has become of growing importance in the EU. This was the starting point of a Cedefop study[150] that looks into the relationship between validation and guidance and explores how improving coordination between them can facilitate a more holistic and coherent approach to the development of truly lifelong learning systems across Europe.

The Council resolution on lifelong guidance invites Member States to consider ways for 'enabling people to benefit from support in obtaining validation and recognition on the labour market of their formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in order to safeguard their employment and maintain their employability, in particular during the second part of their careers' (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 6). The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012) identifies information, guidance and counselling as a cornerstone of validation and this is reflected also in the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015).

So far, however, there is limited knowledge about the way the two concepts are interlinked and how to make them work together more efficiently. This was the conclusion of a thematic report of the validation inventory finalised in 2014 (Cedefop, European Commission, & ICF, 2014) that also highlighted that "It is problematic to draw overarching conclusions in relation to these areas, mainly due to the variation in approaches" that can be observed across countries (Ibid., p. 12).

The study aims at exploring in what way lifelong career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be better coordinated. What are the necessary conditions, synergies and benefits of linking validation of non-formal and informal learning with career guidance? How successful coordination between validation and guidance can be achieved taking into account the specific contextual conditions? How can coherence validation and guidance outputs be assured?

To this end, 13 case studies of practices were analysed (Annex 1) from 12 countries: Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Finland

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149 The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Cedefop.

150 This chapter is based on: Cedefop (2019). *Coordinating guidance and validation.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU. Research work supporting the study was carried out under a Cedefop's framework service by Mariya Dzhengozova (3s), Karim Luomi Messerer (3s), and Michael Richardson (ICF) and coordinated by Pedro Moreno da Fonseca (Cedefop) and Ernesto Villalba (Cedefop).

(two practices) and UK-Scotland. The country selection aimed to capture the different approaches in Europe to validation and career guidance and the extent of coordination between the two services. The case study framework included three main components:

a) Background in which the context underlying each practice is described,
b) Practical operation, describing how things happen on the ground and;
c) Overall assessment, where the study explores organisational and individual benefits as well as challenges and successes resulting from the different forms of relationship between validation and guidance.

The study included both desk and field work:

a) Literature review, including theoretical literature and information gathering through desk research on guidance and validation practices across the 12 selected countries.
b) Field research (site visits), including 13 case studies through individual interviews, focus group discussions and, when possible, direct observation. The aim of the case studies is not to describe national approaches of guidance or validation, but to illustrate how validation and guidance are connected within a practice. They also include beneficiaries' and practitioners' stories, that are brief testimonials illustrating different aspects of how practices were carried out.

Box 1. Definitions of validation and guidance

Validation is a formal process that makes learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings visible and 'usable' for the individual, irrespective of how or where it has been acquired. It consists of four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. At the end of the process an authorised body certifies that the individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard(Council of the European Union, 2012).

Career guidance includes a set of services which help people to manage their learning and professional choices. It enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.

Source: Council of the European Union, 2008.

The relationship between validation and guidance

Part of the difficulty in understanding the relationship between guidance and validation is the wide variety of approaches that can be observed across and within countries. Both, validation and guidance tend to be adaptable to the individual and there are no standardised approaches across Europe. Career guidance usually includes four main types of activity: informative; developing career management skills and autonomy; direct support and capacity building; and managing critical information and assuring quality (Ford, 2007). Validation includes four types of phases usually consecutive: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (Council of the European Union, 2012), although not all of these are included in all cases.

A second difficulty is the high degree of fragmentation the two services. This is more pronounced for career guidance, as it usually is offered by many different organisations such as education and training providers, public and private employment services, hiring agencies, local administrations, HR departments in enterprises, and NGOs (Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, OECD, & UNESCO, 2019). Validation, on the other hand tend to be more

linked to education and training institutions, although an increasing number of initiatives are carried out by labour market authorities or voluntary organisations (Cedefop, European Commission, & ICF, 2019).

This fragmentation has important implications for the coordination of the two services as one crucial aspect of the relationship between validation and career guidance is the institutional setting in which they are embedded. If these services are provided by different organisations, career guidance may signpost individuals towards taking up validation or flexible training offers. In this way, guidance can act as a referral to validation, making people aware of the opportunities and benefits of validation and offering them adjusted learning solutions. In addition to providing a referral to validation, guidance practitioners can help individuals to use relevant labour market information and effectively choose occupational pathways in line with their preferences and potential. Thus, the scope and reach of guidance practices is wider than validation.

One important component of the relationship between validation and guidance, refers to the starting point of the process:

a) Is the person directly contacting a validation provider with the clear aim to undergo a validation procedure?
b) Does the person first contact other services to clarify the possibilities and, based on that, make further career or personal development decisions which may include undergoing validation?

In the first case, guidance activities will directly connect to validation (usually referred to as 'guidance *during* validation'). In the second case, guidance will precede the decision for validation ('guidance *before* validation').

When people get directly in contact with a validation provider they may proceed straight away to an assessment or examination of their competences to obtain a certification or qualification, provided they already possess the required competences. If they do not readily possess the requirements obtain a certification/qualification, the validation provider directs people to complementary training before they can undergo an assessment or examination. This kind of support to validation is what the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (hereafter inventory on validation) has explored and found that in most existing validation practices guidance for the process is provided (Cedefop, European Commission, & ICF, 2019).

In the second case, people may not be aware of the possibility of undergoing validation until they receive career guidance (from PES, chambers of commerce or other relevant career counselling services). Depending on the practitioners (and services) in charge of providing guidance, the activities to clarify a person's options for learning and career development may involve, to a different extent, screening and profiling and/or a skills audit. The person may then be referred to a validation provider, that may be formal or informal depending on people' needs and on the form of cooperation between services. Upon completing validation, people improve their chances of (re)integrating into the labour market thanks to the qualifications or certifications obtained. A person receiving only a partial qualification may decide on further training and may therefore need follow-up guidance. Figure 1 presents a general model for connecting validation and guidance based on the practices explored.

The review of the literature and case studies show a high degree of similarity between 'identification' and 'documentation' phases of validation and the counselling and assessment

services within career guidance activities. In many instances, lifelong guidance process starts by identifying a person's strengths and interests, which will normally include identifying and documenting prior learning. In a similar way, documentation collected during the guidance process can be used as input for a validation process.

Figure 1 – Connecting validation and guidance
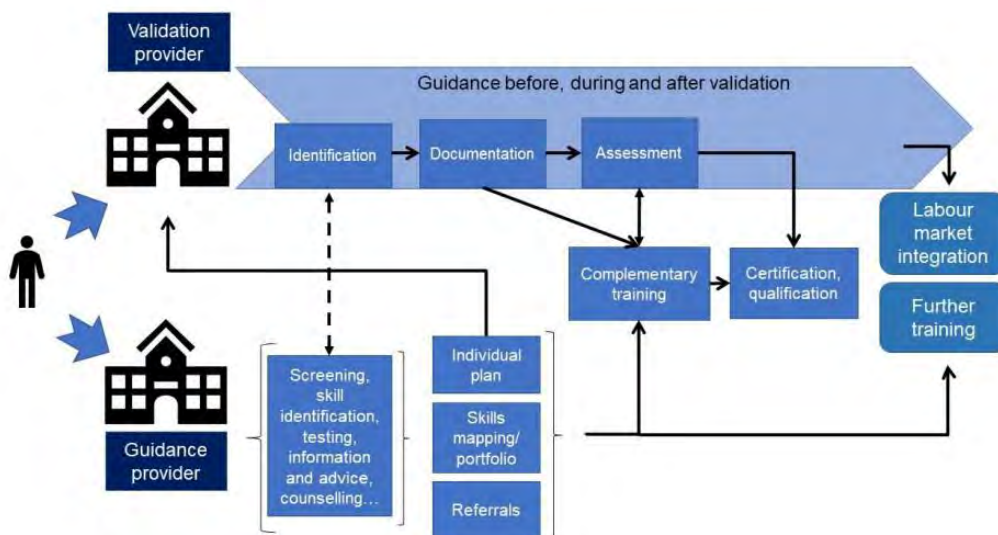
Results from assessment developed in career guidance (particularly identifying skills, attitudes and preferences) may support certification to a higher or lower degree depending on how they are set. On the other hand, assessment and certification carried out within validation share fewer similarities with corresponding career guidance activities. This may be related to the formal components included in validation. Validation usually formally require that the assessment is carried out by an accredited assessor; while in guidance assessment of competences might be done in a more informal, self-directed manner. Seemingly, certification tends to be managed by specific authorities that are in many instances outside the remit of institutions providing guidance. It is important to note, however, that also many validation processes focus on the provision of competence maps or training opportunities tailored to the individual and might not lead to certification.

Forms of relationship between validation and guidance
The 13 practices reviewed permit to gather an understanding of the different forms of coordination between validation and guidance which depend on the governance mechanisms determined by the responsible institution in the country. Characteristics of these governance mechanisms include:
  A. Types of actors involved (for example, PES, chambers, trade unions, employers, educational institutions, municipalities, NGOs) and division of tasks and responsibilities among them.
  B. Degree of centralisation. A practice may be centralised (initiated, managed, monitored and mainly financed by the state) or driven by regional/local/sectoral partnerships (and co-funded by the state, EU, the respective region or sector). In the case of centralised

practices, the connection between validation and guidance may be enshrined in national legislation, policy or strategy.

C. Degree of formalisation of the relationship between validation and guidance. Coordination between validation and guidance can be achieved in at least three ways:

   (i) through formal cooperation between independent services – it is usually based on a shared framework and/or systematic referrals (signposting between services) including standardised procedures.

   (ii) through informal cooperation between independent services – there are no frameworks in place to ensure institutional cooperation, therefore personal cooperation between guidance practitioners and staff at validation providers plays an important role.

   (iii) through integration of services – in this case, usually, a single organisation provides validation and guidance with interwoven activities offering guidance at each stage of the practice.

The mechanisms that shape the coordination between validation and guidance determine how and to what extent coherence is achieved. Coherence reflects how well guidance and validation services exchange information with one another (degree of harmonisation of procedures), and how well the two services mutually enable the intended support to individuals. For example, outputs from guidance processes, such as skills identification, can support certification if: a) they are based on common competence standards and b) information at a previous stage of the practice is properly documented and transmitted to the next stage so that it can be used and further developed.

In the 13 cases, it is clear that coordination between validation and guidance exists generally but in diverse forms, which has mostly to do with country-specific administrative arrangements and traditions. There is high *path dependency* in the sense that existing institutions shape the way coordination between validation and guidance takes place. Centralised coordination of validation and guidance is relatively rare because responsibilities for the two services are often shared between existing institutions with separate remits. Practices involving centralised forms of management and implementation of validation and guidance are more likely to have integrated services.

While possible changes in the forms of coordination between the two services are difficult to predict, findings from the Cedefop study can provide insights into components of successful coordination between validation and career guidance.

Factors identified for successful coordination between validation and guidance

Based on the research outcomes, and in particular of the analysis of the case studies, several factors influence coordination between guidance and validation practices.

1. The existence of a framework that enhances coordination between the two services.
2. Flexible and free-of-charge guidance provided through all the stages of a practice.
3. Coherence of outputs created at the different stages of a practice.
4. Competences of practitioners.
5. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

These factors are in line and relate to the different elements of the Berlin Declaration[151] and in relation to the support structures. The existence of frameworks is very much linked to point 4.1 of the Declaration that states that information provision and awareness raising should be embedded in learning, career guidance and work. Flexible and free-of-charge guidance provided through all the stages of a practice relates to points 4.2. and 4.3 on the importance of provision of guidance along the whole process and having different entry points. The competence of practitioners illustrate point 4.4 of the declaration, while monitoring and evaluation is a necessary feature to assure point 4.5 of the declaration.

The existence of a framework that enhances coordination between the two services
A framework is defined or driven by national/regional legislation, a strategy or a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and employee organisations). It sets up clear principles, rules or procedures about connecting validation and guidance. It systematically helps transitions from guidance to validation and vice versa. For example, in the case of independent services, such a framework means that cooperation would not be fortuitous (based on the goodwill and/or the contacts/networks of a few practitioners), but institutionalised with fixed principles, common to all the parties and stakeholder. However, the existence of a framework does not necessarily guarantee that practitioners will use it. Different types of framework shape the form of coordination between validation and guidance services. Legal frameworks covering validation and guidance tend to lead towards an integrated offer of the validation and guidance service, while non-legal frameworks tend to be used in practices involving multiple (existing) institutions to guarantee consistent forms of cooperation between guidance and validation services. In the absence of a framework, links between validation and career guidance occur through informal cooperation between independent services. The existence (or lack) of a framework often indicates the level of political commitment to create links between validation and guidance.

Flexible and free-of-charge guidance provided through all the stages of a practice
Flexible guidance is understood as individualised support at any point when the client needs it through a combination of delivery forms such as face-to-face guidance, digital tools, phone contact, etc. People need different levels of guidance and flexibility ensures adaptation to the needs of beneficiaries. The lower the level of readiness of clients, the more comprehensive and individualised guidance they will need. Flexible guidance ensures that an individual's needs can be updated or readjusted as they progress through the stages of the practice. Clients that are low-skilled/qualified will need more comprehensive and individualised guidance. Multi-channeling allows for a flexible support service in accordance with the needs of the target group. Beneficiaries need guidance that is as flexible as possible when building their portfolio. Flexible guidance at this step is particularly important for low skilled/qualified adults as well as for beneficiaries not familiar with the assessment standards/references used. Practitioners must share a common understanding of the aims of the practice, their related roles and responsibilities. Especially during formal/informal cooperation between independent services, roles and responsibilities must be clearly assigned because this supports smoother and quicker referrals between the services. It goes without saying that providing fragmented guidance with unclear roles and responsibilities has a negative effect on flexible access to guidance with clients feeling they have insufficient

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[151] *https://vplbiennale.org/berlin-declaration-on-validation-of-prior-learning/*

support. Important components of flexible guidance provision, particularly in relation to low skilled/qualified adults, are the attitude and soft skills of the practitioners, for instance, to show empathy (for an individual's story) and to motivate the person for further personal and professional development.

Coherence of outputs created at the different stages of a practice
To identify, document and assess skills, the practices reviewed use tools such as digital profiling, web-based self-assessment and skills portfolios. These tools are 'coherent' when all or most of them are based on common qualifications and competence standards, occupational standards and other reference frameworks. When outputs produced in the early stages of a practice can be used as inputs for the subsequent stages this will ensure consistent application of standards, continuity in the delivery of services and will save time and effort for the practitioners involved. The form of cooperation between validation and guidance is likely to influence the degree of coherence of outputs. For instance, tools used at the different stages of a practice are more 'coherent' (based on common standard/reference framework) in practices characterised by formal cooperation or integration of validation and guidance compared to practices characterised by informal cooperation between services. Increased coherence of outputs can simplify a shared digital system which would enable structured interaction among practitioners across services and effective information exchange in cross-referrals between validation and guidance.

Competences of practitioners
Skilled practitioners are necessary to ensure successful coordination between validation and guidance. Practitioners involved in guidance and validation have varied roles and functions. Specialised competences and technical training are necessary to perform activities in both guidance and validation, particularly at higher levels of complexity. Some practitioners may be more involved in screening/profiling of clients, identification and documentation, while others may be more involved in assessment and certification. Roles can nevertheless overlap. The same practitioners may carry out several activities, indicating a significant overlap between validation and guidance. Because of this overlap, practitioners' training should be both specific and general. Specific training for a particular role/function is important to assure specialisation and adequate competences. Common training for all those involved in a practice is also important for creating coherence of activities and outputs. With proper training, practitioners who conduct basic screening/profiling of clients should also be able to provide general information on validation. Practitioners who carry out brief screening should be appropriately trained to briefly interview clients to understand the level of concreteness of their request and gauge the complexity of the career related issues they face. Practitioners who conduct comprehensive screening of clients, to identify and document skills, must gauge the readiness of individuals for validation: i.e. identify the need to provide guidance, clarify career options and advise clients about suitable learning and working pathways. Practitioners more involved in assessment and certification must be familiar with the validation procedure and different assessment methodologies, to have experience in the specific field of work, to be trained in assessment and validation processes and to know about quality assurance mechanisms. In addition to technical competences, all practitioners should have the equally important soft skills such as having empathy for clients, ability to motivate them, communication skills, ability to work in teams, commitment, etc. Also, strengthening of soft skills may have a positive impact on flexible guidance provision.

Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

Most of the practices reviewed lack a proper monitoring system. Collecting data on participants' transition into employment or further education (after validation) can be extremely useful as it may provide evidence of the need for follow-up guidance. It also indicates the quality of the guidance and validation services provided. For example, the higher the success rate in transitioning into employment or further education, the greater the quality (and effectiveness) of guidance and validation services. The lack of monitoring and follow up on beneficiaries creates difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of some practices reviewed. While satisfaction surveys might help with monitoring (done by most of the practices reviewed), these usually do not provide information on clients' progress towards their career goals.

Implications for policy and practice

Coordination and coherence between validation and guidance plays a fundamental role to provide effective support to individuals throughout their careers, especially those more disadvantaged that might require further support. The comparative analysis of country case studies carried out by Cedefop points to some key factors for successful coordination of policy and practice in this area.

Proper coordination requires a comprehensive provision of career guidance that covers a wide range of services, before, during, and after validation. This can only be achieved based on a clear political will and agreement between stakeholders and institutions concerned. The case studies show that coordination is normally achieved by setting up overarching policy strategies (such as lifelong learning or adult education strategies) or single legal frameworks that govern the relationship between validation and guidance. Developing a common policy strategy or a single legal framework linking guidance and validation across all occupational and educational sectors requires extensive dialogue and cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders (from policy-makers to teachers/trainers, to business associations) to reach a common understanding about results to achieve and how services, roles and functions of practitioners should be defined. Without such a consensus, different stakeholders will 'pull in different directions' and apply different interpretations to guidance and validation and what they are meant to achieve.

Whichever form they take, strategies or frameworks need to clearly define the tasks and responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved at the national, regional and/or local (municipality) level through the development and dissemination of guidelines. The allocation of necessary financial resources (including co-funding through the ESF) as well as human resources (enough qualified staff) will need to be also be considered. Adequate allocation of financial and human resources would help develop comprehensive, systematised and coordinated processes – from the outreach to potential candidates and identifying their skills to validating/certifying their competences. Also, services coordinating career guidance and validation add to the offer of active labour market policies, including measures for upskilling of low qualified/skilled adults.

Coordinating guidance and validation also requires a common reference framework for qualifications or competence standards in order to make tools 'coherent'. To ensure continuity between outputs of different services, identification, documentation and assessment of skills need to be carried out with tools that are based on common qualifications or competence standards. The output from one activity (or stage on validation) can be used as an input for the following activity (or stage). This guarantees information traceability and prevents the duplication of work, for example, individualised career

development plans feed into individualised skills portfolios which are used to tailor training programmes or competence assessment examinations. In addition to the above, a common reference framework ensures the systematisation of coordination between different services, especially when separate entities provide the services. Lastly, any common qualifications or competence standards framework should be relatable to individuals' non-formal and informal learning experiences. This also ensures coherence between outputs (especially those produced at the skills identification stage) and continuity in the interpretation of individuals' career development needs and goals.

In relation to quality assurance, uniform common standards are essential for ensuring consistent quality in the delivery of guidance and validation services. Quality of services can be improved by focusing on individuals, by flexibly responding to needs (available everywhere and at any time) and by considering the readiness of individuals to get engaged in validation and guidance. It is recommended to provide adequate training for specific roles/functions of practitioners (including technical, but also soft skills) throughout all the stages of guidance and validation. A common training for all those involved in a practice can improve the coherence of services and outputs; it can create balanced teams that cooperate and, therefore, exchange information well. Elaboration of common guidelines and quality criteria for services develops healthy communication within the team and with clients.

Unsurprisingly, setting up specific measures to enhance the commitment of practitioners (time dedicated to clients, motivational work with specific target groups) is also a key success factor. For example, exchange of experience among practitioners or specific incentives (e.g. training) proved to be beneficial in this respect.

Finally, data collection and monitoring and evaluation of on the outcomes and impacts of validation are of course important to gauge the quality and performance of guidance and validation services. Coherence between outputs to guarantee the traceability of information throughout all stages of guidance and validation is therefore essential to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

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Country	Name of the practice and brief description
Austria	*Du kannst was! (DKW)/* You have skills/ You can do it - Regional initiative (in Upper Austria) which enables low-qualified adults with substantial work experience to acquire an apprenticeship qualification in occupations that are in high demand on the regional labour market.
Czechia	*Centrum vzdělávání všem (CVV)/* Education for Everybody Centre - Regional initiative (in South Moravia) funded by the regional government which provides free of charge career guidance to people aged 14 and above.
Finland 1	*Maahanmuuttajien ohjauspalvelut ja osaamisen tunnistaminen (SIMHE Metropolia)/* Supporting immigrants at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences - National initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture aimed at improving and promoting work-related migration, tackling labour market skills mismatch and lack of skilled workers. *SIMHE* Metropolia, is just one of several practises under the initiative.
Finland 2	*Tampereen ammatillisen koulutuskeskuksen toimintamalli opiskelijoiden ohjauksessa ja aiemmin opitun tunnistamisessa ja tunnustamisessa ammattitutkintojärjestelmän viitekehyksessä (TAKK)/* Guidance and validation within the competence-based qualification (CBQ) system at TAKK - National initiative. It provides purposeful educational opportunities for adults who want to acquire a formal vocational qualification, the so-called competence-based qualification (CBQ).
France	*Bilan de compétences*/ Competencies assessment - National initiative. Undergoing a *Bilan* is a universal right for all citizens. It was created to achieve a better balance between labour supply and demand by supporting individuals in identifying their competences and then in developing a professional plan that includes their individual aspirations and fit with current labour market needs.
Ireland	*Writeon.ie* - National programme which aims to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes for a diverse range of adult learners. For this purpose, NALA, the national community and voluntary sector organisation promoting adult literacy has developed a distance learning tool (*Writeon.ie*) which is RPL based.
Iceland	*IÐAN* / An integrated provision of career guidance and validation services with follow-up services at IÐAN education centre - National initiative which addresses the need of upskilling of employees (in certified trades) without a completed upper secondary school level.
Italy	'Upskilling through PES' - Regional initiative (in Emilia-Romagna) targeted towards upskilling of unemployed people registered at PES who are with low employability profile.
Netherlands	*LeerWerkLoketten/* Learning and Working Desks - Regional initiative which aims to strengthen people's skills and competences to match regional labour market needs through the brokering function of the Desks that foster the cooperation between education providers, local authorities, social organisations and the business community.
Poland	*Linking poviat labour offices (local PES offices) with the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning organised within the formal VET* - National initiative focusing on the cooperation between PES services and examination boards responsible for assessment and certification in the VET sector. The background of the initiative relates to: growing interest towards VNIL of

	adults' competences (because of skills gap) and reform in the VET system (providing more flexible access to examination).
Portugal	*Programa Qualifica*/Qualifica Programme - National initiative aiming to raise adult's participation in LLL and train for an upskilled workforce.
Sweden	*Branschvalideringen*/Sectoral validations - Sectoral initiative initiated by labour market stakeholders to address skills shortcomings and bottlenecks in a number of sectors and trades experiencing difficulties in this respect.
UK-Scotland	*My World of Work (MyWoW)* - Web-based career information and advice resource used in schools and careers centres across the country and complementing the Career Management Skills (CMS) framework for Scotland; allows users (pupils, young people and adults) to profile their interests, skills and strengths using a range of digital tools and activities.

Source: Cedefop (2019)

Toteemi

4.3

A nation-wide development and research project on integrating work and higher education in Finland

Marjaana Mäkelä[152]

Integration of work and degree studies is a topical field of development work of Finnish higher education institutions (HEI). In the structure of national education, this sector is divided in two pillars: research-oriented universities and universities of applied sciences.[153] Both sectors encounter the current societal situation where students work long hours weekly, alongside their degree studies. Moreover, an increasing number of students may have extensive work experience already when they start their study cycle in a HEI, and this applies in particular to students entering part-time programs, targeted for professionals with prior vocational qualifications and/or practical experience in the field of study. Additional incentives for the institutions, to establish more functional processes, are found in the forthcoming funding mechanism of higher education in Finland which is to be applied from 2021 onwards. Furthermore, ubiquitous digitalization in educational processes and administration entail increasing and evolving challenges for education providers. On a more specific dimension, the trend to create and implement curricula that are based on competences – rather than enlist courses to be studied – requires efficient validation mechanisms and constant guidance also in the field of work-integrated studies.

In the best of scenarios, higher education studies do not remain in isolation, but despite the challenges of individual time management they can integrate into the other objectives in student life, such as paid work or voluntary and civic work. Mechanisms facilitating this integration developed in Finnish HEI, as they are articulated across actions of a nation-wide project *Toteemi*, are the topic of this article.

Toteemi

'*Toteemi'* stems from initials of words **T**yöstä **o**ppimassa, **t**yöhön (Learning from and to work). Concerns of enhancing validation processes of work, in order to provide for more flexible study pathways for HE students, have led to a number of projects and dispositions in Finland.

The most extensive of these, *Toteemi*, has been carried out during 2017-2019[154]. It was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and coordinated by Haaga-Helia UAS. The group of participants consisted of 16 Universities of Applied Sciences, covering hence the majority of this sector nationally, and two research universities.

Figure 1. Project participants

Source: http://www.amktoteemi.fi/en.

Three development areas across the country

Prior studies and projects, such as *Verkkovirta* that concentrated on validation processes at Finnish UAS institutions[155] and the extensive Eurostudent survey[156] have unfolded widely the situation where an increasing number of HE students need to carry out professional, paid activity alongside their entire study cycle. In Finland, cost of living is relatively high, and young people tend to opt for individual housing rather than for staying with their parents. A national feature in Finland is moreover that the fields of study and professional activity have a number of interconnections. The Eurostudent survey revealed that 53 % of Finnish HE students have a full or a part-time job that relates to their field of study.[157] Hence, it is in the interest of all stakeholders to facilitate more efficient validation of all experience accumulated before and during higher education studies, and to establish processes where competences gained at work may become more extensively, if not fully recognized in one's degree. In the framework of higher education, this has been a particularly complicated issue, and approaches to validation of practical experience still remain scarce in this sector. *Toteemi* endeavored to facilitate this complex development, without compromising the quality of higher education.

The project was articulated around three development areas:
1) *Flexible at work* where individualized, life-long learning pathways across studies and careers were identified and developed
2) *Competence from and to work* aiming at increasing synergy and added value in fields of entrepreneurship, by processes of co-creation and reach-out to alumni networks of HEIs.
3) *Well-being in learning at work* that targeted processes of guidance, counselling and tutoring for enhanced validation.

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154 *www.amktoteemi.fi/en.*
155 Verkkovirta (2019). *http://www.amkverkkovirta.fi/english*.
156 Hauschildt, K., Gwosć, C., Netz, N. & Mishra, S. (2015). *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. EUROSTUDENT V 2012–2015, Synopsis of Indicators.* W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co. KG.
157 Eurostudent Thematic Review (2018). *http://www.amktoteemi/fi/sites/amktoteemi/files/TR/paidjobs.pdf*.

Within these development areas, the project sought after answers to three fields of questions. The first field researched how organisations and companies make direct use of their expert's studies in related fields in higher education. Hence, it represented a third-party viewpoint outside the learner and the HEI. The second field addressed the challenges of higher education institutions using students' competences as part of curriculum studies, in order to advance their graduation, constituting thus a viewpoint of the education provider. The third field engaged with the wide and constantly evolving sector of digitalization as an enhancer of ubiquitous and life-long learning. It focused all counterparts, given that digital solutions englobe the operational areas of students, education providers and the workplaces. When successful, this interplay can facilitate learning and cater for solutions both at the workplaces and at the HEIs.

Approaches from theory to practice
Since the Finnish higher education sector is twofold (applied sciences and research) and the needs of both sectors diverge, to some extent, the project included a research-oriented dimension and a more practical developmental dimension. The University of Jyväskylä conducted the section "Flexibly at work", and the mission consisted of compiling an extensive literature review on work-integrated learning for the purpose of Finnish higher education providers. Moreover, the contribution of the University of Jyväskylä – where traditions of pedagogical development are long-established and widely recognized – included creation of a repertoire of best pedagogical practices and solutions of UAS institutions in work-integrated learning. Knowledge and expertise that were formerly somewhat scattered in various institutions and publications have now been archived in a consistent way, in order to better serve needs of future practitioners and researchers.

The University of Helsinki managed the section "Digitalization in contexts of HE pedagogy". Various opportunities provided by digitalization in higher education were observed and analyzed. The ways in which digitalization can enhance learning and furthermore alleviate learning hindrances was a core element of this part of the project. Alongside this approach, expectations for lecturers and staff related to digitalization, in the framework of the project objectives, were studied at the University of Helsinki.

The more practical oriented development dimension, conducted by the sixteen UAS institution partners, consisted of a large array of subprojects with the aim of tool and process development, as well as design of approaches, policies, cooperation strategies, documentation, networking and even IT applications. The leitmotiv for all this development and service design was to create solutions for more functional integration of work and higher education studies, and to enhance validation therein. Regional, institutional and field-specific needs were taken into account, since Finnish UAS institutions have by law also responsibilities of regional development, and their fields of education vary. Moreover, cooperation with companies, organisations and various NGO take diversified forms in different fields of education, such as engineering, business, hospitality or health care.

The main responsibility of Haaga-Helia UAS, coordinating the entire project, was to ensure national follow-up and dissemination of results. Furthermore, Haaga-Helia compiled and analyzed statistical data on HEI students at work, for the needs of *Toteemi* and also of subsequent research. During the two-year length of the project, specialists from the Vocational Teachers' Education unit of Haaga-Helia conducted seminar days across the country, monitored sub-projects and collected hands-on data from various encounters of HEI providers and workplaces. In order to gather actors and contributors from all over the

country and across institutions, altogether five national conference days were organized in the framework of the project. Students' voices were heard in these seminars as well, and dialogue between learners and educators in questions of work-integrated learning consolidated understanding of development needs. Status quo of validation of work in higher education was questioned and solutions were provided by mostly co-creational methods. This generated debate and triggered enhanced processes on institutional, regional and moreover, on national level.

UAS institutions concentrating on development and innovation

The project website (*www.amktoteemi.fi/en*) was completed at the end of the project. It provides the entire set of findings and results. In the participating UAS institutions, altogether twenty sets of pragmatic toolkits have been created, to meet challenges of integration of work and HE studies. These include various approaches and methods: pilot programmes on intra- and interinstitutional levels, evaluation and follow-up tools, procedures of validation, flexible study modules, methods and repertoires of documentation, as well as online applications to provide more diversified solutions for both students, lecturers and organisations. Agreement templates were created, for increased transparency in work-integrated learning and to enhance information flow between the company, the HEI and the learner.

An example of a sub-project carried out on an institutional level is the process of Demonstration Days at Haaga-Helia UAS. It is the culminating point of work-integrated learning of UAS students who have conducted a period of field-specific learning either in their own work or by volunteering, and this experience has been launched by a tripartite learning agreement between the learner, the lecturer monitoring the process, and the workplace. Demonstration Days are the validation platform where lecturers, peer students and also Haaga-Helia alumni as external evaluators assess and comment the learning results obtained in work-integrated learning or entrepreneurship. This process is described on the website dedicated to disseminating knowledge on work-integrated learning at Haaga-Helia.[158] Work & Study was awarded the second prize in the Global Validation Prize contest 2019, in the category of process development.[159]

Another example of *Toteemi* results is a multi-sectorial study program that is developed in Lahti UAS for event management studies conducted alongside work. *Tapahtumaväylä* (Event Path) is a hop-on type module of 45 ECTS that the student can commence at any time, in function of the responsibilities of his/her work in the event management sector. During the *Toteemi* project and in cooperation between Lahti UAS, workplaces and other Toteemi participants, a fine-tuned process was created where students can flexibly integrate event management studies and work, and where project-type learning phases consisting of theoretical and practical studies form a continuum of three 15 ECTS modules. Online guidance is assured with a mobile application in real time, and the modules are named according to learning outcomes targeted: competences are accumulated from *Crew* level towards *Backstage* functions, and eventually lead into *Access all areas,* with extensive knowledge and skills of the field.

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158 *www.workandstudy.fi/en*. Also see: Mäkelä, M. & Moisio, A. (2017). Work and Study. Conceptualizing validation of work experience in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences. In: Duvekot, R.C., Coughlan, D. & Aagaard, K. (eds.) *The Learner at the Centre. Validation of Prior Learning strengthens lifelong learning for all.* Houten/Aarhus, European Centre Valuation of Prior Learning/ VIA University College.

159 *https://vplbiennale.org/* & *https://vplbiennale.org/vpl-prize/*

Whilst functional and innovative results have been achieved, a number of development areas have been identified as well. UAS participants of *Toteemi* agree on the necessity to enhance information flows across all counterparts. Moreover, engagement of companies and other organisations is not always perfect, which may result from insufficient understanding of the benefits of qualified students working for them, or in some cases, from unnecessary bureaucracy in institutional operations. HEI and the world of work do not always act as swiftly, and processes as well as time management frames diverge. For the institutions themselves, there is a need to constantly develop curricula that are more efficiently coordinated with qualifications and competences required at work, and not just aiming at accumulating knowledge for the purpose of the degree. Dialogue is still an imperative in this development, and multisectoral, interdisciplinary studies are one way of encountering this challenge.

Results from research universities provide background for future work
At the University of Jyväskylä, research findings of *Toteemi* show that extensive study modules, rather than minor entities, are most functional in integration of work and studies, since they facilitate both motivation and validation as a process. Moreover, results unfold how co-creation methods should be emphasized, when higher education institutions and the world of work collaborate. This cooperation necessitates thorough planning and professional monitoring, in order to yield solid results. Evidence is moreover gathered that project-oriented learning and cross-sectional approaches support most efficiently these processes.

Findings of *Toteemi* have been disseminated in conferences by researchers of the University of Jyväskylä, and outcomes of these can be accessed by the project website (www.amktoteemi.fi). Theoretical knowledge of the field has been strengthened and articulated by the extensive literature retrieval, conducted by researchers in Jyväskylä. An important development area for UAS lecturers and staff has been identified in this work: corporate cooperation competences of the academia need to be enhanced further, to meet the specific needs of the industries related to areas of education.

University of Helsinki concentrated on the field of digitalization. Whilst conceptualization of the term digitalization in itself was identified as a core objective, pilot studies were conducted with conceptualization of a variety of digital learning and validation approaches. This was organized by using C-map Tools, in collaboration with university lecturers. Moreover, researchers at University of Helsinki concentrated on unfolding of professional competences of students in teacher education programmes that are required in the 21st century. Interplay across learning and digitalization has been analyzed, especially in areas where until recently digital solutions have not had a significant role. Findings have been disseminated in pedagogical journal articles and at seminars, and references will feature in the final report, accessible on the project website. Findings by the University of Helsinki researchers unpack five distinct, yet entwined areas where digitalization affects a teacher's or a lecturer's work. It emerges …
- as a target for learning and studies.
- as an element in teaching.
- in coordinating work and knowledge.
- in cooperation and interaction.
- as a target of development and research.

These interconnected fields are present in most sectors of today's pedagogical work, and they become even more acute when co-creational strategies of development with companies

are joint to traditional teaching occupation. Competence challenges for teachers continue to grow, which necessitates constant follow-up and monitoring at the education providers' end. This will benefit well-being at work for both teachers and learners.

Haaga-Helia UAS

The project team at Haaga-Helia UAS collected extensive statistical data on students at work on national and international scales. Publications on these findings have been and will be disseminated nationally. Moreover, coordination of findings and results of all partners enables further development in the fields of action of the project: integration of work and HE studies, well-being of students at work and in studies, situational and contextual variation in well-being (among young and mature students), and finally, experiences of UAS graduates on competences required at work.

Findings on an institutional level at Haaga-Helia UAS, resulting from the sub-project work, indicate that processes of career guidance need to be more efficiently integrated to validation of work experience in UAS studies, and training of both career counselors and Work & Study practitioners needs more thorough coordination. It is not always explicit to students how, when and with whom they are able to carry out work-integrated learning, and what this process entails for the learner and the company or organisation. Guidance processes are to be developed with approaches emulated from service design.

Observations embracing the Berlin Declaration

Toteemi raised a number of topics to national debates in Finnish higher education and enabled long-term development work where cooperation networks have been consolidated and innovative approaches have been found, to facilitate work-integrated learning. Yet, in a wider context, validation in HE studies including recognition of prior higher education studies, validation of non- and informal learning as well as integration of work and degree studies needs to be redesigned, for more flexible pathways in studies. The necessity to increase the flexibility dimension is a current topic in European and global debates on higher education.[160] Flexibility may appear with diverging aspects for learners, companies and higher education institutions. Nevertheless, it is an objective that merits thorough discussion and constant development.

Experiences gathered throughout *Toteemi* and other findings align perfectly with the recommendations of the Berlin Declaration. Foremost, recommendations of the Article 1 on organisational arrangements for validation correspond to *Toteemi* outcomes; clearly defined roles of all counterparts and their efficient communication is a key component also in efficient work-integrated learning in higher education studies. Moreover, there is a lot to be accomplished still, to obtain functional guidance and counseling processes where students, lecturers, counselors and industry representatives all are aware of the process, which itself has specified objectives. Hence, recommendations of Article 4 on support structures are embraced also by the Finnish higher education sectors.

To conclude, it is appropriate to quote the Article 3.4 of the Declaration that could be cited as well in the final outcomes of *Toteemi*: *"Validation pathways need to be modular, transparent, and comprehensible at all stages of the process, in order to allow for flexible work and education pathways."*.

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160 The New Student (2018). The New Student - Flexible Learning Paths and Future Learning Environments. Conference on higher education of the Austrian presidency of the European Union. Vienna, 2018. *https://www.eu2018.at/calendar-events/political-events/thenewstudent.html.*

Competitors or Powerful Allies? 4.4

Formal Technical Vocational Education and Training versus Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes

Mona Pielorz and Patrick Werquin

Why are there still so many reservations about the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes?[161] Is it fear (we do not know what the result will be), sorrow (we will lose our high quality standards), concerns about the process (it will cost too much), and/or worries that the people will only follow the "Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes" track, instead of enrolling in the formal education and training system?

Rumour has it that formal technical vocational education and training (TVET) has a strong competitor on the market for recognising and certifying learning outcomes and competences[162]: recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RNFIL, also known as recognition or validation of prior learning, RPL/VPL). Where are those rumours coming from? It is understandable that from a certain perspective it can be frightening that a person cannot show they have completed a traditional learning pathway and attained the corresponding qualification, but nevertheless claims to be able to occupy a regulated job. Even if a thorough assessment proves that this person is able to do the job, a lot of people have mixed feelings. This paper suggests some food for thought, using France and Germany as archetypal cases (Pielorz and Werquin, 2019a and 2019b).

During formal learning processes, the systems systematically collect numerous pieces of information on the learners. From personal data (address, birthday) to school career, the information system collects grades, data about apprenticeship, as well as about on- and off-the-job learning. Therefore, the input process regarding the learning is fully known. In addition, the learners follow a pre-identified collectively agreed path, with a legally adopted curriculum that is taught by teachers who were trained for years in the tertiary education system. In this way there is an assurance that learners have followed the complete curriculum, taken and passed the relevant examinations, and achieved the corresponding qualification. The formal education and training system awards qualifications only to those learners that have successfully passed all the required examinations.

Therefore, it may be natural that some concerns emerge when some RNFIL applicants are awarded a full qualification. These concerns are based on beliefs that they may not have all the required competences either because RNFIL would miss some outcomes or because applicants would fulfil the practical tasks without having all the competences taught during the corresponding formal learning pathway. This may be true, but it remains to be shown

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161 See: Velten and Herdin (2015) in the case of Germany, and Lainé (2018) or Clot and Prot (2013) for France.

162 This paper does not address the thorny question of the definition of the term "competence". The reader will have to bear with us and accept that it is the ability to use knowledge, skills and attitudes to act in context.

why this does not apply to the formal learning system where regular students may well pass and still do not possess all the expected competences. In any case, there is some evidence that a number of stakeholders in the education/training system and the labour market do not trust the outcomes of learning that is not formally organised, even if there is a strong consensus that we all learn everywhere and all the time, and even, if some countries have included learning by doing and by experience in their formal system (e.g. the dual system for technical and vocational education and training). Because it has been in existence for centuries, we are used to a system that puts the emphasis of quality control on the input process. By definition, the input process is less standardised when the learning takes place outside of the formal system. The full input process may be known only in the formal system, and this is why the formal learning system is reassuring for users, especially employers. Nevertheless, a reasonable assumption, if need be, is that the input process can be known in non-formal learning, and assessors can interrogate applicants about informal learning when it comes to key components (e.g. what equipment was at your workplace?).

Some countries, like Germany, value quality work and they are not willing to give up the good reputation of high-quality products "made in Germany", for instance. Some people are also afraid that the well-developed dual system, which is mainly responsible for technical and vocational and educational training in Germany, is at risk if other methods of recognition are used. Therefore, enterprises will not have access to highly qualified workers. This fear is linked to the assumption that young people could deliberately opt for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process rather than formal education. However, the reality in Germany is that, for young people, technical and vocational education and training begins at the age of 16, and not later than 19 or 20 (with rare exceptions). It is unlikely that young people will have learning outcomes from experience at such an early stage of their life, and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes would be likely to prove difficult for them as it demands engagement with assessment and/or qualification standards. The External Examination ("Externenprüfung") is a tried and tested method in Germany which allows those who have learnt outside the formal system to be assessed within the formal education and training system. It allows access to the final examination for a vocational qualification if the applicant is able to prove relevant occupational experience that is 1.5 times longer than the corresponding learning period in the dual system. BIBB (2013) shows that 52% of the people applying for the External Examination are over 35 years old. This statistic shows that the required learning outcomes that are necessary to take part in the External Examination cannot be acquired at an early age. So, in practice the formal technical and vocational education and training system is likely to remain the first choice for young adults who want to achieve a qualification. In the case of the new project on developing a validation process, called VALIKOM (as in Validation of Competences), the condition for applying is that the applicant has relevant vocational competences and s/he is at least 25.

The French approach shows a different approach to the process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. First of all, there is a widely agreed belief that several learning pathways can lead to the same qualification, namely continuing education and training, initial education and training, and apprenticeship, and there is a law passed in 1971 to give effect to this belief. There is also a long history of awarding qualifications on the sole basis of confirmed experience. It has therefore proven relatively easy to add Validation of Experiential Learning Outcomes (V*alidation des acquis de l'expérience,* VAE) to the set of

possible options. As a result, it is accepted that a qualification is the result of a learning process and not only of a specific learning programme. It is a matter or equity to provide a second chance of qualification to those who could not attend the initial education and training formal system long enough to achieve a qualification.

While validation of experiential learning outcomes (VAE) makes it possible in France to achieve a full qualification after a period of documenting learning outcomes and collecting evidence to substantiate them in order to meet the corresponding qualification standards, the newly developed system to recognise non-formally and informally acquired competences in Germany (VALIKOM) only issues a certificate describing the competences of the owner in relation to a specific job.

The fear that there will be fewer and fewer learners in the formal education and training system due to the existence of an alternative aiming at recognising all possible competences can be rebutted in the case of France. The number of successful participants in the VAE increased in the 2000 decade from 25'705 in 2006 to 31'572 in 2009 and has been fairly constant since then (around 25'000 per year). There has been no change in the take up of learners in the initial education and training system. An important point to understand about this absence of competition between the two different systems is that the VAE process may be quite long from an individual perspective. Up to 18 months in some instances. In France, VAE is by no means seen as a second best. It is another route to a qualification, more adapted to the constraints of adult life, and so making the national qualification system more inclusive.

Another important consideration for rejecting the idea of competition between the two systems is that applicants to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning system must have experience, and learning outcomes acquired through it, and this obviously means that applicants are older than a certain threshold. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning processes do not start before a certain age because applicants need to have engaged in a range of non-formal and informal learning activities, in order to become competent as a result of self-learning, random learning, repeated practice through work, internships, and everyday experience in everyday life in order to be ready and to be able to pursue a profession even without having undergone formal vocational training. It is more a second chance of qualification, than a faster route.

Learning – Gaining Competences
Life-wide learning, lifelong learning or learning *en passant* are buzzwords that have been in circulation over the last few years, and which express the idea that individuals already know what they need to know to meet new challenges in their occupations and private lives, and to cope with future changes. They also relate to the necessity to view any form of learning as valid, and to make the corresponding learning outcomes usable by, and for, society.

The difficulty comes from the fact that most individuals do not even realise they are learning when they are learning. All activities may potentially lead to learning, and to the development of competences, for example through repetition and so to permanent improvement of fine motor skills, and through finding new processes to make one's life simpler. Some of this learning might be highly technical (e.g. fixing a car with one's father, learning music). The issue is that we take those learning steps for granted; most of us do not even notice the learning processes we are going through every day. Most of the time it takes a process of serious reflection to understand what we have learned and to identify when and where the learning took place. If we do not know when we are learning and in which situations the

learning process is taking place, then it becomes difficult to spell out the learning process, to document it, and to substantiate the learning outcomes so as to convince employers that we have additional competences over and above our highest formal qualification - in short, competences acquired throughout life.

Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes – Assessment

What exactly is happening during the validation and recognition process? In a nutshell, it is an assessment process, just like those that take place in the formal learning system. The only difference is that, in the case of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, this assessment process needs to be quality assured to a greater extent, because the input process is unknown and quality assurance will generally not have been implemented earlier in the learning process. In practice, this process – which is therefore an assessment, a validation, and a recognition process – supports candidates in identifying and documenting their competences. The documented competences are then assessed, and certified if the applicant meets the required standards. Contrary to some claims, this process is based on duly agreed standards – usually by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour – and achieving a qualification through the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a difficult and long endeavour. The mere fact that, in France, many applicants fail is evidence that the system is not there to award underserved qualifications to whoever applies.

The identification of learning outcomes is the basis of the process, and it also serves as a trailblazer for the way ahead. There are several possible ways to identify existing competences, through self-assessments, biographic-systematic approaches, and/or even with psychological-diagnostic tests. In the end, the potential applicants should have an idea of what is within the scope of their abilities, and for which occupation or profession they have sufficient competences. In France, for example, this is a stage where many potential applicants give up, when they realise they are much too far from the standards that the guidance officer has explained to them. As a result of the guidance process they should also be able to identify the transferable skills which they have learned in one context but could use in others. All these pieces of information help the new applicant to go through the recognition processes. It is important, especially in the identification phase, to use open-ended instruments that can cover the whole spectrum of the acquisition and presentation of competences and abilities.

In the next step, the evidence to participate in an assessment is checked. Extensive documentation of competences is a basic requirement. During this documentation phase, the proofs for the acquired learning outcomes are compiled – a portfolio is a very helpful tool here. The learning outcomes can be substantiated in a variety of ways, whether through written documents, work samples, or practical demonstrations; this is determined either by regulations – Ministries of Labour usually opt for practical tests, simulation or observations, whereas Ministries of Education may solely rely on portfolio – or by the expertise of the assessor(s). It is of the utmost importance that the actions and tasks performed in the past – and which therefore constitute experience – are documented in a detailed and comprehensible manner. A mere list of jobs and occupations in which the individual has worked is not sufficient. By the same token, effective portfolios lead to a self-reflection about learning outcomes. It is this analysis on oneself that is so important to success during the assessment process, and later on in [active] life.

As will be clear by now, during the assessment process the prior learning outcomes and competences are compared to specific reference points or standards. In the case of France these are existing fully recognised qualification standards, which lead to the societal recognition of the VAE qualifications. Indeed, this approach is consistent with modern approaches in the formal learning system where current developments all rely on competence-based curricula. If the standards are based on learning outcomes in the formal learning system, then the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a natural companion to the formal system, and even less a competitor. Moreover, the two approaches could be combined to place learners with some achieved competences at the appropriate stage in the formal learning system so they learn only what they need and can therefore shorten their study periods and lead to significant savings in individuals' and costs throughout the system.

Since all individual learning experiences have to be taken into account for potential validation in the assessment process, it is essential to design the assessment instruments in such a way that the different learning processes can be perceived and assessed in their various situational contexts. In order to cover all learning outcomes and competences, it is recommended that assessors should work with several instruments, for example with a combination of written examinations and practical tests, simulations or the demonstration of work processes. In practice, assessment may rely on several overlapping approaches: portfolios of competences, practical tests in a simulated working environment, observations in a real working environment, written examinations, including essays, oral examinations, interviews, professional conversations with assessors, course challenge tests, case studies with a convincing narrative, final jury/panel, or a combination of any of the above. Since all learning outcomes have the potential to be recognised, it is of paramount importance that the items of evidence are connected to standards and ultimately to occupational profiles through qualification standards. Assessment is the key step because it helps to build trust in the system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning and so in its outcomes. Therefore, it needs to be fair, flexible, current, valid, reliable, sufficient, and authentic. This is where quality assurance comes into play. As mentioned above, the input process is usually unknown – and it is somewhat irrelevant to ask VAE applicants for instance how, where, with whom and when they learnt – and so all quality assurance actions need to focus on the assessment process (including the assessment standards).

The certification of learning outcomes and competences may take different forms. For example, it may lead to the awarding of a complete qualification, of a partial qualification, or of credits towards a qualification. It may also lead to exemption from certain academic prerequisites which are normally needed to access the tertiary education system. It may just lead to a certificate of labour market competences - a certified document that attests competences in relation to a specific occupational profile, and which is normally required for access to jobs. Regardless of which type of certificate is issued, a summative assessment is necessary to demonstrate that the certified learning outcomes meet predefined standards. In addition, the entire approach may be used in a more formative way, for example for teachers in the formal learning system to fine tune their pedagogy to the particular experience of a learner; or for migrants who do not have recognized credentials to demonstrate that they are fully competent, or need top-up learning through the formal learning system (e.g. the dual system in Germany). The approach has a broad range of applications. To that extent, it is a powerful policy tool. A system for recognising non-formal

and informal learning outcomes does not necessarily need to lead to the award of a full qualification in order to provide effective opportunities for citizens, and the state.

What would be the consequences of the absence of systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes? Since applicants for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning would be unlikely to enrol in the formal technical and vocational education and training system anyway, their competences would be lost for the country, and for themselves if they could not benefit from the recognition of their genuinely acquired competences.

Trust

What is the key to building a trusted and recognised system for validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes? First of all, the process should be developed together with all stakeholders. This ensures that all have the same understanding of the matter, a common language, and a sense of ownership. The partners assure each other that they have the same goals and intentions regarding quality and acceptance of the outcomes of the process. This is of paramount importance, as only full recognition of the process and its results can reflect the intended benefits – not only for formal education providers, but also for employers and society at large. Those are the initial conditions for going beyond technical recognition of learning outcomes (assessment and validation) and for achieving societal recognition, which is the key to reaping the full benefits of recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Assurance, and belief in the system, can be secured by the assessment method. Assessment is something that we all know from the formal system – therefore it is already a known and accepted tool for the certification of competence. However not only the assessment, but also the quality and expertise of the assessor(s) play an important role. Ideally, there should be several assessors, and they should collectively cover the occupation, the theory, the practice, and the philosophy of recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

When developing the assessment process, clear reference points and standards should be used and presented with maximum transparency – especially if the goal is to achieve a full qualification. Before the assessment, it should be determined whether a qualification is sought, a partial qualification, a certificate of labour market competences, or any other outcomes. This is where guidance has been shown to be extremely useful.

There is a danger that different approaches will appear to be in competition with the formal learning system. While a certificate of labour market competences may not seem a threat to the formal learning system, awarding a recognized qualification may appear trickier. The above arguments have tried to provide a rationale for creating trust (e.g. standards, guidance, different target groups, high level of failure in achieving a full qualification in the first place).

It can also be surmised that social recognition will be higher if the awarding of the qualification is organised by an institution that is also integrated into the formal education and training system. End users, such as employers and families, will all expect the same level of quality, and identical competences.

Generating trust will demand that careful attention is given to the entire process, especially the assessment component. This would mean in particular: the integration of quality assurance tools into the recognition process, such as setting clear and measurable objectives and standards, drafting guidelines for implementation, providing adequate resources, developing consistent and quality assured assessment methods, developing monitoring and evaluation, and building feedback mechanisms.

A thorough assessment process of non-formal and informal learning outcomes will identify individual competences, and the extent to which these competences meet the specified standards. This is another reason why formal learning and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are powerful allies because applicants who fail in the latter are natural candidates to enter the former. Recognition of non-formal learning outcomes is intended to apply to individuals who have competences and are able to show them. For others who have yet to gain full competence, formal education and training – such as the dual system – is the next best alternative. The system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be as evaluated by its results, in the same way the formal learning system is assessed, with the difference that the assessment will have to be organised individually[163].

Results – A Wealth of Opportunities
What matters in the end is not whether a full qualification is awarded, but that non-formal and informal learning outcomes are validated and that this leads to a recognised award (credits toward a qualification, the right to enter the TVET system, exemption of part of the curriculum in a formal learning programme). Creating multiple entry points for the TVET system, on the basis of an assessment of competences, would probably be a fruitful development. It would provide a route into TVET for experienced learners. Employers would therefore be in a position to recruit experienced graduates, with a recognised qualification.
As will be clear by now, there is no necessity to award a full qualification. But recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a great chance for all those who have no formal qualification, but yet who do have the competences to fulfil job requirements. They constitute the natural target group of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In addition, it provides opportunities for those who have a lot of competences which are not used in their current job but could useful and valued in another one, and want to change to a job where these competences would be more fully used. It is also a chance for workers who have already changed job but who do not have the corresponding qualification which is needed to advance in their new occupation. Promotion is made easier with the relevant qualification. Such people are confronted with the constraints of an adult life (e.g. family, job, other activities including leisure) and may not be able to afford to study full time in the formal education and training system.
Finally, in France evidence suggests those who enrolled in VAE gain an increased interest in formal education/training and further professional development. Making their competences visible has triggered an increased motivation for learning, including formal learning, because being aware of their abilities and competences has proven useful, for instance by increasing their self-esteem. By the same token, any evaluation of any non-formal and informal learning system should look at long-term effects, and at non-economic impacts. There is a lot of hidden value in increased self-esteem. It is for instance a good predictor of future employability and/or promotion.

Food for Thought
This article aimed at showing that formal education and training systems and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning system are not competitors at all. It was made clear that

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163 Recent initiatives are being trialled for organising initial collective assessment, in order to save money and to minimise the need for human resources, but recognition of non-formal and informal learning remains fundamentally an individual approach, because each experience is unique.

TVET and RNFIL are not competitors but powerful allies. They can and should be associates and support each other. Bridges need to be built between them which allow individuals – and typically adult learners – to bring in their already acquired competences, and for instance support them in shortening formal learning processes.

The two systems of TVET and RNFIL already have a lot in common. They both rely on quality assurance, even though at different stages. This means that owners of a qualification will be trusted as highly competent professionals. Both systems will put a title – and ideally the same title – on sets of learning outcomes and so support successful applicants in their job search and/or career advancement. Another possibility for development would be to encourage graduates of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to become motivated to enrol in traditional technical and vocational training and education. They can constitute a reservoir of potential students for the formal vocational qualification pathway. If we all look in the mirror, we will agree that it is on the job that we learn most for the competences useful for our job.

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The Italian National System of Competence Certifications

4.5

The Atlas of Work and Qualifications and its role for VPL

Roberto Trainito and Stefania Lemme

In the last 20 years, the European Union provided cogent recommendations and directions in order to strengthen policies and interventions for reform and innovation concerning the system of education, training and employment services of the EU Member States. Italy is also involved in launching services in order to ensure knowledge recognition and transparency of certifications. Starting from the Law no 92/2012 (the so called "Fornero Law"), which sets up a national public certification system of the competences, and the National Repertory, as per provisions of Art. 8 of the Legislative Decree 13/2013, the Country has developed a comprehensive mapping of the world of labour market and qualifications: the so called "Atlas of work and qualifications".

In this paper we define the state-of-the-art of the Italian certification system of competences, at national and regional levels, as well as explain the potential of the *Atlas of Work and Qualifications* together with its functional use for identification, validation and certification (IVC), the Italian way for VPL. The analysis demonstrates how *the Atlas of Work and Qualifications* allows correlation and equivalence between regional qualifications (through competence description) and describes the content of work in terms of activities (tasks, assignments, etc.) and potentially deliverable product/services in carrying out the activities described.

The Italian LLP pathway towards a National System of Competence Certification

In accordance with the art. 117 of the Constitution, the Italian Education and Training System is shared between State and the Regions: the former has exclusive competence for the definition of general provision in the field of education (art. 117, clause 2, letter n). In particular, the responsibility of the education system falls under the scope of action of the Ministry of Education and Research (MIUR) that operates at central level, while Regional and Provincial Education Offices operate at local level, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies defines and guarantees the essential levels of performance of vocational training. At the same time, the Regions have exclusive competence in the field of vocational training (art. 117, clause 4), often operated through decentralization of functions and tasks to the Provinces and the cooperation with Social Partners. The consequent political negotiation between the central and regional levels takes place in the Permanent Conference for the relations among the State, the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano. The unanimous Agreement represents the instrument through which central Government, Regions and Autonomous Provinces coordinate their competencies and share activities in the name of fair cooperation. Figure 1 shows the Italian Lifelong learning processes of reform in the 2012-2018 period, aimed at ensuring knowledge recognition and transparency of certifications, regardless of the type of learning (formal, non-formal, informal).[164]

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164 All figures in this article are reproduced under full responsibility of the authors.

Fig. 1. The Italian LLL Policies: Towards a National System of Competences Certification

Law 92/2012 ▼ reforming the Labour Market: specific rules for the identification and validation of NFIL are provided

Legislative Decree n. 13 ▼ establishes a "National public certification system" of differently acquired competences (formal, non formal and informal contexts) based on national standard criteria for validation of NFIL; sets up the **National Repertory of education and training qualifications and professional qualifications** (art. 8)

The National Technical Committee is established and it works for:
1) The development of the National Repository of the Education and Training qualifications as well as the vocational ones;
2) The **definition of minimum standards related to the certification services** (standards of process, certificate and system)

Interministerial Decree 30/6/2015 ▼ establishes the National reference framework of regional qualifications: built on the EQF principles (LOs, QA) will be the basis for the national recognition of the regional qualifications and their referencing to EQF.

Decree 8/1/2018 ▼ **establishes the National Qualification Framework (NQF)** for the qualifications released under the national system of competences certification as per Legislative Decree n.13 of January 2013

Law 92/2012

The Law 92/2012 (the so-called "Fornero Law") launches a systemic path, providing a set of provisions for life-long learning, which includes the definition of a national system for the certification of competences and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In particular, the Law identifies informal and non-formal learning and the national system of competence certification as two key elements to guarantee and carry out life-long learning in a perspective of citizens' employability. Indeed, the Article 8, clause 58 delegates to the government the definition of general regulations and essential service performance levels for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning and the minimum service standards for the national competence certification system, and it establishes the direct criteria and principles. Moreover, in coherence with the European recommendations, life-long learning is defined by Article 4, clause 51, as *"any activity undertaken by people in a formal, non-formal and informal context and during different stages of life, in order to enhance skills and abilities, in a personal, civic, social and employment perspective".* The Law 92/2012, therefore, creates the prerequisites for making life-long learning a tool of active policy, so as to support *"the construction, by people, of their own formal, non-formal and informal learning paths, including that related to work, bringing out and identifying the skill needs of individuals in correlation with the needs of the business networks and local territories".* Furthermore, the Law 92/2012 considers the traceability of learning experiences as a further element of the system, starting from the *"identification and recognition of the cultural and professional heritage acquired by citizens and workers in their personal and professional pathways, to be collected through the deployment of databases at national and local levels".*

Legislative Decree n. 13/2013

The Legislative Decree No. 13 of January 16th, 2013 is the enacting provision of the Fornero Law, defining the general norms and the essential levels of required performance to identify and assess non-formal and informal learning and furthermore the minimum standards of the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Lifelong learning is subdivided into:

- "Formal learning", which takes place in the education and training system (Universities and higher-level Arts and Music Education (AFAM). This path ends with the attainment of a qualification or a recognised certification, in compliance with the current legislation[165].
- "Non-formal Learning", which provides a deliberate choice of the person outside the formal learning systems, as well as in any organization that pursues educational and training, volunteer and national civil services purposes.
- "Informal Learning", which takes place, even regardless of the deliberate choice, in the individual performance of activities related to daily life and social and cultural interactions in work, family and leisure contexts.

Moreover, among the principal innovations of the Legislative Decree No 13/2013, the Art. 8 stands out the National Repertory of education, training and professional qualifications. This Repertory represents the unitary reference framework for the certification of individual skills and is composed by qualifications as issued by different bodies and fields, such as schools, universities, regional authorities. The Repertory also includes the qualifications acquired through an apprenticeship and those professions regulated at various level and in different context.

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165 Ciucciovino, S. *Apprendimento Permanente*. In Libro dell'anno del diritto 2013, Roma, 2013

With reference to the Legislative Decree N° 13/2013, the National Technical Committee was established, in order to develop the National Repertory of the Education and Training qualifications, as well as the vocational ones and to define the minimum standards related to the certification services (standard of process, certificate and system). In particular, the National Technical Committee carried out the National Framework of Regional Qualifications (defined by the Interministerial Decree 30/06/2015), as a component of the broader National Repertory, provided by the art. 8 of the Decree No 13/2013. In addition, the National Framework of Regional Qualifications was created starting from the universal mapping of work (the so-called "Atlas"), which will be illustrated in detail in the next chapter.

Interministerial Decree 30/06/2015
The approval of the Interministerial Decree of June 30, 2015 represents a major landmark in enacting the Legislative Decree No 13/2013, since it defines the operational framework for the national recognition of Regional Qualifications and skills, in the field of the National Repertory of the Education, Training and Vocational Training.
This decree defines the National Framework on the basis of which the regional qualifications are recognised and expendable throughout the national territory, determining the operational references of the process standards, certification and registration of the system. These references represent the common methodological basis at national level, through which the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces organize the service for identifying, validating and certifying the acquired skills, in a formal, non-formal and informal context.
In particular, in accordance with Article 5 of the Legislative Decree N° 13/2013, the Regions and the Autonomous Province of Trento and Bolzano have the competences to ensure compliance with the minimum process standards related to two services, see Figure 2:
- The "process of identification and validation", intended as a service aimed at the recognition, by authorized body, of skills acquired in any context by person through the reconstruction and evaluation of the formal learning, also in case of interruption of the formal process. The identification and validation process can either be completed through the issuance of a "Validation document", having the validity of an official document and at least a second party attestation, or by continuing the procedure for the certification of skills outlined below, as long as the person requests it. With reference to the identification and validation process, the minimum elements that characterizes the phases of the process offering this service are:
  o For the identification phase: reconstruction of the person's experience, transparency of the acquired skills and development of the "supporting document for the transparency of the acquired skills ("Transparency document")[166];
  o For the technical assessment phase: technical assessment of the Transparency Document and possible direct evaluation, intended as an evaluation exam for the candidate through a test, technical interview or performance assessment;
  o For the phase of attestation: preparation and issuance of the "Validation document".

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166 The "Supporting document for the transparency of the acquired skills" has validity of a first party attestation, including the following minimum information: a) the person's personal data; b) the skills identified as potential validation items; c) the work experiences and formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences that refer to the sills identified as potential validation items.

Figure 2. Operational references for the minimum process standards

Identification and assessment

Formal, non formal and informal

Output: Validation document

Second party attestation

IDENTIFICATION PHASE means:

Reconstruction of the person's experience, transparency of the acquired competences and development of the **"Transparency document"** (as supporting document for the transparency of the acquired competences)

ASSESSMENT PHASE means:

Technical **assessment of the "Transparency document"** and possible direct evaluation, intended as an evaluation exam for the candidate through a **test, technical interview or performance assessment**

ATTESTATION PHASE means:

Preparation and issuance of the **"Validation document"**

(*Upon request*)

Steps for Certification of competences:

1 Admission to the certification procedure through the formalization of the learning outcomes achieved, in the case of learning acquired through a formal setting; **acquisition of the "Validation document", in case of learning acquired through non-formal and informal settings;**

2 Direct and summative evaluation carried out through **technical interviews or performance assessments, in the presence of a commission or a collegial body** which ensures principles of impartiality, independence and objectivity of the process

3 Preparation and issuance of the **"Certificate"**

Certification of competences (following Identification and assessment)

Third party (public exam with Commission)

- The "procedure for the certification of skills", intended as a service aimed at the issuance of a "Certification", relating to the skills acquired by the person in formal context or those validated skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. This "Certificate" document represents a third-party attestation, having validity of an official document. With reference to the certification procedure, the minimum elements that characterize the phase of the process offering this service are:
  o For the identification phase: admission to the certification procedure through the formalization of the learning outcomes achieved, in the case of learning acquired through a formal setting; acquisition of the "Validation documents", in case of learning acquired through non-formal and informal contexts;
  o For the assessment phase: evaluation carried out through technical interviews or performance assessments, in the presence of a commission or a collegial body which ensures that the principles of impartiality, independence and objectivity of the process are observed.

Moreover, the decree, fulfills the ex-ante conditionalities envisaged for the start of the 2014-2020 ESF programming and, in particular, the "existence of a strategic or regional political framework for lifelong learning". Among the fulfillment criteria to satisfy this conditionality, it is provided for the adoption of measures to widen the access to life-long learning, also through initiatives aimed at boosting greater transparency (for i.e. the National Qualification Framework; the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training; the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training).

In line with the European orientations, the Interministerial Decree of June 30, 2015, thus, aims to promote the transparency of learning, ensuring greater adherence of training to the needs of businesses and professions, as well as broading the recognition of qualifications at local, national and European levels, in order to facilitate the geographical and professional mobility of individuals. In particular, the qualifications issued by the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano have value throughout the national territory and they can represent a title for access to open competition or contribute to professional requirements for the access to reserved work activities, in compliance with the European and Italian regulations. Furthermore, qualifications are made transparent for recognition, at European and international level, by referencing the classification systems of economic activities and professions and at the levels of the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

Decree 8/1/2018
The Decree establishes the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), describing and classifying the qualifications issued under the National System for certification of competences. Furthermore, this decree represents the national framework for referencing Italian qualifications in the European Qualifications Framework, in order to link the Italian qualification system with the systems of other European countries and to coordinate the different systems of lifelong learning and the related services of identification, validation and certification of competences:
- Improving the accessibility, transparency and permeability of qualifications.
- Facilitating the use of qualifications at national and European level.
- Promoting the centrality of the person and the enhancement of individual experiences, also through the identification, validation and certification of the skills acquired in non-formal

and informal contexts, including the skills acquired in work-based learning contexts.
- Contributing to the quality of training and to the increase of the skills in a perspective of personal, civic, social and occupational growth.

The referencing of the lifelong learning qualifications to the NQF, foreseen by the present decree, allows and completes the inclusion of the qualifications in the National Repertory of education, training and professional qualifications. According to the EQF, the NQF is developed in three dimensions, which describe the competences in terms of knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility; descriptors, which functionally explain the aforementioned dimensions, in order to adapt them to the National System of Competence Certification; and in eight levels, which characterize the growing complexity of learning with respect to the initial dimensions.

The referencing to the NQF is mandatory for all qualifications, for the purpose of validation and certification, in the framework of the National System of Competence Certification, while the procedures are managed by the National Coordination Point of the EQF at the ANPAL (National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies), through the independent evaluation of the referencing proposals by INAPP (National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies).

The Atlas of Work and Qualifications
The introduction of a national operational framework, which allows, for the first time in Italy, the recognition of regional qualifications between Regions and the entire national territory, in the context of the National Repertory, is the result of a research action that has achieved a universal mapping of work (the so-called Atlas). In accordance with this model, the VET qualification competences, as per vocational and professional nature, should be described as work-related by mirroring the expertise. Hinging on this holistic of the competence concept, this would allow referencing the work-related competences to the description of work processes for a determined occupational sector. This holistic view is strengthened by the fact that in EU Countries the learning outcomes and competence-based approaches are in a strong position and register positive trend of improvement[167]. Based on the necessity to allow correlation and equivalence between regional qualification (through competences description) and to link the learning outcomes with the expected results/occupational tasks, INAPP, Regions (technical assistance of Tecnostruttura association), Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and ANPAL have developed a comprehensive "mapping of the world of the labour market and qualifications", which includes professional areas in 24 economic sectors and describes them in terms of main work processes, areas of activity and specific activities. In particular, the items composing the Atlas allow comparing Regional qualifications (described in terms of competences, skills and knowledge) through the use of a common language (working activities). This matching was performed via qualitative analysis of methodological and sectoral experts. Sector experts were involved in the development of the Atlas, namely by contributing to the definition and review of work-processes and their respective activities. This provides a strong labour market orientation to the Atlas framework, and as consequences to the national qualification descriptions. In addition, further sections of the Atlas are being developed, such as the draft of *fiches of work practices* upon which designing the evaluation and the assessment. These elements have added value: for example,

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167 Cedefop, *Application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe. A comparative study*, Cefedop Reference Series N° 105, Luxemburg, Publication Office of the European Union, 2016

the Atlas is taken as guiding principles for the design of apprentices programmes, being aligned directly to the terminology and the content of labour market activities.

Fig. 3. Key items constituting the Italian Atlas Framework
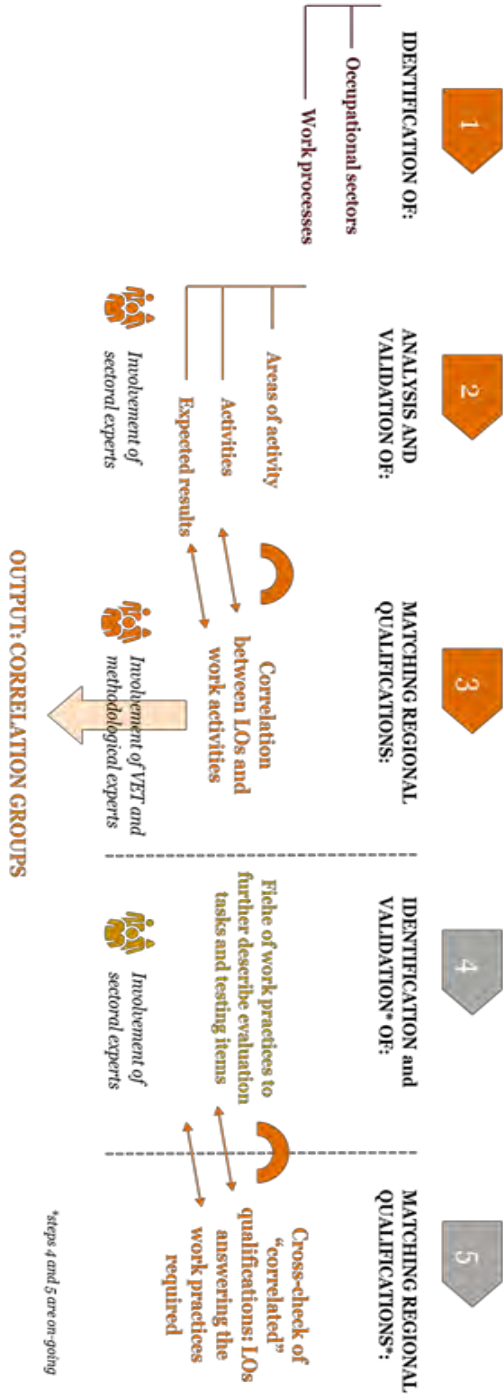
Specifically, figure 3 highlights the key items constituting the Italian Atlas:

- Work contents are represented and made navigable, through a classification scheme formed by 24 "Professional Economic Sectors" (SEP). The classification of Professional Economic Sectors (SEP) has been developed according to the ISTAT classification codes related to the economic activities (ATECO 2007) and professions (Classification of Professions 2011).
- In all sectors, it is possible to view the main "Work Processes", divided into "Processes Sequences", each containing specific Areas of Activities (ADA).
- Each ADA displays a detailed sheet that includes the list of specific activities that compose the ADA and the expected products and services (Expected Results - RA) stemming from those work activities, as well as references to the statistical codes of ISTAT classification;
- *Fiches of work practices* are developed from the expected results (RA) and they represent exemplifications of product/services, of operating modes and the operating contexts through which the expected results are reached.
- The correlation between regional qualifications and the National Repertory are defined by the criterion of "preside professional profile/competence, with respect to the ADA, the correlation group, the activity".
- The regional qualifications, which in terms of competences preside over the work activities of an ADA or a correlation group, assume the code of the ADA or, if discriminating, the correlation group subcode and the associated work activities codes.
- Finally, regional qualifications will be linked to the NQF and correlations will guarantee their recognition across regional territories.

Therefore, according to the scheme above, starting from the identification of occupational sectors and work processes, it is possible to associate the Area of Activity (ADA) to a qualification. At the same time, the *Learning Outcomes* (LO)[168], which compose the qualifications.

The Atlas represents an infrastructure which not only is able to gather all regional qualifications into a unique national framework (NQF), but also to correlate work-base items (economic and professional sectors, work processes and areas of activities and their expected results) to specific qualifications (VET, higher education, general education), as underlined by the example below, concerning the Construction Industry.

In order to make sustainable the development and the update of the work contents, described in the Atlas, (about 80 Work Processes" and circa 830 Areas of Activities (ADA) and 5400 "Expected Results" (RA)[169]), a technical-methodological protocol was set up, in accordance with the Interministerial Decree of 30 June 2015 - Annex 4, to support the constant updating of the system.

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168 Learning Outcomes (LO) are defined as: a) statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence; b) sets of knowledge, skills and/or competences on individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal and informal (For more information, see Cedefop, *Terminology of European education and training policy. Second edition*, Luxembourg, Publication office of the European Union, 2014, pp, 164-165).

169 INAPP, Mazzarella R., *L'Atlante del lavoro nei processi di sviluppo dell'occupabilità e di mobilità occupazionale*. Summary, intervento a "I seminari del venerdì", Roma Inapp, 26 maggio 2017. Isfol OA: < http://isfoloa.isfol.it/xmlui/handle/123456789/1633 >. The figures reported are referred to the Atlas in 2017 and must be constantly updated on the basis of the Atlas development stage.

Fig. 4. Fiches of work practices: the example of Construction Industry

Professional Economic Sector — Work Process — Process Sequence — Areas of Activities — Activities

- Construction industry

- Buildings construction and civil / industrial engineering works

  - Construction design and building site management
  - General works of excavation and handling
  - Construction of reinforced concrete works
  - Realization of building and waterproofing works
  - Completion and finishing works

  - Waterproofing works
  - Masonry construction

Activities:
- Analysis of technical design of wall element to build
- Perform small scale demolition
- Actions of recovery and consolidation of structural elements
- Track according to wall design
- Masonry construction (bearing walls, dividing walls, tampon walls, decorative walls)
- Building walls (arches, vaults, planks, archives)
- Prepare binders
- Validation of the artwork of the work
- Load and unload materials
- Racking and storage of resulting material

RA 1: Make tracking based on project elements, performing site preparation activities, demolishing and / or consolidating pre-existing structural elements, using, if necessary, provisioning and support structures.

1- Tracking

1.1 External tracking for new constructions

Trace an outbound track on a new building plan (eg countryside) using common and electronic tools (eg laser).

2- ...

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This procedure involves the remote consultation of stakeholders, identifying INAPP as the entity, designed by the above-mentioned Decree, to collect the requests for development and maintenance coming from players representative of the work and profession world. These proposals are then analysed and processed by INAPP, which formally present them to the technical group in charge of validating the content of the proposed change. n line with the current legislation at European and national level, the Atlas aims at aligning the labour market systems with worker's needs, encouraging participation in learning through common tools of credit recognition and the enhancement of mutual experiences, in order to improve the accessibility and transparency of qualifications and to promote the centrality of the individual.

To this end, the Atlas functional uses can be identified: 1) provision of lifelong learning guidance through specific needs analyses based on the user/target capacities and potential interests; 2) the Atlas elements as basis for targeted and customised training offer/provision; 3) fiches of work practices as elements to be used for the assessment within the IVC services. With regard to the latter, the fiches represent a compelling tool for the description of working cases in terms of products/services and operating contexts that a certain work-activity should reach (hence, the working performance). They can be used within the IVC (VPL) services as these elements, embedded in the Atlas of work and qualifications, provide specific evaluation tasks and test items with a full coverage of labour market sectors. Each fiche of work practices includes concrete and objective description on how a specific task should be performed, hence through these elements the evaluation and assessment of candidates' learning outcomes for validation purposes are eased and made closer to the work reality.

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OBSERVAL in Honduras

4.6

Conceptual Framework of The Observatory for the Validation of Professional Competences and Human Capabilities in Honduras

Celeo Emilio Arias

The objective of the Observal-Honduras was to integrate an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for the observatory by identifying concepts and theoretical constructs that have been used for the analysis of the recognition of *'previous, current and prospective learning'*, and then in subsequent stages conceptualize and operationalize them in what will be the research orientation for Observal-Honduras.[170] Relevant approaches were identified in education and development (capacities for human development; in human rights; in human capital), models for the analysis of educational policies (democratic emancipator; modernization and control of the state, and that of human resource management) and perspectives of prior learning (critical/radical, liberal humanist, and technical/market).

This article demonstrates that the identified concepts and/or constructs can be found interconnected and/or dispersed in different approaches, models and perspectives within the study field of the 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)'. This is valuable for future research; and for consolidation and maturation of dominant and emerging concepts and constructs, both in the study field at international level, as well as in the Honduran and Latin American context. Furthermore, there is a great opportunity for the RPL study field to consider, in addition to Prior Learning, the integration with Current and Prospective Learning.[171]

The Working Ground of UNAH

During the process of the IV reform and transformation of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), a position favoring sustainable human development was adopted, and on the other hand, knowledge management was incorporated as a new university task, which seeks to integrate other university chores (research, teaching and bonding). It is important to emphasize that economic development is part of the position previously adopted, but more as a means and complement, than as an end. After more than a decade of its implementation, the reform process has been gestating a series of initiatives, as well as complementing, in a process of intra and inter-institutional maturity, the different mechanisms and elements that would allow the achievement of Sustainable Human Development at the level country.

One of the agreements established by the Transitional Commission, derived from the general lines (vision and mission) of the general reform plan, the so-called articulating policy of Regional Educational Networks for knowledge management of Sustainable Human

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170 Observal-Honduras: Observatory for the Validation of professional competences and human capacities.
171 RPCPL: Recognition of Previous, Current and Prospective Learning

Development, privileging the principles of quality, relevance and quality, which already considers the recognition of learning, experiences, and knowledge (tacit, implicit, indigenous, local) linked to non-formal and informal (empirical) contexts. However, the construction and validation of the different mechanisms and elements that allowed its systematic implementation remained pending.

In recent years, intra- and inter-institutional convergence processes have been carried out, in order to strengthen mainly the formal component, although in 2012 the fundamental law for the entire higher education system came into force. Based on the global trends and needs of the national context, the design and implementation of the non-formal and informal components in all sub-systems was established, in the case of the higher education sub-system it was established, by autonomy institutional, that it would correspond to UNAH to direct said development.

With a prospective integral vision, UNAH managed to build a participatory process of articulation between academia, government and business. In the so-called 'Prospective strategy for sustainable human development in Honduras', it converges among other elements. The country vision 2010-2038, nation plan 2010-2022, the economic development plan 2020, the strategic plan for the development of the higher education system (PE-SES) 2014-2023, the national science, technology and innovation system, and the private enterprise sector, and some aspects are also identified in terms of the purposes, benefits and duties of the actors, possible sources of financing, and a route to follow in the short, medium and long term timeline. Another aspect to stand out is the articulated proposal coinciding transversally, by privileging the paradigm of sustainable human development, citing Amartya Sen as one of the main references in that field.

The articulation strategy in the sustainable development plan of Honduras states that *"The result of the approach with the Higher Education Institutions, was the document 'Development of Science and Technology in Higher Education of Honduras', with the aim of strengthening and validating an academic model that aims in the short and medium term, certification of citizens with the skills to drive necessary changes that are required for Honduras to enter the world market with high productivity."*[172]

Derived from the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Higher Education System, the prospective strategy for DHS identifies the following in its five fundamental elements "a) Create an Occupational Skills Assessment Center [...]), b) Raise the number of technical and technological careers, c) Implement academic programs in the different forms of delivery according to the distance modality (blended and blended with virtual mediation), d) UNAH will develop a Higher Education Labor Information System, creating a Labor Observatory [...] and e) UNAH will create a Prospective Unit for Sustainable Human Development that can generate research & development programs, innovation, entrepreneurship (R+D+I+E), knowledge management", this proposal helps to generate installed capacity Inter e intra-institutional to strengthen and strengthen these fundamental elements.

The Observatory

The observatory's main focus is on how to use the recognition and the Validation (or Recognition) of Prior Learning (RPL) as an effective instrument for the sake of personalization of learning in the 'knowledge society' of Honduras? The objective of the observatory in its first stage is aimed at answering this question by initiating the design, configuration, and

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172 References at *https://www.observal.es/es/blog/entry/observal-en-la-universidad-nacional-de-honduras.*

establishment of the bases for the implementation of said observatory, within said bases the conceptual framework. The concept of driving the program will be in tune with the revitalization of the links between the worlds of learning and work through the employability of people. This focused employability can be improved with the analysis of the learning history (validation of previous, current and future learning).

Justification and purpose

The construction process of the Observal-Honduras, by its nature requires a conceptual framework nurtured by different disciplines and validated in different contexts. Specifying a conceptual framework or constructs to a specific emerging field, as it is in the "Previous, current and prospective learning". In addition to the above, a direct link with SDG[173] 4 of the 2030 agenda "Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Also, with SDG 8. "Decent work and economic growth. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

The purpose is to identify and integrate an interdisciplinary conceptual framework, which will strengthen the implementation of the objectives of the Observatory for the validation of professional and work skills in Honduras.

Interdisciplinary conceptual framework

perspectives interconnected by discursive, common and differentiated elements, to make analyzes at different levels. Regarding approaches in education and development (Ron-Balsera, 2011) identifies a) capacities for human development, b) in human rights, c) in human capital, then (Lima, 2011) proposes three models for policy analysis, the democratic emancipator, the modernization and control of the state, and the management of human resources. And on perspectives of previous learning models (Breier, 2006) articulates the critical/radical, liberal humanist, and the technique/market.

Theoretical concepts

The concepts or constructs for the Observal-Honduras framework are considered elements or mechanisms of discourse. There are several epistemic communities that have come and continue to contribute to the maturation of these theoretical concepts or constructs.

Arias, (2017), through an analysis of relevant literature review content identifies categories of analysis (constructs) that are determinants for the recognition, validation and accreditation of 'prior learning', among which we have in order of saturation by number of documents/authors: knowledge (12), power (10), pedagogy (7), learning (6), identity (5), experience (4), learning from experience (2), communication (2), qualification (2). Other constructs were identified that were included only in one of the documents; credential (1), symbolic control (1), governmentality (1), mutual understanding (1), gender, academic credit (1), reflection (1).

Knowledge

The following authors have used this construct for REAP analysis: (Harris, 2000, 2006; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Harris, 2006; Michelson, 2006; Guo, & Andersson, 2006; Peters, 2006; Pokorny, 2006; Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Ruksana, 2006; Harris, Judy & Wihak, Christine, 2011; Cardeiro, 2011). Breier (2006, 2011).

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173 SDG = Sustainable Development Goals

'Knowledge' is defined or conceptualized as follows: Harris (2000: 10) uses the two models of knowledge mode 1 and mode 2, developed by (Gibbons et al., 1994) to differentiate the knowledge produced by academics and which is produced by multiple actors. Mode 1 (traditional) is almost always presented as fixed and universal, privileges coded knowledge. Mode 2 is the socially constructed by multiple actors, in specific and multiple contexts. It gives credit to personal knowledge originated from the application and resolution of problems (Eraut in Barnett, 1992; Eraut, 1994), cit. in Harris, 2000). In addition, it refers to ways of organizing knowledge in curriculum and learning programs, with vertical and horizontal discourse, collection and integration of codes in the curriculum (citing Bernstein, 1971; 1996). ´the vertical discourse ´ acquires the form of coherent, explicit, systematic structure of principles, organized hierarchically […] the contexts are specialized (disciplinary). In horizontal discourse, construction has a more informal tendency, integrating local and experiential knowledge - whose `knowledge` is 'segmented, context dependent, tacit, multi-layered, often contradictory between contexts but not within contexts' (Bernstein, 1996: 170, cit. In ibid).

A crucial point is that vertical discourse is acquired through formal pedagogical relationships and is carried out according to the values and discourses of the context, while horizontal discourses are acquired through informal activity and associated discourses and values (from the workplace, for example). Again, the distinctions, although rigid, should not be over dichotomized. There is evidence of the vertical in the horizontal concepts and vice versa, as well as the additional concepts also the horizontal knowledge structures that are found within the vertical discourses. (ibid)

The collection of codes in the curriculum refers to curricular content that is well isolated from other content, subjects or disciplines. The contents are thus "closed" and relatively fixed and waterproof - although there are several "pure" and "impure" varieties, specialized and non-specialized code collection (Bernstein, 1971: 52), cit. In ibid.). curricula) with code integration occur where borders are less isolated and with more dialogic content with other content, subjects, etc., therefore, more permeable. Bernstein argues that for integration to occur, previously subjects and / or courses isolated, they must be subordinated to a consensual "relational idea" (Bernstein, 1971: 60), cit. in ibid.).

Harris (2006), continued to address the concept of knowledge and curriculum in the theory and practice of recognition of prior learning (RPL), uses different knowledge concepts such as; knowledge transfer, matching knowledge, equivalent, and hard and soft limits to analyze different approaches within practice. Its main argument is that the 'learning of experience', as discourse, is so dominant that it embodies a position against formal knowledge, leading to silence, paradoxes and contradictions around knowledge and curriculum in the theory and practice of (RPL). He also continues his analysis from the sociology of knowledge / education, using Basil Bernstein's curriculum theories, analyzing internally the relations of educational practices with cultural expressions of reproduction and transformation production through consciousness. Harris concludes, pointing out that "although there are caveats in the use of Bernstein's concepts, they provide a powerful language to theorize knowledge and curricula in RPL, thus contributing to making RPL practices more epistemologically responsible. Moreover, challenging some conventional thinking in the field of RPL, for example, that the effectiveness of the weakening of the frontiers of knowledge in the search for 'progress' is taken for granted.

Then, Anderson (2006); his contribution is made using evaluation theories and practices in RPL, he focuses on the evaluation of knowledge / skills. It takes into account several

perspectives, one of the perspectives that it discusses is to evaluate both the individual and his previous learning, including selection and transformation processes, simultaneously said evaluation is linked to theories of evaluation and knowledge [...] the question of the quality of said RPL evaluation does so using terms of validity, reliability, credibility and relevance [...]. It shows that another aspect of the discussion that takes place in RPL is local versus universal knowledge, in light of the tensions that occur in the particularities of the individual and the potential for standardization of evaluation methods. Using a series of concepts, it identifies RPL = Recognition of Prior Learning

two patterns, which are not a dichotomy, that could be used as a starting point for new analyzes, these patterns are among other features, one that seeks to adapt the RPL to the system (based on reliability; closed/convergent; selection function; summative and predictive) and another that seeks the RPL to change the system (based on validity; open/divergent; transformation function; formative).

Subconstruct	Exponents
Knowledge and power	Michelson (2006: 143); It refers to situated knowledge, ´explore how the alternative epistemologies that are offered by the theories of situated knowledge, which could boost both the practice of RPL, as well as allow RPL to challenge the power relations within which knowledge It is legitimized and recognized. It also shows that the term 'experiential learning' is constantly used in the discourse of adult education, however, in his discussion of philosophical premises he decides to use the term knowledge instead of learning, to connote a socially constructed understanding of the world, instead of an internalized development process and it focuses on epistemologies, that is, in the ways in which theories of 'experiential learning' are theories of knowledge, not cognition. It also shows that during the 20th century, John Dewey inspired with his insistence on the organic connection between education and personal experience, and that this was an organizational principle of adult learning, in the sense that knowledge is based on experience. In addition, these theories of adult learning challenged rigid pedagogies, centered on the subject and did much to put contextualized knowledge and diverse life experiences. In addition to this, these theories in their organization of knowledge disagree with academic disciplines, insisting on the large and different demographic differences and learning styles that students have (ibid.: 146)
	Guo & Andersson (2006); they refer to the equivalences of contexts (migrations), based on perspectives from critical theory and post-modernism, examine the relationship between 'knowledge' and power, in the problem that can occur when transferring credentials and experience of a context to another. Their arguments are based on the fact that `the main problem is the erroneous epistemological perception of difference and knowledge, as well as the ontological foundations of positivism and liberal universalism that dominates current recognition practices. In relation to 'knowledge', he expresses that it is used as a power to keep out the undesirable and when citing scholars of critical and postmodern theory as being (Cunningham, 2000; Foucault, 1980; McLaren, 2003, cit.

	In ibid., 2006) they maintain that "knowledge" is power; knowledge is socially constructed, culturally mediated and historically situated; And it is never neutral and objective.
	Peters (2006) using concepts of power and knowledge, from Foucault and Fairclough and Chouliaraki., In the case of Foucault, he uses the concepts of speech, power / knowledge, biopower and power technology to explore why RPL practices have not had Success in challenging academic hegemony or empowering candidates. Peter identifies some paradoxes, many candidates see RPL as the extension of what counts as valid (disciplinary) knowledge, but at the same time candidates (themselves) are required to purchase an existing institutional discourse and knowledge. Peters posits that RPL is caught in a bind, and the candidates in a "discursive struggle": "The practices claim to be about challenging institutional technologies of power but that it is actually normalizing candidates. Likewise, paradoxically their empirical evidence shows how candidates see their previous knowledge as different from the knowledge defined by the institution, while the RPL evaluators look for something they are familiar with, and then, at an empirical level, problematizes discursive aspects, using Chouliaraki and Fairclough makes a critical analysis and sees Discursive aspects of the practical dimensions of RPL In addition Peters adds focus and texture using Halliday makes linguistic analysis and critical discourse analysis with Fairclough looking at two practices associated with RPL; a) the use of learning outcomes and b) focused on portfolios .
	Pokorny (2006) centers his analysis using the 'network actor' or 'network-actor' theory, in which knowledge is theorized as produced, organized and distributed through network patterns in heterogeneous material: such as activities, artifacts , technologies and practice narratives. I apply it in RPL in the context of higher education in the United Kingdom, something interesting to rescue is that it illustrates how the use of learning outcomes in the network (competences) makes a lot of prior learning invisible. In addition to the above, (ibid.) Sees how the use of reflection divides experience and knowledge and empowers RPL candidates by removing or removing their experience from the social context. To illustrate the stages by which RPL candidates make their prior knowledge punctualized and translated into an academic (dominant) network, use c
Power[174]	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis; (Harris, 2000, 2006; Anderson & Harris, 2006; Michelson, 2006; Guo, & Andersson, 2006; Peters, 2006; Pokorny, 2006; Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Ruksana, 2006; Harris, Judy & Wihak, Christine, 2011; Breier, 2006, 2011).
Power and pedagogy	Contemporary social theory helps to understand how contextual conditions change influence how institutions think about problems - for

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174 La *validez* es clave para emancipar el conocimiento y en futuros estudios se va requerir profundizar más sobre el conocimiento informal y los métodos (instrumentos historias de vida y portafolio ajustado) de dar validez a lo informal, local, etcétera.

example, education, the ways in which globalization and commodification are leading to the development of new relationships between Education, training and the economy. Social theories also help to understand the often hidden power relations within different forms of traditional and emerging education, and how these possibilities of forms of action. One of these theories is Bourdieu's theory of practice that applies to a family of related concepts habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), cit. In Harris, 2000)

It is one thing to describe the changes and their understanding in the images, but another is to understand why they are happening and what interests are being served by them. Institutions do not exist in isolation. They are located and shaped by broader social, cultural and economic forces.

contemporary social theory helps to understand how contextual conditions change influence how institutions think about problems - for example, education, the ways in which globalization and commodification are leading to the development of new relationships between Education, training and the economy. Social theories also help to understand the often hidden power relations within different forms of traditional and emerging education, and how these possibilities of forms of action. One of these theories is Bourdieu's theory of practice that applies to a family of habitus, capital and field related concepts (Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), cit in ibid.).

The concept of habitus helps explain how the previous structures and dispositions - individual and collective - continue to shape the current social function and life opportunities. Operating at a largely unconscious and tacit level, habitus represents the bridge between higher order structures and individual decisions and (professional) actions. A key issue is that social assets and resources - or forms of capital - are distributed unevenly and that certain people (with certain habitus) become more and with better access to them than others. Fields are social spaces that comprise different capital holdings. Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) can be seen as fields and RPL as a sub-field within them. The way in which different fields are structured often supports unequal access to capital, despite policies to the contrary. Competition for available capital (whether economic, social, cultural or symbolic) in a field is usually a fierce competition. The concept of capital coincides with the concept of conversion factor proposed by Amarthia Sen, in the case of Sen to generate mobility based on what the individual decides with full freedom.

It is the distribution of capital within the fields that makes it vital to look beyond the policies and declarations of the institutions, and to explore how power is actually distributed in contexts often through indirect social and cultural media - about all if RPL is socially inclusive as possible.

The concepts of habitus, countryside and capital underline the need to see RPL as educational and as a social practice. Examples of the questions that arise are: What are the distributions of capital in the different institutional areas? Who is given access to capital and under what conditions? Is it a

	practice like RPL can expand access, for those who do not have the dominant or capital habit - to that capital? Breier (2006) this author categorized three broad perspectives of the RPL, and within the concepts and constructs he refers among one of them to the inequality of power relations.
Power, pedagogy and possibilities	It is only when one has an idea of how power operates in a context, that appropriate-form interventions - called RPL or anything else - can be done in order to support greater inclusion. Although dominant discourses set limits on activities or actions, no situation is completely fixed. There are always opportunities to reshape the discursive terms. In this way, alternatives to what is could be provided, in the form of what could be. In this way, RPL can be seen as a set of discursive practices that can contribute to the formation of broader institutional contexts - which can "work" towards optimal social inclusion. This level of analysis suggests that RPL executors should influence or give responsible form to aspects of institutional and curricular contexts for optimal social inclusion. Together, the theories and the above concepts allow a depth of analysis that will lay the foundation for an understanding of RPL as a social, educational and well-informed practice, and not as a bolt or bottleneck in procedures.
Pedagogy	The following authors have used this construct for the RPL analysis (Harris, 2000, 2006; Anderson & Harris, 2006; Cameron, Roslyn, 2006; Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Ruksana, 2006; Harris, & Wihak, Christine, 2011; Breier, 2006, 2011). According to Harris (2000) the concepts of pedagogical projection and introjection help to understand the different pedagogical orientations (Bernstein, 1996). Projection pedagogies (sometimes called economic pedagogies) direct attention to the outside world - to the fields of practice, for example, or to market needs. Introjection pedagogies (which can take liberal, populist or radical forms) have to do with the development of the student's internal consciousness. For this reason Bernstein refers to such pedagogies as therapeutic. Introjection pedagogy tends to allow high levels of variation and heterogeneity in pedagogy and evaluation - for example, "evaluation over time" with criteria that are often not explicit and based on a common and tacit ideological basis that allows considerable discretion for teachers. Projection pedagogy is likely to involve a pronounced movement towards a common pedagogy and a "common system of evaluation," that is, homogeneity and less discretionary for teachers. Bernstein argues that projection pedagogy is more deeply penetrating in a socialization process where "the teacher teaches the most" enters the educational framework. This is linked to the concept of governmentality of (Foucault (1988), cit. In Harris, 2000) the current way in which social regulation occurs. Usher & Edwards (1994) suggest that educational practices are becoming more confessional - through increased attention to profiling, self-assessment, counseling and others that these approaches

	are the ways in which they become externalized internal attributes, in Ultimately, for regulation through self-regulation. Maybe RPL is part of this movement.

Learning

The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis, such as Harris, 2000, 2006; Anderson & Harris, 2006; Pokorny, 2006; Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Anderson & Fejes, 2011; Breier, 2006, 2011.

On a global level, changing socio-economic and cultural conditions or postmodernity have re-founded the modes of knowledge production, dissemination and communication, establishing new terms for the time and place and usefulness of education, and forcing the re conceptualization of meaning of learning (Young et al, 1998; Edwards & Usher, 2000). Post-Fordism as a form of economic organization left new relationships between the economy and education, which is based more and more on the requirements of the former (cit. In Harris (2000); Gibbons et al., 1994; Millar & Xulu, 1996) Globalization and commodification are the motives, the "knowledge society" and lifelong learning have become central concepts. In addition, from a socio-cultural perspective, writers in a postmodernist vein have questioned enlightened thinking, particularly the great and universal narratives that have education in a traditional way (liberalism, humanism, radicalism and human capitalism) and the modernist vision of education as a fundamental problem, free of values for personal and social progress. The meaning and nature of education are, therefore, in the process of being rebuilt by changing social conditions (Harris, 2000).

According to (Harris, 2000) A key issue for those interested in the proper development of the RPL practice is that the commodification of education and training (and the management discourses that embody and bring it to reality) cannot be taken by democratic and socially inclusive definition - the results can be rather mixed and ambiguous.

'Concepts and theories are necessary to understand contemporary developments in teaching and learning and in education and training. Changing views and understanding of knowledge, learning, experience, learning from experience and pedagogy is essential to understand RPL. Each of them is taken in turn below. The objective is not, at this point, to link the concepts to each other, because there are many possible links and permutations.' (Harris, 2000)

The concepts of UNESCO, cit. in Singh, and Duvekot (2013), according to the definitions set out in the UNESCO Guidelines (UIL, 2012) are focused on:

a) Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, and is recognized by the national competent authorities, which leads to degrees and qualifications. Formal learning is structured according to educational provisions, such as curricula, grades and teaching / learning requirements.

b) Non-formal learning is learning that it is in addition to or alternative to formal education and is also structured according to educational arrangements but is more flexible. Through the RPL process, non-formal learning can also lead to qualifications and other awards.

c) Informal learning is the involuntary learning that occurs in everyday life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities, and through the interests and activities of individuals. Through the RPL process, skills acquired in informal learning can be made visible and can contribute to qualifications and other recognition. The term experiential learning is also used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience.

Terms	Authors
Experience	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis: (vid .: Harris, 2000; Michelson, 2006; Guo, & Andersson, 2006; Harris, Breier, & Wihak, Christine, 2011), in the 'learning experience' construct (Harris, 2000; Harris, Judy & Wihak, Christine, 2011).
Experience Learning	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis;: ' (vid .: Harris, 2000; Harris, & Wihak, 2011; Breier, 2006, 2011)
Identity	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis; (vid .: Anderson & Harris, 2006; Harris, 2006; Pokorny, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Wheelahan, 2006; Breier, 2006)
Communication	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis: (vid .: Anderson & Fejes, 2011; Sandberg, & Andersson, 2011)
Qualification	The following authors have used this construct for RPL analysis: (vid .: Wheelahan, 2006; Whittaker, 2011)
Inclusion	(vid .: Harris (2000) refers to analyzes of optimal social inclusion, (vid .: Singh, and Duvekot (2013) refer to RPL as mechanisms that contribute to social inclusion, and RPL and the qualifications framework as articulating framework of all levels of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and Top-Down and Bottom up strategies.

Conclusions

The different concepts and / or constructs identified can be found interconnected and / or dispersed in the different approaches, models and perspectives of the RPL field of study, responding to the discursive mechanisms that privilege each of them.

The most saturated constructs in the field of study of "recognition, validation and accreditation of prior, current and prospective learning" as being; knowledge, power, pedagogy, learning, identity, and experience should be integrated and operationalized, in the development of the Honduras Observal's research line, through the prioritized value chains of knowledge: Coffee, Cocoa, Tourism, Education and Vegetables. In the methodological dimension, the constructs have been validated more with the qualitative approach, requiring greater complementarity with quantitative studies going from the descriptive level to correlational and structured equations.

Similarly, emerging constructs (credential, symbolic control, governmentality, mutual understanding, gender, academic credit, reflection, among others) will need to be strengthened, in order to continue achieving higher levels of maturity in their explanation and understanding. In addition to the foregoing, the adjustment to other innovative and innovative constructs would be explored for future studies, with the purpose of consolidating a framework based on contextualized grounded theory.

All concepts and constructs would be articulated in their operationalization, with the common framework of professional families and occupational positions that are established, with a breakdown of competencies, units of competencies and levels of achievement for each of the occupations. As well as consistency with the procedure for the certification of the competence acquired both formally and through informal experience. To link and achieve linkage and relevance, these concepts and constructs must be integrated in their methodological and instrumental dimension, in a portfolio management system and life stories (validation of previous, current and prospective learning).

The conclusion of Pokorny (2006), is that "the theory of the actor in network offers an approach to overcome dilemmas associated with reflection. She argues that RPL could (and should) commit to the heterogeneity of the candidate's knowledge networks rather than focusing solely on convergence towards academics "that is to say that the diverse demands or needs of the different groups of candidates should be taken more RPL In addition (ibid.) It refers to the implications in an investigation of equivalent knowledge based on the detailed exploration of the internal complexity of the networks of the candidates. In this way, RPL could pose a more theorized challenge to network practices that define academic knowledge` Being a relatively new field of study, on the one hand, there are many opportunities to contribute to the maturation of the field of study. On the other hand, it is a disadvantage in not having a consolidated theoretical and empirical foundation, to achieve greater exchange spaces. Especially Latin America is the context with incipient levels of development, the literature review is almost entirely dominated by the context and agenda of first world countries. A fundamental aspect for future studies will be the development and integration of the three dimensions of lifelong learning, both previous (past) and current (prospective) and prospective (future) learning and experiences.

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Post-Validation Pathways 5

Ruud Duvekot

Validation of Prior (VPL) concerns learning processes which allow individual learners to allocate themselves an active role within the 'learning society' when it comes to achieving personal, civil and/or social effects. Civil effect means achieving a learning outcome in the context of a particular qualification standard within the education system. Social effect is focused on results which are relevant to job profiles, social targets, participation, inclusion and/or assignments. Personal impact entails achieving empowerment, career and study orientation and/or personal development.

Such VPL results shouldn't only facilitate an individual's mobility for opening up new pathways for learning and development, but should also embrace a lifelong learning attitude, by highlighting the value and availaby of continuous VPL-processes for engaging in further learning, inclusion and/or career-steps. Post-validation pathways therewith not only focus on stimulating autonomous lifelong learning but also afford new, concrete development steps and the starting up of new VPL-processes.

Six principles support this vision on such lifewide, post-validation pathways.

A. VPL should facilitate an individual's personal development and mobility horizontally, vertically and diagonally within and between organisations, sectors and/or countries.

Why is it important?
Improved empowerment and deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying VPL. It increases the opportunities for the individual in one's private life and on the labour market by highlighting the competences he or she already has. It also provides orientation on how these competences can be deployed and strengthened within the present context of the individual, or for accessing another labour market sector, other function-level or qualification structure, and moreover also for moving in geographical terms to another region or country. This can apply both to those VPL-candidates already in employment and volunteering as well as to job seekers. The emphasis of VPL from the viewpoint of employers, trade unions, as well as education and training lies on improving the employability of individuals within their social context.

Where is it working well?

Examples of enhanced individual mobility by means of VPL-processes can be found across the globe in many countries such as Chile, India, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States. All these countries cover a wide variety of experiences with facilitating people's mobility either for employability (intersectoral mobility of employees), social inclusion (newcomers in a new region or country) or creating career-perspectives (qualification upgrade).

B. VPL results should be transparent, reliable and trustworthy for all stakeholders.

Why is it important?

To have the greatest impact, validation results must be transparent and meaningful to employers and providers of education and training. This understanding and appreciation facilitates opportunities for the individual.

Where is it working well?

In Hong Kong and South Africa VPL options are co-managed by employers and trade unions within the national qualification systems.

C. Where relevant, validation certificates need to be equivalent to formal learning certificates so that they hold the same value on the job market and in the education system and ensure that they form the solid building blocks of further learning and work pathways.

Why is it important?

If validation certificates hold the same value as formal learning certificates, they are more readily usable on the job market or in further education. Equivalence of the results of non-formal and informal learning with formal qualification standards and normative human resources frameworks in learning and working can be established if all standards are expressed in terms of competences and learning outcomes.

Where is it working well?

In South Africa, VPL is in general offered by schools and universities and focuses on linking prior learning outcomes with unit standards that hold equivalence within the national qualification framework. In Malaysia and the Republic of Korea the national qualification framework is also accessible by means of the outcome of a VPL-process. The Academic Credit Bank System in the Republic of Korea is an example of this. This 'Bank' allows citizens to get accreditation of all their learning outcomes be it from formal, non-formal and informal learning experience. In other countries like India and Mexico, learning outcomes that are captured in certificates and qualifications may relate to skills and occupational standards in specific economic sectors. This is not to say that they do not have systems of VPL in the general education and training system, but in these countries emphasis is laid on the validation of competences within labour settings, given the large labour force and informal sectors in their economies.

D. Further learning options need to be offered based on the results of the VPL-process. They need to be adaptable to the individual's learning preferences.

Why is it important?
For strengthening personalised learning, the full spectrum of available learning environments and forms of learning need to be formulated and utilised more effectively. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. Thus, not only the content but also the form in which learning will take place is important. This includes (1) blended learning for the form and (2) flexible, individualised learning programmes for the content. Form and content should be based on learning outcomes.

Where is it working well?
Countries in which tailored and personalised learning options are offered as a post-validation pathway are the Netherlands and the United States of America. In these countries, linking a learner's (retrospective) value to a (prospective) personalised learning strategy fits in well with the demand for competences and skills in society. Such learning strategies may take many forms but are always flexible and tailored. The concept of VPL identifies the potential value of a person's learning experiences and empowers the learner, whereas the concept of personalised learning presupposes that a learner's contribution to the dialogue with the other main actors (teacher, employer) on the meaning, form and content of learning is based on this potential value. Therewith, VPL can be regarded as a precondition for truly activating personalised learning processes in which the learner has a 'voice' of her own. As a result, added value of integrating both concepts arises when linking the learner's autonomy with the roles of the other actors in learning processes.

E. The individual learner should be empowered in being an active agent in the creation of functional learning and working pathways, alongside the responsibilities of the education system, employers and social partners.

Why is it important?
VPL can be regarded as an effective instrument for linking competences and learning outcomes that appeal to individual learners and the other stakeholders in learning and working contexts. VPL covers the roles and responsibilities of these stakeholders in achieving their goals in the modern learning society, where the learning needs of the individual, the facilities from the learning system and the demand for competent people from the prevailing socio-economic system are negotiated. After all, learning – therewith VPL as well - is supposed to be established in general in an open dialogue between representatives of the three main stakeholders in VPL-processes: teachers, employers and learners. Such an open dialogue entails above all that the individual learner acknowledges the personal responsibility to self-manage and document his/her learning history and be able to reflect on these personal learning experiences for the sake of reaching out to a truly personalised VPL-process and the further learning options based on the outcomes of VPL. When learners begin to own their learning, they gain a prised possession that they can protect, build and maintain for a lifetime. In other words, they create their learning independence[175].

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175 Rickabaugh, J.R. (2012). *Learning Independence Continuum.* Pewaukee, CESA.

Where is it working well?
In France, the legal basis for VPL gives individuals the right to have their formally, informally and non-formally acquired experiences assessed. Such a right also exists in Canada, Iceland and Norway, where individuals can have their non-formal and informal learning assessed. In the Netherlands, jobseekers can gain access to VPL once their application has been approved by the national job agency. In all these cases, individuals need to take ownership of their prior learning experiences for utilising the right also entails receiving guidance on compiling a portfolio of evidence for the assessment, as well as counselling on the outcomes of the assessment.

F. Guidance should also be available in the post-validation process.

Why is it important?
Guidance of individuals during the VPL-process is important for creating true social perspective(s). However, the VPL-process doesn't stop after the assessment of one's learning experiences and the issuing of a personal report on the value of one's prior learning with respect to the desired learning objective(s). The learning will continue and the validation of prior learning as well. It's therefore in the interest of actors involved in VPL-processes to be aware of this lifelong impact of VPL. Guidance of individuals should therefore – especially for specific target groups like newcomers, (low-)illiterates, unskilled, etc. – be available as a VPL-service also <u>after</u> a result has been achieved in someone's VPL-process.

Where is it working well?
Guidance as a post-validation service is offered in various countries in a variety of services. In some countries, post-validation guidance is part of alumni policies of learning institutes, in other countries it is offered within the career-management of companies or as a public service for integrating specific target-groups when (re-) entering the labour market or for inclusion of migrants and/or refugees in their new country.

The Candidate at the Centre in the Banking Sector

5.1

An online portal to drive large-scale access to RPL[176]

Karen Deller

Chartall Business College is primarily a provider of recognition of prior learning (RPL) services to corporate South Africa. It has been involved in a number of large-scale RPL projects that are either funded by the employer themselves or by a Sector Education & Training Authority (SETA). Key sectors or disciplines where Chartall has rolled out big RPL projects include insurance, agriculture, banking and management. Over the years the methodology underpinning Chartall's RPL practice has evolved from a largely paper-based and RPL practitioner-directed process to a more online and learner-centred model. This paper describes an initiative using an online RPL and Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT) portal[177] that Chartall Business College developed to take parts of the RPL process to scale in South Africa.

The sector that embraced this online RPL methodology was the banking sector in South Africa. There was a need for RPL due to legislation and regulations[178] which required selected bank employees to earn a full qualification to remain employable in the sector. These staff were computer-literate, time was critical, and they were spread out in every corner of the country – often one to a branch. The traditional 'come to a central point and meet an RPL practitioner' was not a viable option and there were over 5.500 people who needed to access the RPL intervention quickly. There were simply not enough RPL practitioners to assist with the number of RPL candidates in the prescribed timelines, so we turned to technology to make the RPL both less RPL practitioner-dependent and more rapid.

The sector

The size of the banking sector in South Africa is significant. There are 17 registered South African banks and over 50 foreign banks or foreign bank branches operating in the country. There are around 6.700 bank branches and another 800 non-formal transaction structures, such as those found in supermarkets.[179] This distribution makes the banking sector a significant employer. In fact, there were 189.954 bank employees in 2016 when the RPL project was at its peak, although the sector has contracted somewhat due to economic

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176 Sections of this paper are reproduced from an article by the author in SAQA Bulletin, 2019/18.
177 A portal is a website providing information, services and easy access, or links, to other sites.
178 The initial requirement for a qualification was promulgated in the Financial Advisory & Intermediary Act of 1995. This has been amended various times over the years and a list of approved qualifications has been maintained.
179 BANKSETA (2018). BANKSETA Sector Skills Plan. Johannesburg, BANKSETA.
  Tarrant, H. (2019). *SA's 'big four' banks have shut down almost 700 branches this decade*. Retrieved: https://citizen.co.za/business/2140329/sas-big-four-banks-have-shut-down-almost-700-branches-this-decade/

pressure and increases in technology. The Financial Service Conduct Authority (FSCA) and its forerunner, the Financial Services Board (FSB), set educational requirements for all people who provided financial advice to the public (Financial Advisory & Intermediary Services Act, 1995 as amended). This Act required all the bank employees who provided financial advice to earn a full, recognised qualification if they wanted to remain employed in the sector.

Over the years since the Act was promulgated, many people have complied, although there are many still in the process of earning a full, recognised qualification as their deadline dates have not yet been reached (the period is determined by the employees' 'date of first appointment' to a regulated job role).

BANKSETA is the sector education and training authority that oversees the training needs of the sector. The SETA took the initiative to look for a creative way of assisting affected employees to achieve the required qualification. While it was critical that employees acquired a specific full qualification, the employers wanted to do this as cost effectively as possible (both times out of the workplace and actual cost were important considerations). Other employer requirements included scalability, flexibility of delivery (without a reliance on 8:00 – 17:00 classroom sessions), less dependence on an RPL facilitator (to encourage candidate independence and put the candidate in charge of their own learning journey) and ease of managing small numbers without an increase in costs. Other requirements included an online solution to bridge any learning gaps identified by the RPL process post the actual RPL process.

After extensive consultation and formal tendering, Chartall Business College was appointed to design and develop an online portal that would administer both Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT) and RPL. The ultimate mission of the portal is to facilitate access, progression and successful completion of full and partial qualifications through both RPL and CAT.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

The process of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) is defined by the following definitions[180]:

- *Credit* means the amount of learning contained in a (part) qualification whereby one (1) credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.
- *Credit accumulation* means the totaling of relevant credits required to complete a qualification or a part qualification.
- *Credit matrix* means a system in which learning outcomes can be arranged and compared in levels of increased complexity based on agreed groupings of credits, such as in modules or part qualifications.
- *Credit transfer* means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal transfer of credits towards a qualification or part qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions.
- A *credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system* means an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. "Curriculum" in the context of this policy means the requirements for learner achievement of a qualification or part qualification in terms of knowledge, skills, and where relevant, also work experience.

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180 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2014). *Policy for Credit Accumulation & Transfer with the National Qualification Framework.* Pretoria, SAQA.

Usually in South Africa, credit accumulation and transfer refer to the transferring (or accumulation) of credits already obtained formally, whereas RPL refers to the process of credentialing learning that has not yet been awarded credits. In the BANKSETA project, credits were also granted through the CAT process for non-formal training. This was deemed acceptable by BANKSETA because it had trust in the quality and integrity of the training conducted by the large banking sector employers in South Africa. These employers all have training centres and facilities that rival many of the residential universities and their inhouse training is, to all intents and purposes, "formal" in that it *occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment… that is explicitly designated as such*[181]. This internal training is delivered by subject matter experts, using up-to-date and well-packaged training material and it is assessed robustly. The banks are also accredited providers and, in fact, much of the material delivered is aligned to registered unit standards. It's just that the assessment results are never recorded formally, mostly due to the additional cost of formal assessment, moderation and related administration. Typically, though, this training is not considered "formal" by many because there is no upload of the final results to the National Learner Records' Database (NLRD) after a formal moderation process. As such it does not 'count' for formal credentialing. This CAT process changed this and provided a mechanism for formal credits to be awarded.

The behind-the-scenes CAT process started by defining the requirements that had to be met for an internal training programme to be considered for credit transfer. These requirements were:
- Training had to be formally structured (agenda, curriculum, outcomes, etc.).
- It had to be trained, assessed and delivered by an accredited provider (or employer).
- It had to be assessed and marked (no self-assessments counted).
- The marks had to be stored and be verifiable.

A CAT policy was developed for BANKSETA[182] which set out key rules. Then the process of mapping internal bank courses to unit standards started. This process was very time consuming. In the end, 15 employers submitted over 4 500 internal courses to be aligned to the over 500 unit standards stored on the portal. The content of each internal employer course was mapped to either individual assessment criteria, specific outcomes or full unit standards. This entire process was carried out in writing and stored in the portal for easy retrieval and consolidation by the candidates. As a result of this mapping, one internal course could lead to:
- An exemption from a whole unit standard.
- An exemption from one or more specific outcomes (in one or more unit standards).
- An exemption from one or more assessment criteria (in one or more unit standards).

By collating the exemption outcomes for more than one internal course (and most candidates had completed over 100 internal courses with various employers), candidates were awarded exemption for entire unit standards. Only full unit standards were exempted; partial unit standards were not. This complex, behind-the- scenes mapping took a long time to

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181 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2018). *National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning.* Johannesburg, SAQA.
182 BANKSETA (2015). *Credit Accumulation & Transfer Policy.* Johannesburg, BANKSETA.

programme and complete, but it made the process of granting exemption quick and seamless for the candidates when they needed to use it.

Simply, the creation of this CAT matrix allows people who have completed internal, non-credentialled courses with various employers in the sector to apply for exemption from registered unit standards. In doing so they are able to shorten their time to complete a full qualification. They literally log onto the portal, access the CAT matrix landing page, tick off internal courses that they have completed (with up to three employers and/or providers) and get a report showing how many exemptions they could earn against the nine full qualifications loaded onto the portal. If candidates then wish to proceed with the RPL step, they are then prompted to upload proof of their internal and other courses to the portal so that these courses can be verified manually by an RPL adviser before they move on the RPL stage.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Once the CAT exemptions have been calculated and verified, and the candidate has selected the qualification that they want RPL against, the next stage of the process commences. To facilitate this process the BANKSETA RPL policy was updated.[183]

The RPL process on the portal starts with an RPL readiness assessment to ascertain whether or not the candidate is a suitable RPL candidate (i.e. they have sufficient prior learning in the subject area to be assessed without training). This pre-assessment is done through a series of questions, based on the unit standards in the qualification. These questions are preloaded in the portal and appear to the candidate automatically once the CAT exemptions are awarded. These are currently a simple yes/no series of questions, and candidates are encouraged to be honest. There are plans to adjust this to more qualitative questions that actually test a basic level of prior learning as some candidates were not entirely honest, which resulted in some people attempting RPL who were not really ready for the process. Candidates are also profiled via the portal for their level of "RPL readiness"[184] and those that are at risk on certain elements are flagged for additional support during the RPL process.

After the RPL readiness assessment and RPL pre-assessment, the answers are collated automatically in the portal, and the candidate is issued with a final letter, on an official BANKSETA letterhead, which outlines:
- The qualification they have selected (there are nine qualifications on the portal; all BANKSETA quality assured).
- The unit standards in the qualification that they are exempt from, through the CAT process.
- The unit standards they have indicated they can RPL for (from the pre-assessment).
- The unit standards that they should complete through formal training with an accredited provider (because they indicated in the pre-assessment question that they did not have sufficient prior learning to be assessed without training).

The candidate then starts the RPL preparation process on the portal. This is done through a series of videos designed to inform the candidate:
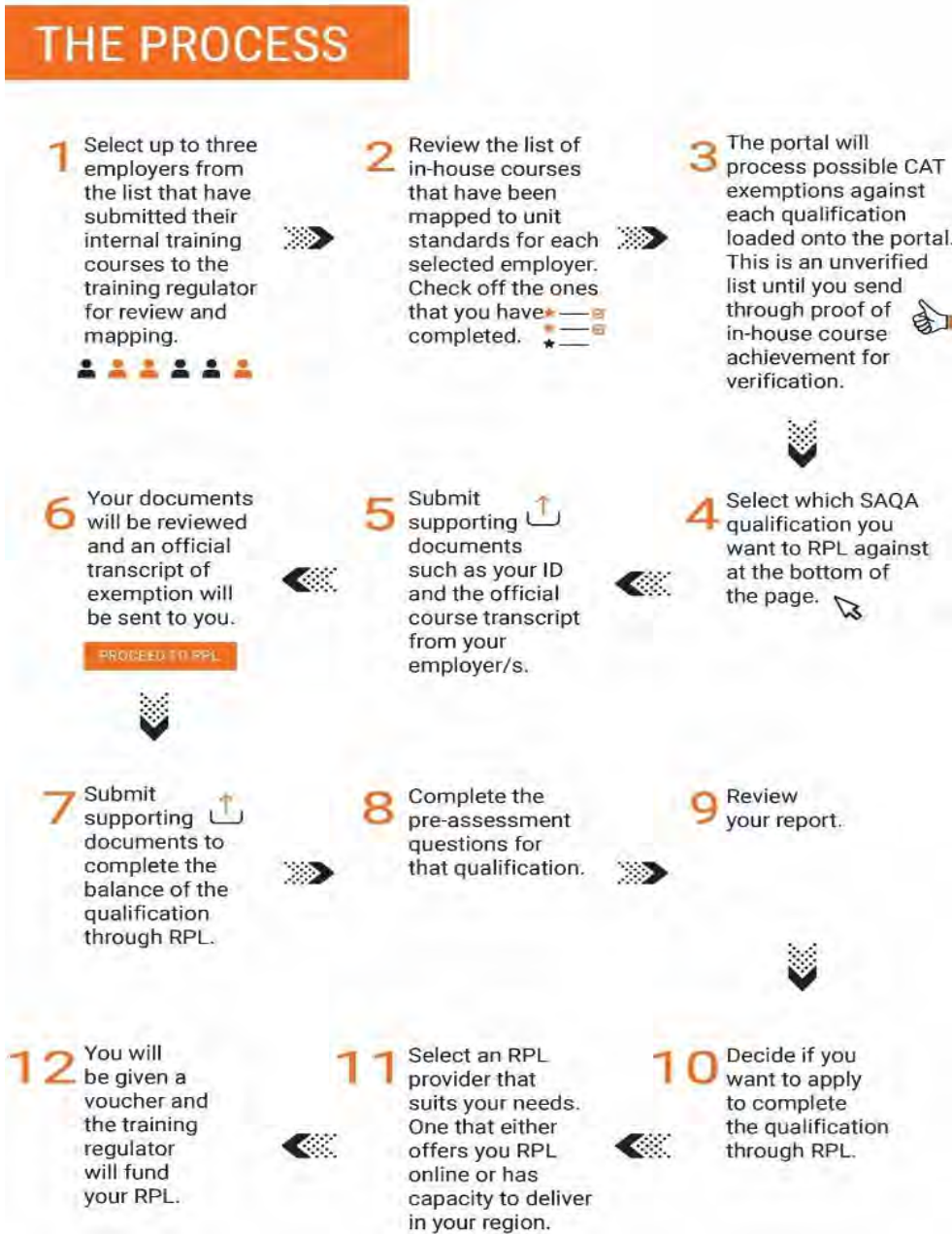- How RPL will work.
- About SAQA, unit standards, etc.

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183 BANKSETA (2015). *Recognition of Prior Learning Policy.* Johannesburg, BANKSETA.
184 RPL readiness encompasses a number of selected variables, such as level of digital literacy, length of work experience, highest level of formal education, English reading for comprehension skill, etc.

- The assessment principles.
- The assessment process.
- Their rights and responsibilities as an RPL candidate.
- What they can expect after the RPL process (e.g. where they can go for training if they do not complete the assessment successfully, where they can ask for assistance at any stage, what additional support is available, where they can get information on the process, etc.).

Figure 12. Flow diagram of a candidate using the RPL & CAT portal

THE PROCESS

1 Select up to three employers from the list that have submitted their internal training courses to the training regulator for review and mapping.

2 Review the list of in-house courses that have been mapped to unit standards for each selected employer. Check off the ones that you have completed.

3 The portal will process possible CAT exemptions against each qualification loaded onto the portal. This is an unverified list until you send through proof of in-house course achievement for verification.

6 Your documents will be reviewed and an official transcript of exemption will be sent to you.

PROCEED TO RPL

5 Submit supporting documents such as your ID and the official course transcript from your employer/s.

4 Select which SAQA qualification you want to RPL against at the bottom of the page.

7 Submit supporting documents to complete the balance of the qualification through RPL.

8 Complete the pre-assessment questions for that qualification.

9 Review your report.

12 You will be given a voucher and the training regulator will fund your RPL.

11 Select an RPL provider that suits your needs. One that either offers you RPL online or has capacity to deliver in your region.

10 Decide if you want to apply to complete the qualification through RPL.

By doing this preparation online we can ensure that it is repeatable if someone needs to review it (for example if there is a delay between doing the preparation and actually starting the RPL) and it is trackable so we can ensure the validity and transparency of the process. In Figure 1 the RPL-process is presented.

The actual RPL does not currently take place through the portal. The BANKSETA wanted to use the portal to both make RPL more readily available to the sector and capacitate additional RPL providers in the sector. To achieve this, the RPL & CAT portal was designed to be a 'clearing house' for RPL. So, once the candidates have completed the pre-RPL process, they are asked to select a provider through which the actual RPL assessment and moderation can be completed. There are currently three providers using the portal and each has selected a unique RPL approach to attract candidates to select their offering. For example, Chartall Business College offer candidates the opportunity to complete their RPL process online, with the offer of online training if they are found not-yet-competent after the RPL process. Candidates who select the Chartall RPL offering have their details transferred seamlessly to the Chartall Learning Management System to start their RPL immediately. One other provider offers face-to-face RPL sessions in the larger centres. The Chartall offering was the most popular, probably because it was seamless and because it allowed candidates to take control of the pace and place of their RPL assessment.

Once the candidate has selected a provider, the formal RPL process starts. It is worth noting that each candidate will have a different RPL assessment tool as this needs to consider the unique requirements of each candidate. For example:
- Different candidates will have different CAT exemptions, depending on the unique combination of internal employer and other courses they have attended.
- Different candidates will have different levels of prior learning in the remaining unit standards. So which unit standards they can RPL, and which ones they need training in, will be different for each candidate.

This need for multiple versions of the assessment tools was accommodated by Chartall Business College cost-effectively by modularising the RPL assessment tools (one per unit standard with a capstone assessment) so that specific modules can be used for different candidates depending on their needs. This curation of the right assessment tool was autogenerated by the Chartall Learning Management System. The flow diagram below summarises the process followed by the typical candidate.

Key features of the RPL & CAT portal
The key features of the RPL and CAT portal are summarised in Figure 2.

In the second circle from the middle are the underpinning pillars of the portal:
- *Candidate-centred* – the candidate manages the pace, place and space of the RPL and CAT activities. They drive the journey themselves to get out of it what they need, when they need it. The alternative is a practitioner led RPL process where the practitioner decides what, when and how the RPL will be conducted and 'does it' to the candidate.
- *Technicist RPL (summative)* – The term "technicist RPL" is also referred to as a 'credit-exchange'[185], or competence-based model for RPL. This is an RPL process that simply

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185 Osman, R. A. (2001). The recognition of prior learning: early lessons, challenges and promise. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 54-59.

provides candidates with a mechanism to have their current learning mapped to registered unit standards for the purposes of credit award. It is a simplistic view of RPL which is common in the workplace in South Africa. It tends to focus just on what is known, not how that knowledge is produced or used and more developmental approaches have been documented[186] but these approaches are more difficult to automate and deliver independently of a practitioner.

Figure 2. Diagram of the key features of the RPL & CAT portal
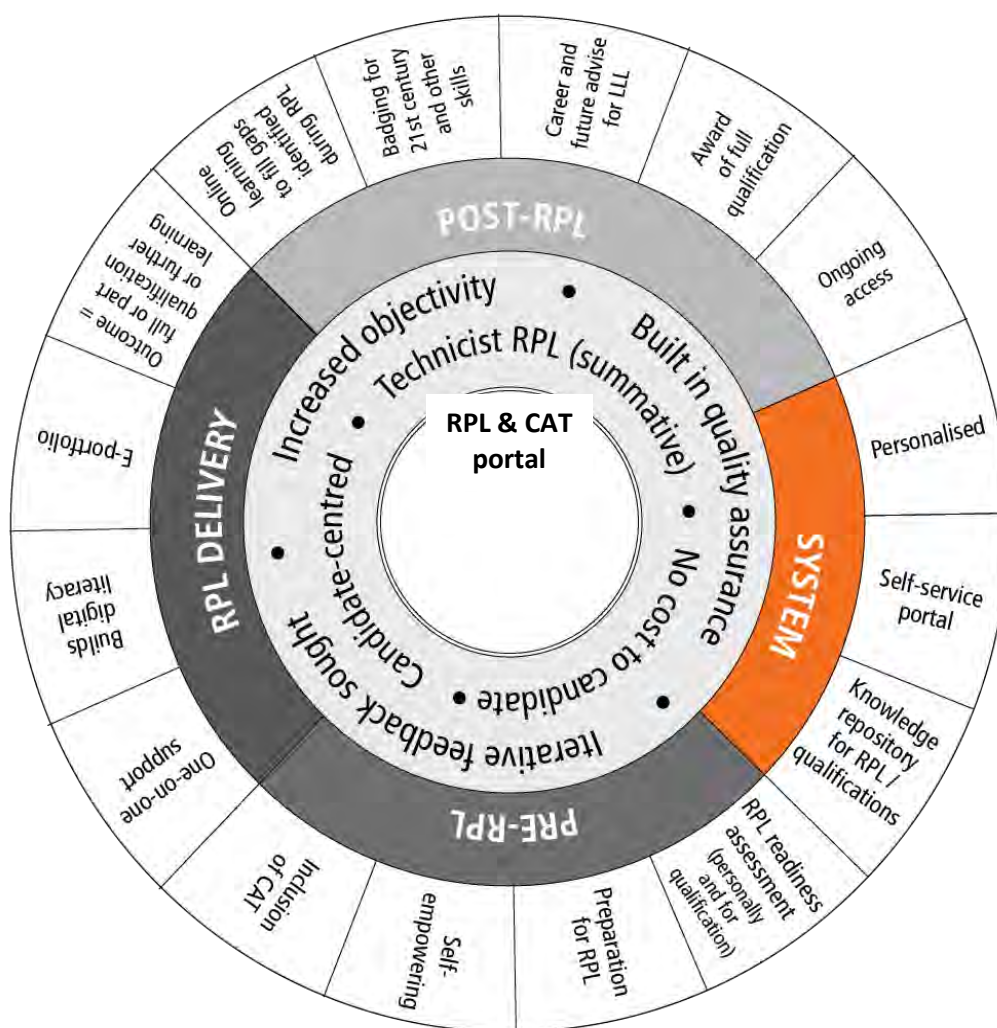
- *No cost to candidate* – the full process was and is funded by BANKSETA. From time-to-time they open a new funding window and the providers are paid directly.
- *Increased objectivity* – because the process is not dependent on the skill of an individual RPL practitioner, every candidate gets the same experience and preparation.

186 Harris, J. (1999). The recognition of prior learning (RPL): introducing a conceptual framework. *South African Journal for Higher Education*, 38–43.

- *Built in quality assurance* – BANKSETA personnel are logged in as administrators and are able to track the delivery, advise and candidate queries/comments in real time. They can review surveys and check quality as they wish.
- *Iterative feedback sought* – candidates are asked for feedback at every stage of the process. This way the portal is simplified and made more user friendly on an ongoing basis.

The balance of the features is addressed as: system, pre-RPL, RPL delivery and post RPL. These are summarised in table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the key features of the RPL & CAT portal

System	*Personalised*	The CAT, pre-RPL assessment, actual RPL and post-RPL pathways are all personalised. Each candidate can raise support tickets and engage with an RPL adviser one-on-one in a variety of modes (email, WhatsApp, calls, discussion forums, chat lines, etc.). This engagement ensures that each candidate's readiness, unique needs, formal and informal prior learning and so forth are considered. And the candidate can self-track their own progress on a timeline (portal) and activity bar (LMS – the Chartall Learning Management System).
	Self-service portal	By being self-service, the candidate is in charge of the process. They decide if they want to be RPL-ed, where, how fast, and when. This is empowering and non-threatening than practitioner led RPL because no other role player from the workplace can access the results in real time. The online portal also allows for massification of RPL nation-wide and wider in future.
	Knowledge repo-sitory for RPL / qualifications	There are many resources on the portal – documents such as sector and national policies for RPL and CAT, articles, videos on the qualifications, videos on the various providers offering RPL services, communiques, etc. All of this access to information in one space enables greater understanding and trust in the process of RPL in the sector.
Pre-RPL	*RPL readiness (personally and for qualification)*	Once the target qualification is selected, the portal asks the candidate set questions to ascertain their readiness for RPL and gauge prior learning in the qualification. Advice is then provided to enable them to make the decision as to which unit standards they should apply for RPL and which should be completed via training.
	Prepa-ration for RPL	This is online (video so repeatable), trackable, ensures validity and transparency of the process. Meets regulatory requirements.
Pre-RPL	*Self-empowering*	The pre-assessment and CAT process help candidates develop an awareness for their own potential and own prior learning and the value of this when being assessed for a qualification. This highlights their current level of competency. The candidate is active in the process. They take charge of own RPL journey (ownership). This sets the scene/motivation for future learning and it builds self-efficacy.
	Inclusion of CAT	The Credit Accumulation & Transfer matrix provides recognition for formal credits already achieved and transfers them to desired qualification. This built-in matrix allows for institutionalised formal learning and workplace informal learning to be included.

RPL delivery	*One-on-one support*	Behind the portal is a cohort of trained RPL advisers who deal with support tickets raised on the portal, engage in Skype chats, answer WhatsApps and provide email and telephonic support on demand. This is also pro-active support if there is no action on the portal for seven days.
	Builds digital literacy	The act of engaging with a portal, uploading of files, using online chat and raising support tickets, accessing videos and information curated for them raises the general level of digital literacy. This sets the ground for future online lifelong learning. In this way, RPL becomes a pedagogy in its own right because it leads to additional learning as it takes place.[187]
	E-portfolio	The actual RPL assessment is conducted by Chartall using an online portfolio of evidence curated for each individual and automatically generated to assess what each candidate needs to have assessed. This portfolio is available to the candidate indefinitely for a variety of purposes such as further lifelong learning and as part of a CV for a job-hunting process. All personal documents uploaded once to one portal for multiple purposes. The portfolio is a combination of own Naturally Occurring Evidence (informal and non-formal) and set projects.
	Outcome = full or part qualification or further learning	Most candidates earn a full qualification using a combination of RPL and CAT. Those who don't are transferred to the Chartall Learning Management System for addition online training and re-assessment. Note that specially trained RPL assessors are used by Chartall as general summative assessors often have a good understanding of the theory of a subject but are not well versed in the practical application in various workplaces.
Post-RPL	*Online learning to fill gaps identified during RPL*	Chartall Business College has content curated to address gaps in prior learning. This is made available to candidates post the RPL and CAT to fill any gaps in learning revealed by the RPL process. The content delivered to each candidate is uniquely curated to address their unique needs, so they do not have to plough through a lot of content that is irrelevant to their needs. Content is curated as a full qualification, full unit standard or micro-learning.
	Badging for 21st century and other skills	The Chartall LMS provides each candidate with multiple and flexible pathways post the RPL process. There is the optional access to micro-credentialing on-demand, with badges to share on social media (building self-esteem and motivation). This strategy helps to make learning visible and rewards lifelong learning post the attainment of the full qualification through RPL and CAT. This is currently a paid-for service post-RPL.
	Career advise on learning	This is available from the trained RPL advisers, and a career assessment is available if requested. There are plans to add additional courses such as CV building, resilience and interview skills. May also include advice on new qualifications to pursue.

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187 Ralphs, A., Cooper, L., Deller, K., & Moodley, K. (2016). *RPL as Specialised Pedagogy: Crossing the lines.* Pretoria, HSRC & SAQA.

	Award of full qualification	The qualification can be awarded in full or in part through RPL and CAT only, through RPL only or through RPL, CAT and training. These qualifications (or Statements of Result [SoR] if it's a part qualification) are nationally and internationally recognised for transferability and articulation. The RPL candidates are awarded the same certificate as a classroom learner. This qualification award enables candidates to remain employable in sector.
	Ongoing access	Candidates who have enrolled on the portal and the Chartall LMS have ongoing access to download their portfolio to use for job seeking, as a repository to store copies of their certificates and SoRs, to source applicable training content for lifelong learning, request further RPL opportunities and so forth. They are also made aware of new learning opportunities and funding opportunities from BANKSETA.

Highlights of the RPL & CAT portal

Over the five years the portal has been live, the following has been achieved:

- 4.000 people have graduated with a full qualification using a combination of RPL, CAT and (if required) additional learning. This enabled them to remain employable in the banking sector.
- 9.000 people have accessed some of the services on the portal. Many have completed the CAT process without moving onto the RPL step, some have used the information services, and many have completed the RPL pre-assessment and then elected to rather complete the balance of their qualification through training as opposed to RPL.
- 4.500 stand-alone courses have been mapped to approximately 500 units standards on the portal (and to their specific outcomes and assessment criteria).

Conclusion

The RPL and CAT portal was developed for a specific need to take RPL to scale the banking sector in South Africa. It showcases what can be achieved by linking an online, CAT and RPL preparation portal with a provider's online campus to support candidates before, during and post the RPL process.

Key to note is that the portal is personalised, enabled for self-service (with available support) and allows the candidate to access the services in their own time, at their own pace and in their own space. This combination makes the portal a viable model for massification of part of the RPL process (information provision, screening, readiness assessment and provider selection). All that is required is a basic level of digital literacy, ability to follow instructions in English, access to WIFI, data and a smart phone or computer (learning on the portal can be accessed on a smart phone, but it is difficult to complete assessments on a small screen).

The lessons learnt, and contribution made, by this case study of RPL practice at both Chartall Business College and the banking sector, have been immense. The RPL and CAT portal has applicability beyond its current application, and this is being explored with other SETAs and professional bodies.

Caught in an Education System designed for a Past Era

5.2

Jim Rickabaugh

Social and economic changes in the past few decades are transforming the modern workplace. As a result, we are experiencing a confluence of pressures that argue for a new approach to learning that will prepare young people for their future as citizens and workers. The good news is that a growing group of concerned and committed educators, advocates, leaders, and constituents are building, testing, and improving new learning-centered designs to meet this educational challenge.

Those of us who are working to redesign our approach to learning have before us an exciting opportunity to partner with efforts and movements such as VPL, that value and seek to validate learning that is driven by individuals and occurs outside and beyond formal educational environments. This goal is within reach and holds the potential to transform the way we think about and engage in learning across countries, cultures, and work contexts.

The design for our traditional education system

For generations, the core work of schools and educators was understood to be teaching students basic academic content and skills as part of a standard curriculum. Key benchmark points were based on age or grade level rather than readiness, and progress through the system was measured by standardised, closed-response tests calibrated to determine whether the intended knowledge and skills had been absorbed.

Students who were inspired to learn or had a sense of direction after completing school was not a priority or core expectation, and generally was not measured. In fact, little direct attention typically was given to any specific purpose associated with what students were asked to learn. More emphasis was placed on students complying with adult expectations, following directions, and behaving in an acceptable manner than on building a sense of purpose and the skills to learn independently.

The design for our traditional education system was not arrived at by chance. In fact, it was designed to mimic a workplace where employees were instructed to perform pre-identified tasks and routines by a supervisor who then closely monitored the work to ensure strict compliance. In industry, much like the education system, little thought was given to having workers see purpose or value in the tasks they performed. The purpose or value of the work was the purview of managers, a function most workers would never experience.

> Call out: *The design for our traditional education system was not arrived at by chance.*

The consistency between the experience of students in the education system and workers in the majority of workplaces is difficult to miss. Human labor to perform low-level tasks was inexpensive enough to still make a profit. Technology generally lacked the capacity to

perform most of these tasks consistently and less expensively. So, for purposes of the economy, the traditional education system worked well enough.

However, while a factory-model education system may have worked in the past, it no longer adequately prepares learners for today's workplace and lacks the flexibility to adjust to the fundamental and dramatic changes yet to come. This growing mismatch has been a concern for some time. Now, it has reached a crisis.

Sadly, most system reform efforts have focused on increasing the pressure on educators and students to work harder, longer, and faster, as a means to improve results. Yet, educators have been doing the best they can within the current system. Applying more pressure as a strategy to solve the problem assumes that there is a reserve of energy, time, and strategies that can be tapped and applied. There is not, or at least not enough to solve the problem.

Meanwhile, today's students are increasingly seeking a clear purpose, meaning or sense of direction in their learning. Consequently, attempting to increase pressure and apply old methods of compliance-based instruction is even less effective than in the past.

Making the situation even worse, the same measures and assessments applied to gauge the effectiveness of the old design are being used to measure whether any attempted innovations are delivering what is needed. As long as old measures of success are applied, it will be a challenge for a new system design and a new approach to emerge.

> Call out: *As long as old measures of success are applied, it will be a challenge for a new system design and a new approach to emerge.*

Workplace pressures are demanding a New Education Design

Perhaps the most dramatic, yet largely ignored, shift in the relationship between people and work involves the changing nature of the worker's role and their social contract with employers. In 2005, approximately ten percent of the American workforce was engaged in freelance, contracted, on-call, or temporary work roles. A decade later, following the 2008 recession, these work roles made up almost 16 percent of the workforce. Today, these roles apply to 20 percent of the workforce, and predictions are that within a decade, half of all workers will have this type of project-based or limited-term work arrangement. Importantly, this shift in work roles represented 94 percent of employment growth between 2005 and 2015.[188]

This trend is important on many levels. It redefines the relationship between employer and employee. Old assumptions of employer-provided healthcare, retirement accounts, and unemployment protection no longer hold true. Regular paychecks and stable income are not guaranteed. On the other hand, workers have greater flexibility and control over their time, and a greater array of choices about where and with whom they will work.

The implications are equally dramatic for the education system. In the old design, teachers made judgments regarding whether student work was of adequate quality. Students deferred to the teacher's assessment rather than being expected to take responsibility for the quality of their work. In the traditional workplace, supervisors made similar judgments on behalf of workers and gave feedback when the quality was not satisfactory. For freelance, contracted, and similar roles, failure to consistently produce quality work reflects on the

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188 Katz, L. and Krueger, A. (2016). The rise and nature of alternative work arrangements in the United States. In: *ILR Review, 72(2), March 2019*, pp. 382–416.

worker and influences whether future work can be secured. The worker must take responsibility for, and be able to determine, what represents quality work.

Historically, teachers decided what students were to learn, how they would learn, and how they would demonstrate learning success. In the workplace, supervisors decided what skills and knowledge workers needed and took responsibility for arranging for training as needed. As workers become increasingly independent, they will need to search out what they need to learn to remain relevant and competitive, decide how they will learn, and how they will use their new knowledge and skills to secure ongoing work.

> Call out: *The worker must take responsibility for both learning and being able to determine what represents quality work.*

There are several other implications for the design of the education system, but these two capture some central elements that must be considered and incorporated into an educational system design that will prepare today's learners for their future.

Paralleling the shift toward more worker independence and self-reliance are advancements in technology that are changing the value equation relating to jobs for which schools have traditionally prepared students. The McKinsey Global Institute recently predicted that the technology in existence today can perform 50 percent of the tasks for which we now pay humans.[189] Employers understand that if they can train workers to perform repetitive, routine tasks, in many cases they can program technology tools accomplish the same work. This shift is visible in many areas of the workplace already. As the cost of technology tools and functions continue to fall and the cost of human labor grows, the pace of change will become even faster.

A third dimension to this challenge is the emergence of new jobs that will require new skills. Traditionally, schools have prepared students to engage in work that already exists. In some cases, schools trained students to perform specific jobs as a way to launch a lifelong career. This approach made sense when there was little change in the nature of work and the existence of specific jobs. Manpower, a global workforce resource, predicts that 55 percent of all jobs today's students will perform do not yet exist and the technical skills required to perform them have yet to be defined.[190] Today, efforts to prepare students for a specific job or career without giving them the skills and nurturing the dispositions necessary to continue to learn, including without having to be taught, risks shortchanging their future.

These are but a sample of the trends, shifts, and disruption underway in the workplace for which schools and educators are attempting to prepare today's youth. Yet, at least one thing is clear. The traditional design of formal education does not have the capacity to prepare students to compete and succeed in this new world of work.

> Call out: *The traditional design of formal education does not have the capacity to prepare students to compete and succeed in this new world of work.*

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189 Manyika, J., et al (2017*). Jobs lost, jobs gained: Workforce transitions in a time of automation.* [No place], McKinsey Global Institute.

190 Kowalski, R. (2017). Comment in keynote address to the 8th Annual Convening at the Institute for Personalized Learning. Wisconsin, CESA #1.

The emergence of a new design

While there are variations on a new design for education and learning, there are also some consistent dimensions taking shape. Like any new idea and approach, some elements surface only to be shown to have limited potential, while others prove to have significant utility and are worth developing. Here are four elements of the emerging design that hold significant promise and are worth pursuing.

1. Learning-centered approach. Maybe the most significant dimension of the new design is a shift from an instruction-driven to a learning-centered approach. Traditionally, teachers identified what students needed to learn and decided how it would be taught, learned, and assessed. This approach only worked for students who were ready to learn what was taught, in the way it was taught, and at a pace that meant they were ready to demonstrate their learning when the assessment was scheduled. In a learning-centered approach, learners play an active role in setting goals for their learning in light of identified learning competencies, co-design the path their learning will take, and co-monitor their progress. Further, they are assessed when they are ready to demonstrate their learning.

2. Purpose-driven learning. Another dimension of the new design is learning driven by purpose. In the old design, purpose typically was ignored or taken for granted. The focus was on what was to be learned and how. Rarely was there significant discussion about why the learning might be important and how a skill or concept might add value or offer opportunities for the learner. Yet, we know that purpose is the most powerful driver of learning in life. We learn to walk, talk, and perform other key life activities because we see a significant value and purpose in doing so. Learning in school does not have to be different. Of course, not every learning activity may have an immediate life application, but the more learners can see value in what they are learning, the more the momentum of their learning grows. Further, an understanding of purpose aids in increasing recall and application of new learning in other settings and circumstances.

> Call out: *We know that purpose is the most powerful driver of learning in life.*

3. Ownership of learning. A significant dimension of the emerging design is ownership of learning. Students historically have seen learning as something they do for, and at the direction of, adults to avoid negative consequences, or gain approval. While these are not necessarily bad motivations, they deprive students of the pride of ownership for their learning and undermine the understanding that the primary beneficiary of learning is the learner. By giving students authentic choices in setting their learning goals and paths and building their skills to self-assess and monitor their progress, we can give them a sense of ownership, pride, and control that further motivates their learning and prepares them to continue their learning long after having completed their formal education.

4. Building learning capacity. Still another dimension of the new design is a focus on learning and the capacity to learn as the central driver of success. Much of the traditional system has been based on grades as the core currency of schools. Parents and educators have urged students to work hard in order to get good grades. While this exhortation sounds worthy, in fact, it urges students to focus on the external reward of grades rather than the most important outcome: learning. The new design focuses on learning as the most important

activity, and positions grades and other external measures as nothing more than a reflection of the important work students have done to learn. Some argue that students still need good grades to gain acceptance into the college or university of their choice. While this statement may be partially true, it will be good learning that keeps students in college or university and leads to ultimate success. This focus on learning has even greater importance as young people enter the workforce. Palmer and Blake[191] argue in *The Expertise Economy* that the ability and motivation of employees to learn will be the success differentiator for businesses and enterprises in the future. They describe the constellation of skills as *learning agility,* the capacity and inclination to learn diverse content and skills, in a variety of settings, using appropriate tools and strategies*.* The authors argue that in a world featuring rapid change, learning capacity and the commitment to learn throughout the organization will provide key advantages to the innovation, productivity, and flexibility necessary for sustained success.

Importantly, each of these design elements focus on the experience of the learner, reflection on practice, and the potential to provide the learner with competencies and dispositions that will prepare them to be successful in the workplace and in life. Much of what has been tried in the name of school improvement has been driven by the interests, preferences, and desired working conditions of adults. Yet, the only effective way to change learning outcomes is to change the experiences of the learner. In short, the focus should be on building the learner's capacity to learn, not the capacity to be taught.

> Call out: *The only effective way to change learning outcomes is to change the experience of the learner.*

At the Institute for Personalised Learning, a division of CESA #1, we think about the key elements or learning drivers we hope to nurture using the acronym: POWER. The idea is to nurture POWER-full learners, not just good students. POWER stands for a series of actions educators can take from the first day to reach all students, nurture learning confidence and competence and prepare students for college and future careers:

1. Purpose: Help students to see a current and long-term *purpose* for what we ask them to learn. Purpose is a powerful driver of learning.
2. Ownership: Nurture *ownership* for learning by providing meaningful choice, giving opportunities for students to have a real voice and supporting them to set goals for their learning. Help students to see that learning is something they do for themselves, not for others.
3. Wonder: Build *learning curiosity* through questions, exploration, dilemmas and mystery. Avoid "pre-chewing" and "digesting" content before presenting it to students whenever possible.
4. Efficacy: Coach students to build academic *efficacy*. Help them to understand that by utilizing good strategies, smart effort, and the resources available to them they can learn challenging content and skills.
5. Responsibility: Help students build a sense of *responsibility* for their learning by supporting them to make meaningful learning decisions and by leveraging the four other factors. We take responsibility for what is important to us.

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191 Palmer, K. and Blake, D. (2018). *The Expertise Economy.* Boston, Nicolas Brealey Publishing.

Implications for all learners

This article has focused on the redesign of the formal educational system and the learning needs of children and youth. Yet, the approach and practices featured in this emerging design also have implications for adults already in the workplace.

Most people in the workplace today experienced education in the traditional design. They often lack the skills and experience to be agile, independent learners. As the contours of the new learning-centered design take shape, near unlimited opportunities exist to support development of this same skill set for all types of workers in almost any workplace.

The collective impact of a population that values learning and possesses the skills to become learners for life could be limitless. Rather than waiting for someone to define for workers what to learn and teach them a narrow set of skills, we open the door to a world in which everyone can learn, grow, and contribute regardless of background, experience, or status in life.

Dialogical Validation in Dutch Teacher Training

5.3

VPL-enhanced learning strategies in the Netherlands

Ruud Duvekot & Klaas Doorlag

In the Netherlands, the Archimedes Institute at Utrecht University of Applied Sciences offers teacher education for 14 bachelor and 11 master programmes. The Institute's staff highly values education meeting the learning needs of students, for initial and for post-initial learning[192]. Making learning more flexible is considered essential in order to realize such a learner-steered approach to lifelong learning in teacher education. This calls for making use of the students' learning history in order to be able to offer each student a flexible, personal learning trajectory. Such personalised learning is based on two interrelated processes:

1. The validation process focuses on identifying, valuing, validating and advising on the further development of competencies that a person already acquired formally and informally, and will need to acquire for reaching-out to a learning objective (qualification, competence-development, personal fulfilment, etc.).
2. The learning process facilitates the student in (co-)initiating, designing and implementing flexible learning arrangements within the modular, blended learning offering of the Institute.

The organisation of education, guidance and assessment is geared to giving students the opportunity to take control of their own learning process in dialogue with the Institute's teacher-educators. With the help of this dialogue, the student can actively participate in determining the objective, tempo, method of assessment, content and form(s) of their learning trajectory. Such self-directed learning based on co-management of the learning process is the basis for personalised learning. It has validation and tailored learning as supporting pillars. Where *tailored learning* is mainly about the design, supervision and implementation of a learning trajectory, *validation* focuses on the assessment and advice on the content of the student's learning in relation to the personal learning need. Creating the right balance in the relationship between the two pillars is the essence of the dialogue between student and teacher.

The validation process relies on a portfolio-steered approach in a learning environment based on learning outcomes. The student has a variety of test methods at her[193] disposal and can achieve an intended learning objective by means of a learning-pathway dependent or a learning-pathway independent programme. The process has a dialogical character because

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192 Initial education is education people receive from the moment they become subject to compulsory education. Their further learning is termed post-initial education.
193 Wherever 'she' or 'her' is written, 'he', 'him' or 'his' can also be read.

of the continuous coordination between student and teacher about what has been learned and what still needs to be learned. The student is the owner of her personal learning experiences and ensures that these experiences are used to achieve the intended learning objective. The teacher is the owner of (the learning outcomes of) the learning offer and has the responsibility to match this offer with the learning experiences and learning needs of the student and guide the student in the learning trajectory.

In order to realise such an integrated approach to validation and learning, the concept of *dialogical validation* was presented in 2018 as one of the supporting pillars of personalised learning[194]. Dialogical validation enables the student to be co-owner of the flexible learning strategies of Archimedes. This article explains why and how this is achieved.

Validation = Learning

A broad view of the phenomenon of 'validation of prior learning' embraces all learning that takes place consciously and unconsciously, informally, formally and non-formally and above all continuously. Learning can be seen as an individual activity within social processes. Such processes cover all possible learning, working and living situations and are not necessarily intentional but always - consciously or unconsciously - enrich one's knowledge, skills and insights.

Claxton states learning '*comes in many different shapes and sizes. And these start to kick in at different stages of development. [-] learning is a much wider, richer concept than is captured within current models of education and training*'[195]. It also encompasses implicit, non-intentional learning in its holistic approach:

> *Learning is what one does to transmute incompetence into competence, ignorance into knowledge. By definition, learning starts in the zone of the unknown, and attempts, via a whole variety of activities, mental and physical, to discover comprehension and expertise.*[196]

This description supports a social-constructivist, broad and social interpretation of learning and covers both the breadth and depth of learning. Jarvis defines such learning as an activity that continues to take place throughout life, in which the continuous learning experiences of people can be actively used for the various purposes for which further learning takes place:

> *Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.*[197]

194 Duvekot, R.C., Edwards, S., Grooters, N., Hoevenaars, L. en Noorlander, M. (2017). *Valideren is (te) leren. Een model voor dialogisch valideren van leeruitkomsten*. Utrecht, Instituut Archimedes.
195 Claxton, G. (1999). *Wise up: the challenge of lifelong learning.* New York/London, Bloomsbury, p.5.
196 Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. & Wallace, M. (Eds.) (1996). *Liberating the Learner: Lessons for Professional Development in Education.* London, Routledge, p. 47.
197 Jarvis, P. (2009). *Learning to be a person in society*. London, Routledge, p. 25.

Jarvis' definition can be used as a basis for applying the concept of dialogical validation. People learn, partly through their personality, in different ways, by reflecting on the experiences they gain and internalising them, within a given context and by processing theoretical information. People learn consciously and unconsciously at all stages of their lives and in all areas of their lives. Each person is a learning person - '*it is the whole person who learns*' [198]- with their own learning style, motivation, experiences and ambition. Dialogical validation links up with these unique, individual learning experiences and makes the connection(s) between a person's personality, the individual context and the personal enrichment that can be achieved at a university of applied sciences.

Dialogical Validation

Linking the student's learning needs to the university's learning offer is based on validating existing learning experiences and taking these as the starting point for organising a learning cycle in which new learning outcomes are achieved at regular intervals and anchored in one's portfolio. The dialogical character of such a cycle is based on Paolo Freire's conceptions that the dialogue between student and teacher should be essentially open and equal and concerns the wish or need for design and content determination of one's (further) learning. Without openness and equality in the consultation on learning, only limited use can be made of the validation of one's previous learning to initiate meaningful and personalised learning.[199]

In Freire's view, learning - and thus validation - can be regarded as a cycle that starts with experience, which is reflected on, which then leads to a certain action and which in turn produces a concrete new experience that can be reflected on: '*Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection*'[200]. Such learning revolves around the experiences that people gain in specific situations within their living and working situations and which they can use as input for a dialogue with a teacher (or an employer, colleague, etc.). This dialogue motivates and enables people to (self)reflect. The right combination of experience and reflection then leads to new learning processes, which ultimately leads to the acquisition of human autonomy, after which a new future perspective emerges. Such a cycle is based on integrating validation and learning. The role of the portfolio is best used in the cycle if it is tailored to different functions within the cycle (planning, supervision and assessment), and if the portfolio fulfils a central function in the supervision and monitoring of personal development.[201]

Validation processes can vary depending on the ambition, the intended effect and the context or situation in which the student finds himself. In general, we are dealing with three main forms of generating an effect of validation:

1. Validation for <u>civil effect</u>: the student would like to achieve a civil effect (qualification); testing is then dominated by a classical approach in which a learning standard is chosen, for which a specific portfolio is then completed and assessed in order to achieve access to a learning programme.

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198 Jarvis, P. (2006). *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning*. London, Routledge, p. 50.
199 Freire, P. (1972, 2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, Continuum.
200 Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers – Letters to those who dare teach.* Boulder, WP, p. 22.
201 Tartwijk, J. van en Driessen, E.W. (2009). Portfolios for assessment and learning. In: *AMEE Guide no. 45. Medical teacher, 31*, pp. 790-801.

2. Validation for <u>social effect</u>: the student chooses to strengthen certain areas of competence. This can be in the context of employability, professionalisation, integration or career (re)orientation. A portfolio format can be used, such as a personal, broad portfolio or a portfolio format more specifically aimed at specific areas of competence. The goal is to start learning (again) or to keep the level of learning up to date (initiation, upgrade or update).
3. Validation for <u>personal effect</u>: the student can also consider achieving a purely personal effect (empowerment, inclusion, personal enrichment, *enjoyability*) when entering into an assessment. This may mean, for example, that the student wishes to have a personal portfolio of personal learning experiences validated as a stand-alone, reflective assessment procedure. Then it is up to the student to use the assessment report as a driver for doing something within her framework of personal learning objectives. However, it can also stop with such a 'portfolio assessment'. If desired, this personal effect can be recorded in an official certificate with civil effect.

Dialogical validation can be defined as assessing a person's learning experiences and advising on further learning options with the purpose of achieving a desired learning effect via a personalised learning pathway. Such validation is characterised by:
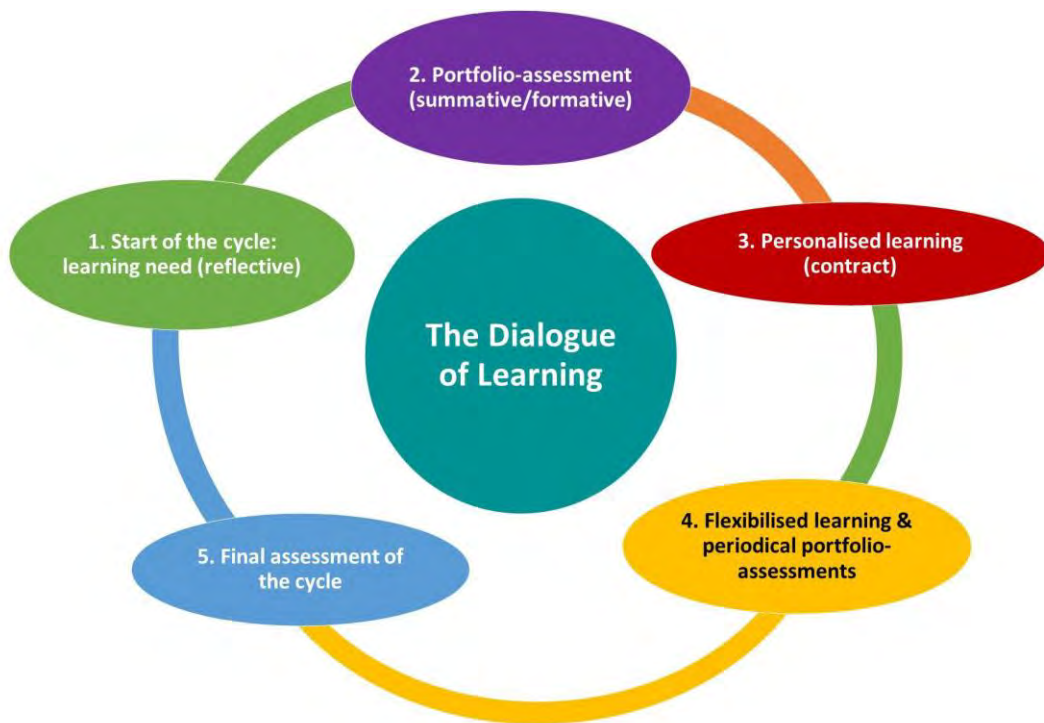1. **Awareness**: the awareness of the student that investing in learning is useful and necessary, and that she has a learning history that can support and strengthen the purpose and direction of learning.
2. **Motivation**: the awareness of one's already available potential can be a stimulus for reaching-out to a concrete learning objective. It can even help formulate a concrete learning need or desire.
3. **Facilitation** (**affordance**): the facilities for learning, testing and supervision that are available to a student to learn (summative/formative) and to which the student has access or is entitled. Such affordance includes legislation and regulations, financing, education and training programmes, provisions for assessment and (career) guidance. For the Institute, this entails that it distinguishes itself through an assessment and learning concept that responds to a person's learning history and learning objective.
4. **Learning pathway independence**: an understanding of learning that can take place in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, regardless of time or place.
5. **Dialogue**: an open dialogue between student and teacher in which both have their input in (1) determining the learning need - form, content and meaning - of the student and (2) the subsequent design, implementation and evaluation of a personalised learning trajectory.
6. **Assessment** as an instrument to compare and value the student's learning history and the learning outcomes of the testing organisation. There are three types of assessment forms suitable for making this comparison:
   - Assessment *of* learning, in which a person's portfolio is assessed summative against a prescribed standard and can lead directly to (partial) recognition.
   - Assessment *for* learning, in which a formative development-oriented advice is generated for creating a follow-up process in which the desired learning objectives can be achieved.
   - Assessment *as* learning, which shows the reflective nature of validation. The assessment is experienced as a learning process in itself.
7. **Ownership**: the (conscious) ownership of the student's learning experiences and the reflective ability to connect them dialogically with the learning outcomes of the Institute.

8. *Co-design*: cooperation between student and Institute about the joint development of meaning, form and content of further learning.

Cyclical process

Dialogical validation can be interpreted as a recurring cycle in which validation and learning alternate. At the end of each cycle, the result can be the starting point of a new cycle, or a separate new cycle can be started. In all cases there are successive learning cycles which are necessary and useful for the student in the context of lifelong learning design in order to maintain and improve himself in a sustainable way in the learning society (for empowerment and employability).

Figure 1: The cycle of dialogical validation and learning

The successive steps in a cycle are:
1. The focus is on the awareness of personal value and the articulation of the student's learning needs on the basis of someone's learning experiences acquired earlier by means of reflecting on their own actions. At the start of their study programme, students go through an immersion phase of 1 period (5 weeks). In this immersion, in addition to being introduced to the learning team approach, they will be guided in the creation of a portfolio with which they can demonstrate their relevant knowledge and experiences. This is the start of the process of dialogical validation. Dialogical validation can then take place in various forms, depending on the nature of the competencies to be proven.
2. Testing, assessing and advising on the articulated learning need, in order to recognise the learning outcomes already acquired (summative) and to give shape to a personalised

learning trajectory (formative). Agreements about the personal learning pathway are recorded in an *educational agreement*[202] between the student and the university (and possibly the employer).

3. Depending on the learning objective, the student receives an appropriate learning offer: recognition of someone's value (summative) by means of a portfolio assessment, in combination with a development-oriented (formative) advice on further learning for shaping a personalised learning trajectory.
N.B. In case of the choice to only strive for recognition, the student completes the cycle with step 3 in which the personal portfolio is updated (and validated!).

4. Then the student gets formal recognition of what already has been learned and a personalised and flexible learning trajectory, designed through blended learning with periodic test moments or progress assessments. The portfolio can serve as an instrument for monitoring the student's progress and enables the communication with the guidance-facilities of the university.

5. Finally, the new, achieved learning outcomes of each learning cycle are summative assessed by means of a final assessment and anchored in the portfolio or professional competence file of the person concerned. If desired, the result of one cycle can lead to the start of a new learning cycle. In this sense, this is about managing one's lifelong learning because the result of one learning cycle generates new learning needs in a subsequent learning cycle. The learning cycle is therefore primarily a learning spiral with multiple learning cycles rather than a single, separate learning cycle.

This learning cycle can be filled-in by students in various ways. After each cycle the student can build a new cycle on the basis of an enriched portfolio and new learning wishes. This is what we call *the portfolio-loop*[203].

Flexible learning
Flexibilization of learning means that learning can be followed independently of time and place and is organised on the basis of learning outcomes. It is the result of learning (learning outcomes) that is central. Learning outcomes can be/will be achieved regardless of form, location and time. It's not about 'how' but above all about 'what' someone has learned. Flexible learning is therefore the sum of (1) validating learning outcomes already achieved and (2) learning the remaining learning outcomes through a learning pathway that fits in with a person's personal learning objective and context. By validating one's learning outcomes so far, flexible learning can therefore be directly linked to the student's learning needs, resulting in what we term as personalised learning.

The integration of personal learning experiences into the learning outcomes of an Institute's qualification is a critical success factor in making learning more flexible. This integration can be organised effectively in the dialogue between the student and the teacher. In the case of dialogical validation, the learning outcomes are fixed but the path towards them, the learning

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202 After the intake assessment, the summative results and the formative advice are processed in an educational agreement (contract) between the student and Institute Archimedes. This agreement defines the defined, personalised learning pathway in terms of planning, form and content with respect to the learning outcomes to be achieved. If an employer also has a role to play in achieving the learning result, she will also be a party to this agreement.

203 Duvekot, R.C. (2016). Leren Waarderen. Een studie van EVC en gepersonaliseerd leren. [*Valuing Learning. A study of EVC and personalised learning*] Thesis. Houten, CL3S.

path, can differ. Both parties directly involved - student and teacher - consult each other about the value of the student's portfolio and the design of her learning pathway. A range of learning pathway-independent assessment methods can be used for recognising, valuing, recognising and further developing the learning experiences that someone has already acquired.

The starting point is that with the help of various forms of assessment prior to starting up an intended learning trajectory, a portfolio drawn up by the student containing the documentation of previous learning experiences will be assessed summative so that it can be determined whether the intended learning objective has already been achieved and/or which (additional) learning trajectory is required. Such an assessment might also indicate which learning style best fits the student's further learning programming: work-based learning, distance learning, classroom-learning, etc.

During the learning process, each form of assessment contributes to enriching the student's personal portfolio and provides insight into the student's progress.

After the learning process, the final assessment of the portfolio, also containing the new learning outcomes, completes the learning-cycle and enables (in time) a new learning need that can be prepared by the student.

Therewith, in the dialogue between student and teacher, the portfolio is the starting point for achieving learning outcomes and anchoring them in the student's portfolio. These learning outcomes can be achieved through the validation process and/or the learning process. In principle, students can make continuous crossovers between validation and learning from their own portfolio, because both learning processes are based on the same learning outcomes. They are distinguished from each other by their learning pathway-independent or learning pathway-dependent character. The content and meaning of learning play an equal role in both learning paths. The difference lies in the student's ownership of the learning process: the choice of how the learning process takes shape and how the learning outcomes are documented, assessed and linked to an intended learning effect.

Within the *validation process,* the testing or assessing (summative) and advisory (formative) functions of validation in the dialogue between the student and the teacher are used to value and recognise learning outcomes. The student has various forms of testing available, enabling product- or process-oriented validation options.

The *learning process* aims at offering learning that cannot be realised through validation or that the student believes is desirable. This offer is personalised in terms of content, form and meaning. The student has a say in the design of the personal learning pathway within the legal and educational framework of the study programme and/or the domain within which the student learns.

Perspectives

Dialogical validation provides space for answering the students' learning needs and strategies. It enables the student to express a concrete learning need that can either result in a direct return on personal learning experiences or - more indirectly - can lead to a flexible and personalised learning trajectory. Since dialogical validation in the form of '*assessment as learning'* is a learning process in itself, it is an integral part of personalised learning. In this light, the perspectives of dialogical validation can be described as follows:

- Dialogical validation can be used in a wide range of applications in the context of lifelong learning policies, personal empowerment and inclusion strategies and career development steps, for different target groups and at different cognitive levels. Since organisations generally operate with different target groups that also operate at different levels, dialogical validation presents itself as a broadly applicable concept for pursuing learning objectives for any target group or level.
- An important factor in the exploitation of dialogical validation is the savings that it can help achieve in terms of investment in time and money in the practice of personal career development or - at the organisational level - of personnel policy, both for normative and for development-oriented policies.
- Extrinsic factors can lead to the use of dialogical validation in activities aimed at personal career development and personnel policy. This may, for example, involve quality requirements set by the legislator with regard to the personnel working in a particular sector. These requirements can be general requirements such as having a relevant diploma at higher education level. Specific requirements may also be set, for example with regard to safety procedures in production processes. In such cases, the use of dialogical validation can be the catch-up that the professional or organisation has to make in order to meet the new requirements.
- Intrinsic factors can also be a strong promoter of dialogical validation in personal career development and personnel policy. The motivation for this can come from both the employer and lead to the facilitation of validation applications in terms of time and money for employees. From the student's point of view, personal initiative can also lead to gaining access to a personalised learning trajectory.
- The use of dialogical validation for 'from-work-to-work policy', in social or job-seekers programmes, can be supportive ion achieving more efficiently a good match between the supply and demand of a person's skills and qualifications on the labour market.
- The process of dialogical validation stands and falls with the way in which the personalised portfolio is prepared, used and, in view of the recurring character of the cycle in figure 1, can actually generate a recurring effect on the lifelong learning process of a student. Practical examples show that the information and guidance of candidates for dialogical validation is crucial, particularly in the phase in which the portfolio is made. After all, the portfolio is the input that the learner provides for the assessment and the basic material on which she bases her personal learning needs. In the assessment, the valuation takes place, which then determines the type of recognition that is required from a personal or organisational perspective.

Critical success factors
One of the tricky aspects of dialogical validation is the design of test forms that do justice to the complexity of assessing and advising on personal learning experiences and at the same time are selective and diagnostic in nature and achievable in terms of time, money and concrete learning effect. A number of critical success factors can be concretely identified:
1. *Awareness of* the value of dialogical validation, in which the learner is central, requires broad support. Awareness is needed to want to invest in portfolio formation on the one hand and in dialogical validation on the other. Acceptance of each other's roles and responsibilities (ownership) is important in this respect in order to make validation a real dialogue. It is also important to recognise that the validation function is integrated into

the learning cycle. Validation is also learning, so to speak, albeit independent of the learning path!

2. The way in which the content of the learning offer is translated into concrete and recognisable *learning outcomes*. This says a lot about the way in which dialogical validation on the basis of a student's learning need can be linked to a personal learning arrangement.

3. The *portfolio* as the carrier of the dialogical validation and the personal learning arrangement. The portfolio is a powerful form to give form and substance to the student's ownership of learning. Facilitation from the university can give a welcome boost in this direction by offering:

   a. A portfolio training aimed at self-management of competences. This is a useful tool to start the desired portfolio formation and to organise self-reflection on one's own knowledge and ability.

   b. Portfolio guidance as an accessible source of information for helping to set up a person's portfolio is of great value for actually creating a portfolio.

   c. Self-assessment instruments to help determine, for example, the level of competence and ambition. This can be important in determining the purpose and direction of an intended, personalised learning pathway.

4. The *professionalisation of* the university staff in managing and exploiting dialogical validation. This mainly concerns learning to deal with new forms of testing and new roles as teacher, such as coach, portfolio supervisor and assessor. The main aim is to be able to listen to each other in the dialogue between students and teachers in order to create an effective balance between the need for and supply of learning. The feasibility of test forms and portfolio methodology also falls under the heading of professionalisation. Trusting the quality of the assessor is one of the main issues in this context.

5. *Assessment* has four main forms: self-assessment, assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning. All forms can be integrated into an institute's personalised learning concept. They all enrich the creation of a valuable connection with the student.

6. The *ownership* within the dialogical validation must be clear:

   a. The student is responsible for the self-management of competencies and the construction and management of the portfolio. The portfolio is the basis for the construction of personalised learning trajectories.

   b. The university manages the qualification standards and must be able to respond to a student's learning need, i.e. be able to offer customised learning options and supervise the student's self-learning ability. A university is also responsible for drawing up the contract between the student and the university (and possibly the employer).

   c. The organisation for which the learner works has the responsibility to articulate the competence need of the organisation and to facilitate investment in the student.

7. For *flexible learning arrangements,* not only the content but also the form in which the learning takes place is important. This includes (1) blended learning for the design and (2) flexible, personalised learning arrangements for the content. Form and content are based on learning outcomes.

8. *Quality assurance* of portfolio-assessments and personalised learning trajectories is needed for creating trust in the ways of working of dialogical validation and accounting for the outcomes of both validating of personal learning experiences and learning the further or desired learning outcomes. The trust in the quality of the assessor should be

equal to the trust in the teacher (which in practice at the Institute are the same professionals).

9. *Monitoring and action research* are needed into practical examples, approach, methodology and effects of dialogical validation in combination with personalised learning. The outcome of such monitoring and research is aimed at learning to use both phenomena as a separate process and in combination with each other in the context of lifelong learning strategies.

In conclusion

Continuous development of the individual learner (goal) is paramount with lifelong (informal and formal) learning as a motor (means). Dialogical validation connects goal and means and can be effectively used by the citizen in determining choices regarding learning and working. In the case of teacher education, dialogical validation is based on the dialogue between 'learner' and 'teacher'. This dialogue generates a validation of personal learning experiences and a further learning advice. This dialogue has a holistic character in which portfolio management and assessment methods focus on summative and formative as well as reflective validation of a person's generic qualities in order to create and strengthen a personal learning strategy.

Within the dynamics of validation and learning the utilisation of the concept of dialogical validation therewith aims at making a difference when it comes to shaping and preparing students for their functioning in the changing (learning) society. More specifically: the aim is to recognise and validate generic, personal qualities for the purpose of personalizing learning and career development in the lifelong learning arena.

Recognition of Prior Learning and Flexible Learning Pathways in South Africa

5.4

A National View

Heidi Bolton, Joe Samuels, Omotola Akindolani & Takatso Mofokeng

This article sketches the story of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) development in South Africa between 1995 and 2020, in a system where access to learning, redress, progression along learning pathways, quality, transparency and the integration of education and training are key. The paper has five parts. Firstly, it sketches the context for RPL in the country. Secondly, it explains how RPL is understood and the evolution of RPL policy, in South Africa. Thirdly, it analyses key RPL developments. Fourth, it presents the latest RPL data in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) managed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The paper closes with reflections on these developments and their implications for access and redress, learning pathways and lifelong learning.

Socio-economic context

After 26 years of democracy, South Africa has made some progress towards establishing a fairer society, but widespread poverty, inequality, and unemployment remain. Around half of the country lives below the poverty line and there is a 30% unemployment rate. In the latest comprehensive report of Statistics South Africa (STATSSA, 2016), of the persons aged 20 and older, around six percent of the population had no schooling; 13.6% had primary school as their highest formal education level; 68.2% had secondary school and 12.1% had completed Post-School Education and Training (PSET)[204]. Since the establishment of democracy, given the lack of formal learning opportunities experienced by many adults under *apartheid* and in the context of its legacy[205], RPL has been viewed as being an essential part of learning and work pathways.

Education, training and development context

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995; 2008; 2019) was the mechanism chosen to integrate the education and training system that was segregated racially under *apartheid*. From the start the NQF aimed to enhance access, redress, mobility (progression) within the system, and the quality and transparency of the system, for the benefit of all learners in the country (*Ibid*.). Highlights regarding the impact of the NQF on understandings of, and realities in, the South African education and training system are sketched here.

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204 Statistics South Africa (STATSSA) (2016). *Community Survey 2016*. Census Report. Pretoria: STATSSA. STATSSA conducts a census every five years; the following census in the country is scheduled for 2021.

205 *Apartheid* refers to the unfair unequal race-based political system in South Africa before the establishment of democratic government in 1994. Statistics South Africa (STATSSA) (2016).

Understandings and developments regarding the systemic integration of education, training, development and work

In 1994-1995 the education and training system in South Africa was deeply divided along demographic lines. Developments under the SAQA Act[206] included *structural* integration within and across the sectors making up the system. Under the NQF Act[207] which replaced the SAQA Act, there was further restructuring, including the integration of education and training-related responsibilities through the establishment of the Departments of Basic Education (DBE), and Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2010. The former is responsible for Basic Education; all PSET now falls 'under the one roof' of Higher Education and Training. The NQF Amendment Act[208] seeks to strengthen SAQA's powers regarding its qualification evaluation and verification functions, enabling it to record misrepresentation in the NQF context and to activate the related sanctions. However, this Amendment Act has not yet been proclaimed and is therefore not in force. A recent Consultative Paper on its revision seeks further to enhance the efficiency of NQF processes through simplification and reducing perceived entity responsibilities – it may also alter some of the aspects embedded in the Amendment Act.

Currently three Quality Councils, for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Occupational Qualifications respectively, oversee three coordinated NQF Sub-Frameworks[209]. SAQA oversees the implementation and further development of the NQF, the communication, coordination, and collaboration between the main NQF partners, and articulation between the NQF Sub-Frameworks. The focus on 'learning pathways', 'articulation' and 'articulated pathways' within and between these Sub-Frameworks has intensified since 2012.

Articulation in education, training, development and work

Articulation can be understood in at least three ways.[210] First, learning-and-work pathways can involve 'linked qualifications' and work experience, where articulation possibilities exist in the 'grid of qualifications' making up the NQF, the professional development and designations overseen by professional bodies, learning at work and other elements. The definition of a 'learning achievement' under the SAQA Act was changed to mean a registered 'qualification or part-qualification' under the NQF Act, with major implications for understanding 'learning achievement'. These '*systemic*' learning-and-work pathways can be supported by '*specific*' inter- and intra-institutional articulation agreements in the form of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), RPL, and other mechanisms. Systemic articulation is also enabled when *individual learners are supported* as they encounter and overcome barriers and transition in their learning-and-work pathways. All of these types of articulation

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206 Republic of South Africa (RSA) (1995). South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995. *Government Gazette No. 16725, 4 October 1995*. Cape Town: Government Printer.

207 Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2008). National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008. *Government Gazette No. 32233, 17 February 2009*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

208 Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2019). National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Amendment Act No. 12 of 2019. *Government Gazette No. 42646, 19 August 2019*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

209 These comprise the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi.

210 Lotz-Sisitka, H. (2015). *Close-Out Report for the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)-Rhodes University Partnership Research into Learning Pathways.* Unpublished report.

are aided by collaborative relationships, curriculum alignment, career advice as well as the quality and flexibility of provider admission, curriculum, teaching-and-learning and assessment systems.

SAQA has led a number of articulation-related research and development initiatives in the interests of deepening the culture of articulation in the country. The National Articulation Baseline Study[211] revealed 75 articulation initiatives between public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, some of which were categorised by the researchers as 'developed' when they comprised formal agreements and transitioning learners, 'emerging' when partly set up, and 'latent' when they had been operating but had encountered challenges and ceased. The findings from this and related research together with 16 events for stakeholder engagement, led to the identification of a set of articulation enablers, amongst others.[212] Building on this work, SAQA commenced a national initiative to strengthen learning pathways in three sectors in which related attempts had already been made.

Flexible learning pathways
The flexibility of learning-and-work pathways – linked to RPL – has been a central concern in South Africa since the adoption of the NQF. SAQA partnership research between 2011 and 2015 showed the importance of flexibility in admission systems, curriculum systems, teaching-and-learning systems, and assessment systems – in enabling flexible learning pathways.[213]

In 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) identified South Africa as one of eight countries with flexible learning practices that could take part in its Flexible Learning Pathways project. The ensuing Case Study of Flexible Learning Pathways in South Africa[214] showed that in the HEIs selected for their known flexible pathways, RPL played a prominent role. Further, RPL was implemented differently across the three types of HEIs selected. In a relatively small private HEI, RPL was an individualised process; in a University of Technology, RPL was integrated into online and face-to-face application processes and had been mainstreamed; in a public HEI, RPL was categorised as 'pastoral' by the researchers, based on the extent of the personalised care and support shown to the candidates before, during and after their RPL processes.

211 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2018). National Articulation Baseline Study. Report based on SAQA-Durban University of Technology (DUT) Partnership Research. Pretoria: SAQA.
212 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)-Durban University of Technology (SAQA-DUT) (2020). *Articulation between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Higher Education, Work.* Booklet based on SAQA-DUT Partnership Research. Pretoria: SAQA.
213 Walters, S. (2015a). *Lifelong learning and professional development in residential universities*. Booklet based on South African Qualifications Authority-University of the Western Cape (SAQA-UWC) Partnership Research into Lifelong Learning. Pretoria: SAQA.
Walters, S. (2015b). Lifelong *learning and professional development in residential universities*. Poster based on South African Qualifications Authority-University of the Western Cape (SAQA-UWC) Partnership Research into Lifelong Learning. Pretoria: SAQA.
214 Bolton, H., Matsau, L. and Blom, R. (2020). *Case Study of Flexible Learning Pathways in South Africa*. Draft South African report on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) eight-country study of Flexible Learning Pathways.

What is RPL in South Africa?

RPL is defined in South African national policy as "the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development".[215] RPL is multi-dimensional – it is a process through which non-formal, informal and formal learning can be measured and mediated against learning outcomes for recognition across different contexts (*Ibid*.: Clause 15[a]). The minimum criteria for RPL include advice regarding RPL routes and guidance in the preparation of evidence; assistance with the preparation for assessment; and advice, guidance and support to address gaps in candidate knowledge and skills as revealed in RPL assessments (*Ibid*.: Clause 24[f]{i-iv}). While assessment is an integral feature of all RPL in the country, it is not treated in isolation from these other steps in the RPL processes: it takes place in combination with a range of other strategies that allow for different sources of knowledge and forms of learning to be compared and judged. RPL includes diagnostic, formative or summative assessments, to create opportunities for, or towards access and/or credit (*Ibid*.: Clause 15[c]).

Qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF may be awarded in whole or in part through RPL. The processes followed must be credible, quality-assured and consistent with the accepted and approved principles and criteria of SAQA and the relevant Quality Council/ professional body/ institution concerned (*Op Cit*.: Clause 15[b]).

In South Africa, the RPL process is multi-contextual; it differs across contexts. It may be developed and implemented differently for the purposes of recognition in the context of the three NQF Sub-Frameworks, professional designations, and recognition in the workplace. Furthermore, it is conducted using a variety of specialised learning interventions and/or assessment approaches through which the knowledge, skills and values of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed. The purposes and contexts of RPL determine the practices and outcomes of the RPL process in each case (*Op.Cit*: Clause 15[d]).

Forms of RPL

In SAQA's RPL policy, while there are essentially two forms of RPL – RPL for access to learning, and RPL for credit (*Ibid.*: Clause 7[a,b]) – RPL has also been used for recognition in workplaces, and towards the granting of whole qualifications.[216]

SAQA policy for recognising professional bodies and registering their professional designations in the context of the NQF[217] is designed to require that these bodies provide RPL routes to obtaining their professional designations. The designations awarded by the professional bodies are traditionally on the basis of qualifications plus the required workplace experience and a 'board examination' which allows individuals to practice. For alignment with

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215 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2019). National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning, as Amended. Government Gazette No. 42319, 19 March 2019. Pretoria: SAQA. [SAQA's RPL policy and criteria in the context of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008 were originally published in 2014 and reprinted in 2016].

216 Although this has been designed to enable the awarding of full qualifications via RPL, this is not always being implemented by Higher Education Institutions, who often draw on the '50% Rule' to justify their requirements that learners obtain at least 50% of the qualification concerned, at the certifying institution.

217 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2020a). Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as Amended. Government Gazette No. 43150 of 26 March 2020. Pretoria: SAQA. [SAQA's policy and criteria for professional bodies were originally published in 2012].

the National Constitution[218] and the NQF, they need to include the option of an RPL route. SAQA hosts workshops to guide professional bodies, several of which have commenced their RPL work.

National, SAQA, Quality Council, and provider RPL policies

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) RPL policy
There is a 'funnel' of RPL policies at differing levels in South Africa, which are aligned or are in the process of being aligned. The DHET has developed and oversees the implementation of, national policy for the coordination and funding of RPL[219], and collaborates with SAQA and the Quality Councils for its implementation. It was intended that the RPL Coordinating Mechanism would manage funds and information, RPL-related research, the professionalisation of RPL services, advice and support for RPL providers and candidates, advocacy and collaboration with the national Career Development Services located in the DHET, and the monitoring and evaluation of RPL implementation. The Reference Group that guided this work met several times, however, this policy has not yet been implemented fully.

SAQA's RPL policy
SAQA, in line with its mandate and the DHET RPL policy, develops and oversees the implementation of national policy for the implementation of RPL in the three NQF Sub-Framework contexts – and reports on this work. SAQA first developed RPL policy in 2002; this policy was revised on the basis of experience gained and research done, in 2014, and again in 2019 for alignment to DHET policy. SAQA's role is to support the RPL Coordinating Mechanism, conduct sector-wide and across-sector RPL research, and ensure both the uploading of RPL data in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), and Quality Council certification of learning achievements in a way that does not discriminate against learners who follow 'RPL routes'. SAQA has uploaded a considerable amount of RPL data to the NLRD; further work is underway towards the disaggregation of Senate Discretion data from HEIs, so as to capture the RPL that these entities are doing, on the NLRD.

Quality Council and Professional Body RPL policies and practices
It is intended that the Quality Councils develop and oversee the implementation of, NQF Sub-Framework-specific RPL policies in line with SAQA's over-arching policy, and that of the DHET. Quality Council responsibilities in this respect include ensuring provider implementation and support, certifying learning achievements, advocating RPL in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts, and reporting to SAQA on progress made. The providers of education and training in turn develop and implement their institutional RPL policies in line with the Quality Council specifications, and report to the Quality Councils. Professional bodies are also required to provide for RPL as noted.

SAQA's RPL policy development process
SAQA's policy development and revision process – for RPL and other elements of the NQF policy suite[220] – is inclusive and differs from the standard approach of drafts by experts

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218 Republic of South Africa (RSA) (1994). *Constitution of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
219 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2016). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy*. Government Gazette No. 39876, 31 March 2016.
220 The NQF policy suite in South Africa includes the NQF Level Descriptors (SAQA, 2012) and policies for registering qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF (SAQA, 2020b), recognising professional bodies and registering

followed by rounds of consultation with, and inputs from, government officials and the research and implementation communities. SAQA preceded its RPL policy revision with long-term partnership research into a 'maximally inclusive' RPL model sufficiently general to frame implementation across the range of NQF contexts.[221] This research commenced five years before the policy revision process. A full year was then allocated for the policy revision process.

An invitation for nominations for a Reference Group comprising representatives of the range of public and private NQF stakeholders and sectors was distributed widely as well as being placed on SAQA's website. Nominations received were considered and representatives chosen by a SAQA team. Representivity was ensured in this Committeee, in terms of NQF organisations and other aspects such as province/urban-rural/gender population group. The RPL policy was revised across four whole-day face-to-face meetings in the year, one open meeting for public comments and opportunities for representatives and their organisation to make inputs to each draft in between.

The value of this participatory method is that all of the conflicted points of view are present as each draft is refined: clauses can be negotiated and agreed through dialogue and motivation. There are opportunities to develop relational agency[222] when the members are exposed to the traditions and reasoning behind each point of view. While this approach has potential to generate buy-in for the implementation of the policy after its publication, there is always a risk that entities do not elect sufficiently experienced people to represent their organisations/sectors in the Reference Group and then struggle with implementation afterwards.

The emergence of an RPL system in South Africa

RPL in South Africa 1995-2008
An Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) study of RPL across 22 countries positioned South Africa in a cluster of five countries at 'Stage 5 of 7' in terms of setting up a national RPL system – a stage which comprised 'islands of good RPL practices'. The study found four countries at 'Stage 6 of 7' or 'in the process of setting up national RPL systems', and no countries with 'Stage 7' fully-fledged national RPL systems (*Ibid.*). South Africa was described in the study as having a vision for RPL, many practices, access for people from different backgrounds, and sporadic funding. The research report also commented that 'not all levels or sectors were open' to RPL. [223]

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their professional designations (SAQA, 2020a), evaluating foreign qualifications (SAQA, 2017), misrepresentation in the context of the NQF and RPL, CAT and assessment (SAQA, 2019b; 2014c and 2014a respectively).

221 Cooper, L.; Ralphs, A; Moodley, K. and Deller, K (2016). C*rossing the lines: RPL as specialized pedagogy.* Peer-reviewed book developed as part of the SAQA-University of the Western Cape (UWC) Partnership Research into an inclusive RPL model. Cape Town; Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press.

222 Edwards, A (2010). *Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise*. Dordrecht: Springer.

223 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2009). *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*: Draft Synthesis Report No. EDU/EDPC (2009)4 or JT03268326. Paris: OECD.
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-South African Qualifications Authority (OECD-SAQA) (2009). *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Note for South Africa*. Pretoria, South Africa: OECD-SAQA.

RPL in the years 2010-2011

At the SAQA-hosted *National RPL Workshop* in 2010 blockages and needs stemming from the first years of RPL implementation in the country were identified in relation to four key areas, as follows:

1. Sharing effective delivery models for RPL.
2. Enhancing the quality of RPL.
3. Developing workable funding models for RPL.
4. Addressing legislative and other barriers to the expansion of RPL nationally.

These needs were addressed at SAQA's 2011 *National RPL Conference: Building and expanding existing islands of excellent practice,* where there was a stream dedicated to addressing each of the types of barriers identified. One of the outputs of the conference was the *Resolution and Working Document on RPL*, which was endorsed by the 350 participating delegates. The ideas it contained were then actively addressed by SAQA in its RPL policy revision process, and by the Ministerial Task Team for RPL, in its work.[224]

RPL in South Africa Since 2011

Following the *National RPL Conference* of 2011, dissemination of the *Working Document on RPL,* and a SAQA recommendation, a Ministerial Task Team on RPL was appointed and conducted research into RPL legislation and policy, the status of RPL in the sub-sectors making up the NQF, funding models, and a comparison of different international RPL coordinating mechanisms.[225] SAQA played a leading role in this work. The Task Team recommended the development of a National RPL Institute, which led to the DHET (2016) policy for the coordination and funding of RPL. SAQA's 2014 and 2019 revisions of its policy for implementing RPL followed the 2011 conference and DHET (2016) RPL coordination policy respectively.

For five years until 2015, SAQA supported over 20 organisational RPL initiatives and around 100 individuals a year. SAQA assisted entities that approached it. These entities included a group of organisations in the Agricultural sector, the Department of Correctional Services; the Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa (DENOSA); the Department of Defence (DoD); the Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA); the Department of Social Development (DSD); the Department of Transport (DoT); the Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC); private company e-TV; the Marine Industry Association of South Africa (MIASA); the National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB); Rand Water; the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC); the State Information Technology Agency (SITA); the South African Police Services (SAPS) and others – with the potential reach of over 300,000 people. Since 2015 the DHET has taken up this role.

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224 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2011a). Reco*gnition of Prior Learning (RPL): Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice.* Book of Abstracts and Summaries, National RPL Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 23-25 February 2011. Pretoria: SAQA.
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2011b). *Resolution and Working Document on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).* Delegate-endorsed recommendations, National RPL Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 23-25 February 2011. Pretoria: SAQA.
225 Ministry of Higher Education and Training (MHET) (2012). *Final Report of the Ministerial Task Team on a National Strategy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

RPL and technology

Technology plays a special role in increasing access to RPL and learning in general. In South Africa, several initiatives include conducting RPL processes and/or assessments via online platforms. Several HEIs offer RPL using a mix of online and face-to-face processes. In the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context, some processes similarly combine face-to-face processes with online RPL assessments; others involve RPL processes that are almost exclusively online. The OQSF initiatives are linked to funding from the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) that cater for specific industry sectors like banking, insurance, agriculture and others.

RPL data

Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL and while the three Quality Councils must oversee the submission of RPL data for uploading in the NLRD, there are few sanctions for non-submission and only some entities submit these data. Since 2014 when the submission of the data became mandatory, SAQA has made systematic efforts to conscientise NQF stakeholders in this respect and to enable the RPL data loads into the NLRD. While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, to date ten of the 21 SETAs; the Council on Higher Education (CHE) via 27 of the 99 registered private HEIs and two of the 106 recognised professional bodies have provided RPL data. These records have been loaded into the NLRD. The data presented in this section focus on the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL.

Analysis of data in the NLRD for qualifications achieved via RPL

A total of 31 143 *people* on the NLRD have achieved qualifications through RPL. The total number of *records of the achievement* of qualifications through RPL is 34 695 because some learners have more than one achievement via RPL.

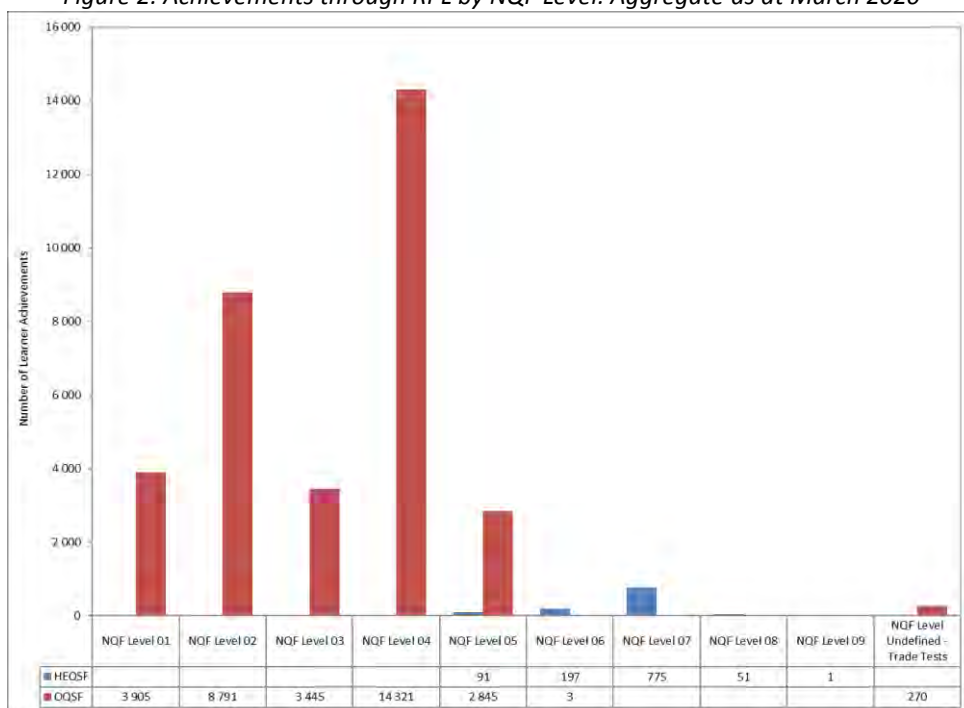*Figure 1: Achievements through RPL by NQF Sub-Framework: aggregate as at March 2020*
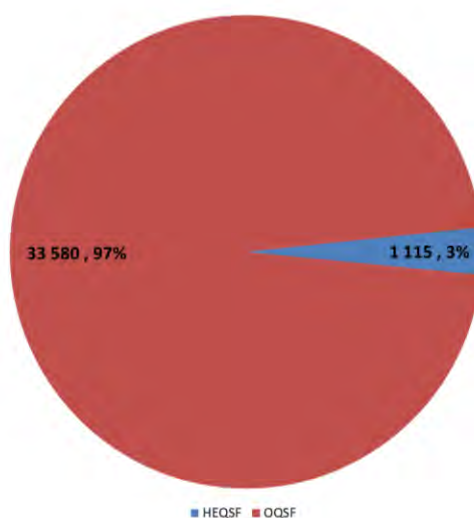
Source: NLRD

Nearly all (97%) of the 34 695 recorded learning achievements through RPL were in the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context, with 1 115 (3%) of the recorded learning achievements achieved being in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) context, as shown in Figure 1. To date, there are no learning achievements through RPL recorded in the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF).

Figure 2 shows that over a third (41%) of the learning achievements through RPL between 2012 and 2018 were achieved at NQF Level 4, followed by achievements at NQF Level 2 (25%) and Level 1 (11%). Figure 2 also indicates that all of the RPL achievements at NQF Levels 7, 8 and 9 were in the HEQSF context only. Some examples of the qualification types that make up these RPL achievements are: Further Education Training Certificates, National Certificates and Diplomas.

Figure 2: Achievements through RPL by NQF Level: Aggregate as at March 2020

|	NQF Level 01	NQF Level 02	NQF Level 03	NQF Level 04	NQF Level 05	NQF Level 06	NQF Level 07	NQF Level 08	NQF Level 09	NQF Level Undefined - Trade Tests
■ HEQSF					91	197	775	51	1	
■ OQSF	3 905	8 791	3 445	14 321	2 845	3				270

Source: NLRD

Figure 3 shows that of the twelve NQF Fields, most of the records of RPL achievements are in the Field of Services (40%), followed by the Fields of Business, Commerce and Management Studies (35%) and Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology (18%).

The total number of *unique qualifications* achieved through RPL was 229. The top ten qualifications with RPL achievements are shown in Figure 4. The qualification with the highest number of RPL achievements – over 8000 (25%) – was the 'Further Education and Training

Certificate: Real Estate' at NQF Level 4[226]. This was followed by the 'National Certificate: Contact Centre Support' at NQF Level 2, with 3 015 (9%) achievements and the 'National Certificate: Business Administration Services' at NQF Level 2, with 2 197 (6%) achievements.

Figure 3: Achievements through RPL by NQF Field of Study: Aggregate as at March 2020
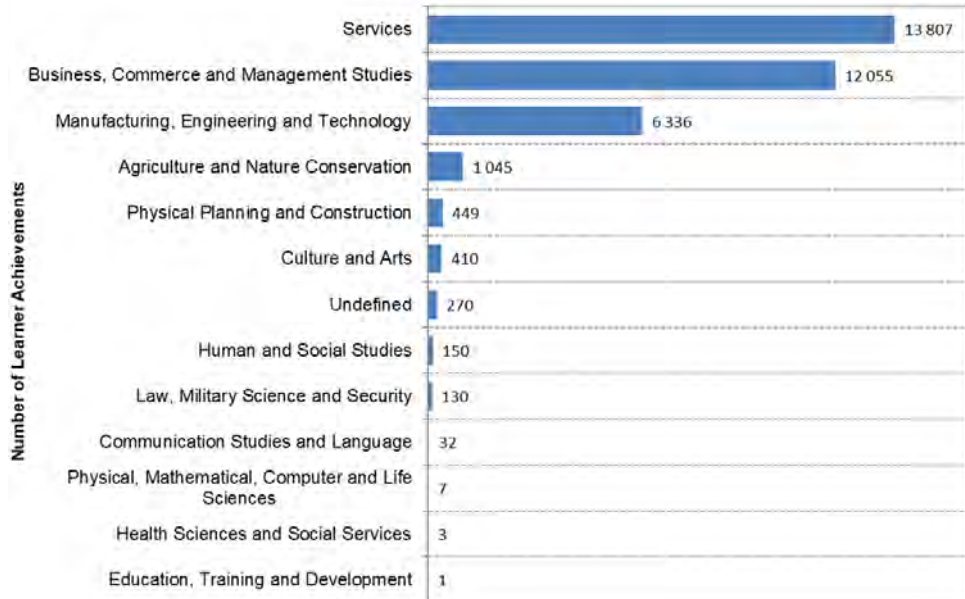
Source: NLRD

Figure 4: Top ten qualifications achieved through RPL as at March 2020

Source: NLRD

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226 This number is linked to legislation that required Real Estate Agents to upgrade their qualifications/ obtain qualifications to this level.

RPL data from public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
SAQA's 2017 NQF Impact Study research[227] showed that all but one public HEI in the country had RPL policies. Some HEI use decentralised models where RPL is implemented differently across different faculties and/or departments; others use centralised models and may for example have offices through which learners can access RPL and other types of support. It is known that RPL takes place in the following faculties: Management Science; Law; Economics; Arts/ Humanities/ Social Sciences; Education; Engineering and/or Information Technology; Health and Environment Sciences; Public Management, Agriculture and others. SAQA is currently developing regulations to ensure the submission of the related learner achievements. Historically these data have not been submitted to SAQA: they are submitted by HEIs to the DHET in aggregated form under the category 'Senate Direction', so there are not yet any public HEI data in the NLRD.

RPL data in the NLRD from the professional bodies
It was initially not mandatory for professional bodies to provide for RPL routes to their professional designations. However, SAQA's (2012; 2020) policy for recognising professional bodies requires that these bodies must *inter alia* "Include as general requirements, assessment, RPL, designation competencies and/or work experience" (Clause 43[f]).[228]

RPL data in the NLRD for part-qualifications achieved
At the time of writing, the number of learners who had achieved one or more part-qualifications via RPL was 87 915, with the records of achievements of part-qualifications via RPL numbering 1 610 956. The number of part-qualifications achieved through RPL was 3535.

Closing comments
RPL existed in isolated instances in South Africa before the establishment of democracy but has been legislated since 1995. SAQA oversaw the development and publication of the first RPL policy, and criteria and guidelines, in 2002 and 2004 respectively, and encouraged its implementation – to the extent that the OECD found 'good RPL practices' in pockets across the country in 2008.

SAQA's strong focus on consolidating the national RPL system from 2010 – in seeking to ascertain and address the barriers to a fully-fledged system, revising its policy, recommending and supporting the Ministerial RPL Task Team, and leading large national RPL initiatives – led to DHET policy for coordinating and funding RPL, the beginnings of an RPL Coordinating Mechanism, the development and publication of the Quality Council policies for RPL in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts and the mandatory submission of RPL data for uploading into the NLRD.

While these developments are significant, more work remains to be done. SAQA has aligned its policy for implementing RPL, to the DHET's policy for coordinating and funding RPL. The Quality Councils are in the process of aligning their RPL policies. There are contentious

227 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2019). *Assessment of the impact of selected aspects of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).* Report on the 2017 NQF Impact Study. Pretoria: SAQA.
228 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2020b). *Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).* Government Gazette No. 43150 of 26 March 2020. Pretoria: SAQA. [SAQA's policy and criteria for registering qualifications and part-qualifications under the NQF Act were originally published in 2013].

aspects such as the reluctance of the CHE to allow over 10% of a cohort to access RPL in any given HEI programme, and not allowing RPL for credit despite some HEIs wanting to do so. If these clauses prevail, the CHE will have to provide for exceptions. These issues are being addressed as a matter of urgency.

This article notes the shift nationally from focusing on RPL in its own right, to emphasising RPL as a key mechanism in flexible learning-and-work pathways. Further, it describes considerable work done towards understanding the nature and extent of articulation in the country, identifying and agreeing on articulation enablers, and leading initiatives to strengthen learning pathways. SAQA's participation in UNESCO's eight-country study of flexible learning pathways deepened understanding of how RPL is being implemented and experienced in HEIs. This paper also draws attention to the importance of harnessing technology to increase access to RPL and learning and provides some examples in this regard.

While it is encouraging to note the utilisation of RPL by many entities across NQF contexts in South Africa, further work is needed to obtain and load the records that do exist but have not yet been submitted and uploaded into the NLRD. Loading these records would make visible the true extent of learner achievements via RPL in the country. In order to achieve the desired further developments, continued political will and state resources, nationally coordinated structures, relational agency, and joint work by all the stakeholders involved, are needed.
While many institutions are conducting RPL very well, to serve all the learners and workers in South Africa seeking flexible learning-and-work pathways, the full set-up, functioning and support of the RPL Coordinating Mechanism are needed urgently. SAQA supports these developments.

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South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2002). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the Context of the South African National Qualifications Framework.* Pretoria: SAQA.
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2004). *Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).* Pretoria: SAQA.
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South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2014a). *National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa.* Pretoria: SAQA.
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2014b). Nati*onal RPL Conference: Tried and tested, tools, templates*. Book of Abstracts and Summaries, National RPL Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 23-26 February 2014. Pretoria: SAQA.
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2014c). *Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)*. Pretoria: SAQA.
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2017). *Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as Amended*. Government Gazette No. 40733 of 31 March 2017. Pretoria: SAQA.

VALIDATION IN VOLUNTEERING

5.5

A study on outcomes and impact of the validation of volunteers' competences

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Education and learning are substantial and constant parts of everyone's life. Even though the concept of learning is often associated with courses, assignments and exams (formal learning), knowledge, skills and competences can also be acquired in many other ways (informal/non-formal learning). Sometimes, we are not even aware of all the activities from which we educate ourselves and which competences we might have developed through them.

The recognition problem
Imagine a 23-year old volunteer from Germany. About 6 years ago, she joined the Red Cross Youth. Throughout her volunteering pathway, she has gained not only a lot of medical expertise but also important soft skills, such as how to assume responsibility. Since she has always had a keen interest in medical sciences, she aspires to become a doctor. Good grades are an essential requirement to study medicine at a German university. As she has never been a top student, her rather mediocre grades will very likely keep her from realising her dream – despite the skills she has already developed throughout her volunteering career.

On the one side, this situation shows the indispensable and capital role that volunteering plays in lifelong learning. It allows volunteers to develop personal, social and civic skills that could have not been acquired through formal training. On the other side, it also underlines that informally gained competences are seldom recognised by formal education, companies or institutions.[229]

What is the reason for this lack of recognition? Firstly, volunteers often find it difficult to communicate what competences and skills they have acquired during their volunteering. Secondly, employers have difficulties to identify those skills and competences when reading through the credentials of volunteer organisations as these certificates often describe the activities done rather than the competences they have acquired. As a consequence, many job vacancies go unfilled as skills and competences are not visible.[230]

Even though more and more people and organisations all over Europe are becoming aware of the value of volunteering as well as of the benefits of VNFIL (validation of non-formal and informal learning) for the voluntary sector, their use and impact is still largely unknown. VNFIL arrangements are still not broadly developed all over Europe. This runs the risk that those

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229 EUCIS-LLL (2015). *Validation of learning outcomes: opportunities and threats for non-formal education.* http://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/policydebate_validation_synthesis-report1.pdf
230 MATACHE, M. (2015). Benefits of validation for the individual – The case of Romania. [ImproVaL]

learning outcomes might be considered less valuable on the labour market than their potential suggests.[231]

The validation study within ImproVal
In order to address this issue, a project named *Improving Validation in the Voluntary Sector* (*ImproVal*) has been established. *ImproVal* is a European project, involving partners from five European countries (FI, NL, BE, DE, SK). The project aims to provide a synthesis of the work undertaken in the EU on the validation of volunteering experience.[232]

Within the frame of the project a study was conducted to discover whether and how volunteers and voluntary organisations use validation tools to document skills and competences and if the participants have been able to use the outcomes of validation. To gain these insights, two questionnaires for volunteers as well as for organisations have been created and additional interviews with experts from the partner-countries were conducted. To avoid language barriers, both surveys were provided in six languages (English, German, Dutch, French, Finnish, Slovak). The interviews took place from November 2019 to January 2020.

The aim here was not to get as many answers as possible, but to get answers from people already using that tool. This resultet in an unequal number of participants from the countries the surveys were done in, since the usage of tools for assessing these competencies differs a lot when one is comparing different countries.

Methodology

Survey for organisations
The survey for organisations consisted of 30 questions in total – 3 single choices, 14 multiple choices and 5 open questions as well as 8 Likert scale questions. The total sample size of the organisation survey was 361, of which 44 surveys were completed. This results in a response rate of 12.19% with the answers mainly coming from the countries of the project-partners.

Survey for volunteers
The survey for volunteers consisted of 22 questions in total – 11 multiple choice and 3 open questions as well as 8 questions that the respondents were asked to answer using a Likert scale. The total sample size of the volunteer survey was 359, of which 25 surveys were completed. This results in a response rate of 6.96% with the answers mainly coming from the countries of the project-partners.

Semi-structured (peer) interviews
Apart from the online survey, 10 semi-structured (peer) interviews with experts from voluntary organizations from the partner-countries were conducted. Answers were recorded by note-taking and/or audio recording. After the interviews were conducted, each partner shared their most important findings with the entire project team. All of those findings were compared and combined in one interview summary afterwards.
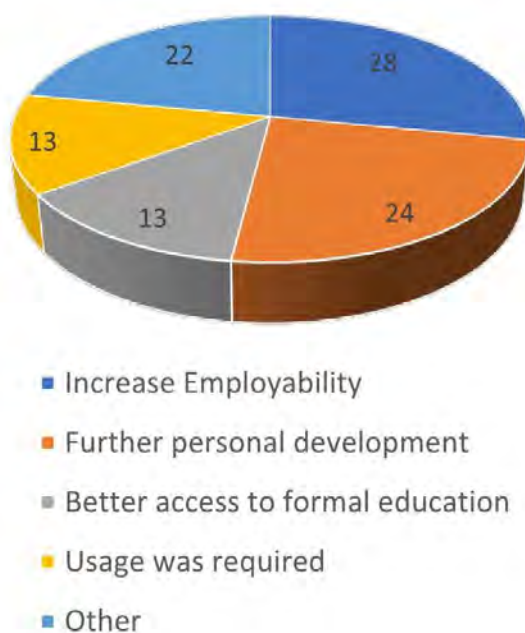
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231 Bremer, G. & Peeters, J. (2017). Learning from Volunteering. Recognition and validation of volunteer experiences. In: Duvekot, R. & Coughlan, D. & Aagaard, K. (Eds.) (2017). The learner at the Centre: Validation of Prior Learning strengthens lifelong learning for all: 2nd VPL-Biennale (pp. 89-102). [5] (Series VLP Biennale; Vol. 6). (European Centre for Valuation of Prior Learning) Houten/Aarhus.

232 *https://www.improval.eu*

Validation tools from the perspective of volunteers

Respondents were asked to select the tools they have been using.[233] Since most of the answers from volunteers in this study came from participants in Slovakia, unsurprisingly the tools often being used there were mentioned more often over all. So a lot of the participants used either the *European multilingual tool Youthpass* or the Slovak tool *D-zrucnosti pre zamestnanie* ("V-Skills for Employment"). Most of the volunteers said that having used the tool would have been helpful in the employment system (42%). According to the volunteers, certificates (43%) and confirmations of participation (27%) are by far the most common means of "recognition" that describe and validate the competences they have acquired. The main reasons for starting to use the validation tool as described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Reasons for using validation tools

■ Increase Employability

■ Further personal development

■ Better access to formal education

■ Usage was required

■ Other

Source: http://www.improval.eu/images/Validation_in_Volunteering_Study.pdf

In case that volunteers have gotten a permission, most of the respondents indicated that it helped them to find a better job (32%) or to get a better volunteering position (24%).

Validation tools from the perspective of organizations

When the organisations were asked to look at the tool from the volunteer perspective, most of them identified the difficulty to self-reflect on their competence development as the biggest challenge for volunteers in the evaluation process (30%). Other factors include a lack of interest (19%) or a lack of time (18%). Only 4% indicated their volunteers would not have had any difficulties while using the tool.

From the organisational perspective, time pressure (28%) and the struggle to identify the volunteers' competences (18%), as well as a lack of evidence that could prove the volunteers'

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233 JOKOLVÁ, M. (2019). *Validation Tools for Volunteers Compendium*. [ImproVaL}

competence development (14%) were frequently indicated. Furthermore, it was mentioned that it usually takes a long period of time until a new tool gets known and trusted in the society. Only 13% of the organisation respondents answered that they did not face any problems at all for implementing the tool.

Yet it was found that the reasons for using the tools, given by volunteers and organisations, show some discrepancy While volunteers predominantly start using the tool in order to increase their employability, only very few of the organisations mentioned combating unemployment as a reason for implementing the tool. A popular reason for implementing a validation tool in their organisation was to reward the volunteers for their work, to formally validate their skills and make them aware of what they have achieved. The validation tool enables the volunteer to vocalise their experience and turn it into an asset, which can be used to facilitate their access into formal education or into the labour market. In some cases, the use of validation tools can also function as a "showpiece" for the organization, therefore, benefit the organisations' reputation and even increase volunteer retention. The competences that organisations assess by using validation tools are described in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Competences assessed
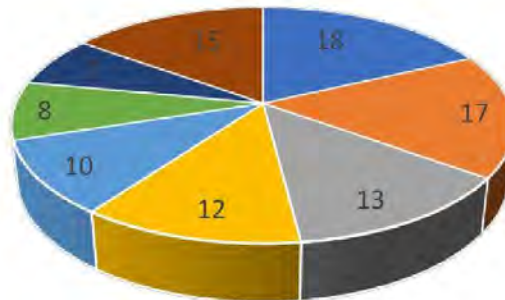
- Communication skills
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Managing relationships
- Time management
- Self-confidence
- Critical thinking
- Others (e.g. intercultural dialogue, …)

Source: http://www.improval.eu/images/Validation_in_Volunteering_Study.pdf

In order to recognise volunteers for the competences they have acquired, most organisations either issue certificates (37%) or a confirmation of participation (28%), which is in line with the kind of certification volunteers claim to receive (as mentioned above). Digital solutions such as Open Badges (8%) are still less common in some countries than in others. Overall, it

is to be expected that the interest in digital badges will continue to rise, especially amoung young people, during the next years.

To promote the validation process, it is essential to make volunteers aware of the benefits that come along with it. Using a validation tool should be seen a worthwhile investment rather than a time-consuming extra hassle. In general, the following aspects are considered as strengths/ benefits of the validation process:
- It helps recognizing (identifying, documenting, and assessing skills) skills acquired through voluntary work.
- Volunteers are more aware of what they have learned and how they have improved.
- Helpdesks and support are, when offered (e.g. *Europass*), useful, especially for elderly volunteers .
- Validation documentation and certificates can function as very useful addition to their application dossiers (in some cases the volunteer can directly download an official volunteer certification).
- Overall, it supports the overall assumption that volunteering can lead to professional competence development.

Yet the interviewees stated that certain steps within the validation process still offer room for improvement:
- Often, a very complex and time-consuming validation process.
- Some tools are still not entirely digitized ("paper-intensive" processes can also be very time-consuming).
- There is a lack of standardization (reliable comparison between different tool outcomes cannot be ensured).
- Tools have a highly theoretical approach.
- Some tool are offered on a platform but it is a closed space (only people from the volunteer organisation have access to the tool.)
- There is a lack of "success stories" (young people finding a job after using the tool).
- The tool can induce management difficulties (esp. time/resource management).
- Regular promotion is mandatory as the tools do not seem to "self-develop".
- It can be proven difficult to connect the tool to other existing platforms (inter-operability, such as the orgnisation's intranet).

One of the reasons that using the tool can be very complex and time-consuming, occurs when the volunteer has been involved in the organisation for a long period of time and has accompanied many projects where he or she might have developed competences. Apart from that, some tools are still not (entirely) digitized. Those "paper-intensive" processes increase the time investment. In the end, the success of a tool depends highly on its usability, as well as the efforts made by volunteering stakeholders in promoting them and making them accepted outside the volunteering context.

Recommendations for validation based on the surveys
So what about the 23-year old student who aspires to become a doctor? What should be done in order to help her further her educational or professional career?

1. Standardise the outcomes of validation tools

Policies need to be implemented that guarantee the credibility and reliability of the outcomes of the validation process. Possible approaches would be to standardise the structure of the obtained certificates or to adopt clear and transparent quality standards.

2. Promote validation tools

By creating the <u>tools compendium</u>, *ImproVal* has already made an important contribution to the promotion of validation tools. However, an even more intense and more frequent promotion of the tools will be necessary in the future.

3. Raise awareness and sensitization

"Validation cannot be considered as a good investment for individuals if it's not widely understood and accepted by societies".[234] In order to make volunteers as well as other stakeholders in the education and employment sector conscious about the potential that VNFIL yields, more awareness raising campaigns should be organised. This will help to reach out to potential tool users and organisations.

4. Make sure that validation tools reflect the volunteers' needs

As Bremer and Peeters (2017) already stated: "The starting point of the validation process should be the individual needs and interests of the volunteer". Keeping that in mind while looking at the different tools, it shows that there is a relatively wide variety. Some tools are being used more often than others. It might be worthwhile taking a closer look at how these tools operate and why they are popular.

Also, further potential for improvement should be identified. This covers technical aspects, for instance. Especially among younger generations the use mobile devices and applications is very popular.[235] Yet only a very small proportion of the respondents indicated that the tool that they are using offers a corresponding mobile application. Offering an app version of the tool could potentially increase its user-friendliness and thus attract new users.

5. Invest in trainings for tutors/mentors

As our research has shown, a broad spectrum of tools does already exist. While some european countries have no tools at all, others have 4 or even more tools. Problematic here is that after constructing the tools, most of them don't find enough attention in form of dissemination. This often results in the tools not being recognized, thus not being used and developed further and after a couple of years being cancelled alltogether.

Instead of developing more and more tools, focus should be put on capacity building of educators. Guidance and counseling is essential throughout the entire process of validation – especially for the elderly tool users or those with a disadvantaged background.

6. Emphasise value of digital recogntition methods

As mentioned above, traditional "tangible" recognition methods are still the most popular. New forms of recognitions such as Digital Badges, however, offer several advantages, especially in a higher education context. They can document informal learning outcomes in a

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234 Fɪꜱʜᴇʀ (2019). Response to the Open Consultation on ihe Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL). (European Association for the Education of Adults) Brussels.

235 SᴛᴇꜰᴀŃꜱᴋᴀ, M. & Wᴀɴᴀᴛ, T. (2017). Benefits from using mobile applications by Millennials – a gender and economic status comparative analysis. In: The Proceedings of XVI International Marketing Trends Conference, Madrid, ed. J. C. Andreani. (Marketing Trends Association) Paris-Venice.

more flexible way than traditional methods such as paper certificates.[236] One of the interviewees mentioned that Open Badges are especially popular in Italy. It should therefore be considered as a starting point for further research in this field.

To conclude

As can be seen, an increased effort and willingness to change recognition in education is still required in the future to improve and integrate the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. It is though hard to recommend one of the mentioned tools as the best one. This is on the one hand due to partly differing requirements from the perspective of organizsations compared to volunteers and on the other hand due to the small sample size of the study that did not include participants of every european country. Since that more research should be done in this field.

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236 DEVEDZIC, V., & JOVANACOVIC, J. (2015). Developing open badges: a comprehensive approach. Educational Technology Research and Development, 63, 603–620.
DYJUR, P. & LINDSTROM, G. (2017): Perceptions and Uses of Digital Badges for Professional Learning Development in Higher Education. In: *TechTrends*, 61 (4), 386–392.

A personal experience of the French validation system

Validation at the University of Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne

5.6

Franz Fuchs-Weikl

On November 19, 2018 I obtained the university degree "DURIF" (*Diplôme d'Université Responsable en Ingénierie de Formation*) at the Sorbonne in Paris by means of the recognition of competence. It is a French Bachelor's level qualification in the field of education management. The prerequisite for this is admission by university, the preparation of a dossier and its 'defence' in front of a jury. The entire process, from initial consultation to completion, took one and a half year. I was the first non-native French speaker at the Sorbonne to undergo recognition of competences or a VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*).

In France, almost every qualification (exceptions are, for example, medical studies) must be accessible in two ways: regularly by completing appropriate training and, alternatively, by recognizing acquired competences. A combination of both models is possible and the rule[237]. The recognition of competence in conjunction with further training is often the only realistic way for people 40+ to obtain a degree. In Austria, the recognition of competence in higher education degrees is currently not possible yet. With my degree in France by competence recognition, I wanted to show which methods can be used to achieve this.

Background

Recognizing work experience for formal qualifications is an important milestone for lifelong learning and participation in further training. The approach is relatively new in Austria. The projects '*You have competences/Du kannst was*' of the Chambers of Labour of Upper Austria, Salzburg, Lower Austria and Burgenland as well as the Continuing Education Academy Austria (wba) represent major innovations. Other countries such as France already have much more experience in this area, which we can make use of. As a project partner in the ERASMUS+ project "Transnational Peer Review for quality assurance in Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) Extended" (2015-2018) I gained insight into ten institutions from seven countries. At a peer review in February 2017 in Dijon I got to know the French approach of validation as peer. It was here that the idea arose to run through a French validation-process in a self-experiment.

Basics

The basic idea of validation is to make competences visible, to compare them with a standard or formal educational qualification and to recognise them. This is based on the

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237 République Francaise (2018). *La formation professionnelle. Annexe au projet de loi de finances pour 2019*, p. 141ff, *https://www.performance-publique.budget.gouv.fr/sites/performance_publique/files/files/documents /jaunes-2019/jaune2019_formation_professionnelle-W.pdf*

recommendation of the European Council of 20 December 2012[238] that Member States create such national regulations by 2018. A nationally coordinated identification and documentation of these competences should make it possible to acquire entire qualifications or at least parts of them. The aim is to achieve greater employment security, increased mobility and greater participation in lifelong learning. Moreover, when all countries relate their training systems to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), qualifications become comparable[239]. In this country, the "Strategy for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Austria" has recently become a key policy document[240].

Four steps to recognition
The European Council Recommendation identifies four steps towards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning:
1. Identification of learning outcomes: As a rule, an initial interview clarifies which competences a person has acquired in a non-formal or informal way.
2. Documentation of learning outcomes: In the second step, "evidence" is collected for these competences. This includes, for example, school and course certificates, service certificates, work samples, etc.
3. Assessment of learning outcomes: The proven competences are now compared with a "standard". Such a standard is a defined qualification (e.g. an apprenticeship diploma).
4. Certification: If the competences assessed correspond to a qualification, a formal qualification is issued (e.g. an apprenticeship diploma or a university degree).

From theory to practice in France
In France, the recognition of competence is called "la Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)". In 2017, 10.864 qualifications were registered in France in the "Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (RNCP)". This list corresponds to our National Qualifications Framework currently being established[241]. In addition, both, the Education Act (Code de l'éducation - art. L122-7, 2008) and the Labour Act (Code du travail - art. L900-1, 2008) regulate the legal right to validation of acquired experience. The guiding principle on the central web portal for validation in France summarizes the aim and claim of the approach well: 'Any person, regardless of age, nationality, status and educational level, who has at least one year of experience directly related to certification can apply for validation (VAE). This certification, which may be a diploma, a title or a certificate of professional qualification, must be registered in the Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (RNCP).[242]

The validation process to become an education manager at the Sorbonne in practice

Step 1: Identifying my learning outcomes
After the peer review at CIBC Bourgogne, my French colleague Didier Handouche offered me free counseling on the validation of my professional experience as an education manager.

238 Europäische Kommission (2012). *Empfehlung des Rates vom 20. Dezember 2012 zur Validierung nichtformalen und informellen Lernens,* 2012/C 398/01.

239 Europäische Kommission (2008). *Der Europäische Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen*. EC, Brussel.

240 Bundesministerium für Bildung (2017). *Strategie zur Validierung nicht-formalen und informellen Lernens in Österreich.* https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/euint/eubildung/vnfil.PDF.

241 NKS - Nationale Koordinierungsstelle für den NQR in Österreich (2019). *Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen. https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/*.

242 Ministère du Travail (o.J.). *Le portail de la validation des acquis de l'expérience. http://www.vae.gouv.fr/*

After two telephone and e-mail sessions in May 2017, my consultant presented seven possible qualifications within the French National Qualifications Framework (RNCP) at bachelor's and master's level at seven different universities in France that matched my professional experience. I opted for a university diploma in Education Management: "Diplôme d'Université Responsable en Ingénierie de Formation (DURIF)" at the Sorbonne. Three reasons were decisive for me:

- A degree at level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework (Bachelor level) seemed to me to be more achievable than a Master due to the linguistic challenge.
- The curriculum of this qualification almost completely coincided with my professional experience, which offered the prospect of full validation.
- Paris is within easy reach and the Sorbonne is very prestigious.

Step 2a: Documentation of learning outcomes - Application
In August 2017, I applied for competence recognition (Dossier de Pré-Orientation) at the university[243]. The application consisted of the application form, my description of the relevant professional career, a letter of motivation, my curriculum vitae, a copy of my passport, certificates and references. The application had to be submitted in French. The first positive surprise came right away when I was allowed to translate the certificates myself without any red tape.

Already at the end of September 2017 I received the administrative approval (Avis de recevabilité administrative) and in the middle of October the confirmation of the pedagogical feasibility (Avis de recevabilité pédagogique). At the Sorbonne, the application was treated by the Department for Continuing Education (Formation continue). This department was also responsible for monitoring my dossier and organising the jury.

In January 2018, I signed the contract that regulated my enrolment at the university, my entitlement to 20 hours of supervision by a university employee, the possibility of participating in candidate workshops and the fee. For self-payers, the cost contribution was EUR 1.200. As a result, I received the Guide for Competence Recognition (Guide VAE), which described all the necessary work steps, as well as the competence-based curriculum of the DURIF training[244]. Chantal Hémard, pedagogical assistant and responsible for further education offers, was extremely competent and careful in the preparation of my dossier. At the beginning, all certificates had to be submitted (training certificates, service certificates). Only work samples or working documents from my professional experience (e.g. analyses, training plans, course programme planning, job descriptions, relevant final theses from further training courses, etc.) were added later while preparing the dossier and were enclosed in the appendix (*annexe illustrative*). The dossier contained a description of the relevant professional practice, a detailed description of the competences and a comparison with the competence-based curriculum of the desired qualification.

Step 2b: Documentation of learning outcomes - the dossier
The dossier in my case - without annexes - comprised 75 pages[245]. First of all: the documentation of the learning outcomes through the preparation of the dossier was methodical, rational and individual.

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243 Fuchs-Weikl, F. (2017). *Dossier de PRE-ORIENTATION (DPO).* Salzburg.
244 Hémard, C. (2018). *Référentiel certification Paris I FCPS DURIF.* Paris: Université Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne.
245 Fuchs-Weikl, F. (2018). *Dossier VAE. Diplôme Universitaire Responsable en Ingénierie de Foramtion (DURIF).* Salzburg.

Table 1: Components of the Dossier

Dossier		Scope
Le parcours	Overview of the relevant professional practice	7 pages
Les expériences significatives	Overview of the relevant experiences	2 pages
Les grandes parties/les empois	The concrete description of examples of professional experience and their assessment in terms of acquired knowledge, competences and personal characteristics	51 pages
Le tableau récapitulatif	Comparison between acquired (=experience) and required competences (=standard)	5 pages
Conclusion	Summary and reflection of the process and the results	3 pages
Bibliographie	Literature used	3 pages
Appendix (annexe)		scope
Le tableau d'autopositionnement	Inventory of relevant professional practice, training and further education	23 pages
Annexes obligatoires	All confirmations, certificates and evidence	75 pages
Annexes illustratives	Example documents from professional practice and from relevant further training (course programme planning, theses, job profiles, analyses, strategies, planning documents etc.)	329 pages

Source: Fuchs-Weikl 2018

At the beginning of my dossier there was the hypothesis that, as a candidate, I assumed having acquired the competences described in the DURIF training curriculum through my professional experience. As a preliminary work, I compiled an inventory of the relevant professional practice, training and further education. There I identified the relevant experiences (*les expériences significatives*). This 'identification of relevant experiences' is like a negotiation process. In the 'tableau d'autopositionnement' certain competences are repeated. I went through this self-description together with my supervisor and identified those areas in which competences occurred repeatedly and which coincided with the curriculum. We needed two short Skype meetings and some e-mails.

The first chapter of the dossier gave an overview of the relevant professional practice and the relevant professional experiences (*le parcours*). In addition, I arranged my own career within the institutional framework (e.g. the history of adult education, the role of the social partners and the AMS/Austrian Employment Office) and also made a comparison with the situation in France. Next was the competence analysis. I described seven concrete professional experiences out of four jobs and illustrated them with detailed examples: These included a description of the initial situation, the main steps and strands of action and a balance sheet of the actions. At this point it was particularly important to link the set of actions and considerations with a relevant theory. From my point of view, a great gain of knowledge and a transfer between theory and practice emerged here: an absolute added value of this form of validation.

Examples of significant professional experience in my dossier
- Employment 1: Education Manager, 2000-2007.
    - Activity 1a: Participation in an AMS call for tenders.

- Activity 1b: Design of a modular system for preparatory courses for the final apprenticeship examination.
- Employment 2: Head of Customer Service, 2007-2010.
  - Activity 2a : Personnel development.
- Employment 3: Sales Manager Course Programme, 2010-2014.
  - Activity 3a: Organisation of the consultancy and sales team.
  - Activity 3b: The reorganisation of the planning of the course programme.
- Employment 4: Education officer at the Salzburg Chamber of Labour, since 11/2014.
  - Activity 4a: The introduction of workshops for school classes.
  - Activity 4b: Writing the regional education monitor for Salzburg.

After each described example, I balanced the acquired knowledge (*connaissances*) and competences (savoir-faire) and the applied personal qualities (*qualités personnelles*). I combined the knowledge with the corresponding literature and thus linked it to theory.

Step 3a: Assessment of the learning outcomes in the dossier by the candidate
In the end I summarized all acquired competences again and compared them with the competence-based curriculum in the form of a table (*le tableau récapitulatif*). This is where the comparison between acquired and required competences is made. In my dossier, the comparison between the competences acquired and those required in the curriculum comprised a five-page table which followed the following pattern.

Table 2: Assignment/comparison of the competences acquired and
the competence-based curriculum

Activities and tasks (based on the DURIF curriculum)	Employment (described in the dossier) in which I performed this task							Acquired competences
	1 a	1 b	2 a	3 a	3 b	4 a	4 b	
D1 : needs analysis	x	x	x	x		x	x	- to include the descriptions of the customer advisors (counsellors) in planning - analysis of the situation - to diagnose the work situation of my team and the situation of the entire organisation - to use job descriptions to analyse and compare job profiles and draw up training plans - to analyze the needs of teachers, the purpose of excursions in curricula and the needs of pupils. - to view and to analyze relevant data and statistics - analysis of individual and collective training requirements

Source: Fuchs-Weikl 2018, p. 66ff.

In the last chapter I composed a summary and reflected on the process and the results (conclusion). The annexes included testimonies (*annexes obligatoires*) and work samples (*annexes illustratives*) as well as the "tableau d'auto-positionnement".

Step 3b: Assessment of learning outcomes in the dossier by the jury
I submitted the dossier both electronically and on paper, in five copies for four members of the jury and the university. The time between submission and presentation was about 1.5 months to give the members of the jury sufficient time to study my documents and to check the comparison between the competences I described and the competence-based curriculum. Finally, on 19 November 2018, the presentation and defence of the dossier took place in front of the jury. The 4-member jury consisted of two representatives of two universities and two representatives of the profession or practitioners. My supervisor, Chantal Hémard, was present but no member of the jury. The members of the jury asked concrete questions regarding my dossier, my professional practice and the general conditions in Austria. A very interesting expert discussion developed.

Step 4: Certification
The composition and tasks of the jury are defined in the "Code de l'Éducation" in articles R613-37. The jury is made up of university representatives and representatives of the profession. It can determine three results: Full recognition, partial recognition (including training recommendation) or rejection. In my case, I was awarded the university diploma completely, with the grade "très bien".

What can we learn from France?
The EUROSTAT indicator for lifelong learning shows a markedly higher participation in continuing education for France than for Austria. For 2016, for example, it was 18.6% in France and 14.4% in Austria[246]. The framework conditions for continuing training and in particular for validation are clearly regulated in France. In the 2000s it was the law on "social modernisation" (2002) and the "law of May 2004 on lifelong learning" that brought very interesting innovations[247]. The first law also contains the "Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)". The second law created the individual right to training (*le Droit Individuel de Formation/DIF*) of 20 hours per year, cumulated over 6 years with at least 50% support from employers. In addition, the principle of a mandatory appraisal interview including planning of further training was regulated every two years (*entretien d'évaluation professionnelle)* and a training passport (*passeport formation*) was introduced.

In France, the financing of further training and validation is supported by further training funds (Organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés/OPCA) managed by social partners, and in the future by the "Opérateurs de compétences (Opco)". Employees have a personal training account (*Compte personnel de formation/CPF*) and receive financial support of EUR 500 (EUR 800 for unqualified employees) per year with a maximum total of EUR 5,000 or EUR 8,000[248]. For French universities in particular, the validation opens up new fields of activities and opportunities. The universities are increasingly concerned with imparting practical

246 Statistik Austria (2016). *Bildung in Zahlen 2015/16. Schlüsselindikatoren und Analysen*. Wien: Statistik Austria.
247 Ardouin, T, & Lacaille, S. (2009). L'évolution du champ de la formation. In: *L'audit de formation*. Dunod.
248 Le Monde (2018): *Le Monde: Le projet de loi « avenir professionnel »* . https://www.lemonde.fr/emploi/article/2018/08/01/le-projet-de-loi-avenir-professionnel-definitivement-adopte-par-le-parlement_5338446_1698637.html?xtmc=opca&xtcr=2

knowledge and knowledge for action. They are more interested in real work and in creating competences and qualifications. The validation also leads to an increase in the competences of university staff, who now acquire new competences for accompanying candidates, for looking at professional careers, for evaluating professional experience and for working in juries[249]. On the occasion of a visit to a validation fair in Brussels in June 2018, an employee of the University of Le Mans told me that the validation activities act as a research and development department.

Personal reflection
Personally, I can say that I spent about 150 hours of my free time preparing the 75-page dossier and compiling all the documents and invested EUR 1,200. I got to know nice, very open and competent people in France, reflected on my job description and the theory behind it, improved my French quite a bit and had extremely exciting experiences overall. The European context makes it possible for me to obtain a university diploma in France by means of validation, which I am currently denied in Austria due to a lack of offers. By the way, Professor Lenoir, a member of 'my' jury, pointed out that in France it is also possible to obtain several doctorates on validation and that I should publish this ...

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249 Lenoir, H. (2009). *VAE, compétences et Jury Universitaire*. *http://www.hugueslenoir.fr/validation-des-acquis-de-lexperience/*

Using Validation to improve the Quality of Portuguese SMEs

5.7

Ana Catarina Mendes Garcia & Maria do Carmo Vieira da Silva

Rapid technological advances tend to blur the boundary between human-made labour tasks and those performed by machines and algorithms, leading to major transformations in global labour markets. The way in which they are managed conditions the full development of each individual, since the adoption of strictly utilitarian and economist measures may result in widening skills gaps, greater inequality and consequent polarization (Cummins & Kunkel, 2015; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2018). Therefore, it is worrying that employers indicate that future training and/or requalification processes will have as their priority target audience those employees who play a pivotal role in strengthening the company's strategic capacity. As a result, the individuals who would benefit most from these training processes will be the least likely to enjoy them (Aleandri & Refrigeri, 2013; Cummins & Kunkel, 2015; WEF, 2018). Furthermore, active learning and learning strategies are part of a set of competencies that will continue to grow prominently until 2022, reinforcing the need for a more.

This project was set up to promote the balance between the four spheres of the development of learning – economic, sustainable, community and personal – in the specific context of Portuguese SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises). Thus, a training model based on the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) approach was conceived which, by allowing employees to be routed through a self-reflection process, made it possible to raise awareness and recognize the value of the skills developed along their personal and professional path. In addition, the flexibility of the whole training process, combined with the stimulation of divergent thinking and resilience, also allowed the systematic and simultaneous development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills (Duvekot, 2014a; Duvekot, 2014b).

In the project we focused on the following problem: *To what extent can a training model, based on the VPL approach and supported by principles of the educational sciences, contribute to individual empowerment and, consequently, to an improvement in the organizational quality of Portuguese SMEs?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human resources and competencies

Skills needs are changing (WEF, 2017; Olesen, 2014). The development of academic skills is fundamental but insufficient. The promotion of higher-order social, communication and thinking skills (problem solving, critical thinking and decision making) is becoming increasingly vital for 21st century citizenship and employability. Therefore, it is important to reflect on three key characteristics that affect the way and pace at which skills are developed (WEF, 2017):

1. *Technology and globalisation* are significantly changing business models across sectors, accelerating change in job destruction and job creation, so that, on average, one third of the skills needed to get jobs done today are believed to be entirely new by 2020.
2. *Education and training systems*, having remained static and under-invested for decades, are apparently inadequate for these new needs, with some studies suggesting that 65% of children entering primary school today will have jobs that do not yet exist and for which their education has not prepared them, aggravating skills gaps as well as unemployment in the future workforce. Moreover, adult training and qualification systems have developed poorly in most economies, which undermines the speed of adaptation of the current active workforce of three billion individuals to the new context.
3. Old-fashioned but prevalent *cultural norms* and institutional inertia create barriers, especially regarding gender. Despite rising levels of education, women remain underrepresented in the paid workforce, particularly in sectors considered to be of high potential and high-level jobs.

The increasing pace of technological change and globalization has opened new opportunities. However, it has also revealed the importance of aligning business practices, public policies and education and training systems with the skills needed today (WEF, 2017). Indeed, by investing in the skills of their populations, countries can help to ensure that their participation in global markets translates into better economic and social outcomes. The combination of hard skills and soft skills is essential and even more urgent when it comes to the number of adults who lack the skills needed to meet the challenges of globalisation. It is crucial to invest in skills that not only help individuals enter the labour market and protect them from the risks of losing their jobs, but also promote international competitiveness and economic progress in an interconnected world (Balcar, 2016; Hurrell, 2016). Governments, employers, trade unions as well as education and training providers should work together to create training opportunities in the workplace, improve access to formal adult education and make it easier for employees to combine work and training. In addition, greater recognition of informally developed skills will help workers to gain new skills and adapt their careers to changing needs (WEF, 2017).

An organisational learning culture
Regardless of their current skills, workers will need to retrain during their working lives. However, education systems were built around the education of children rather than adults. The existence of an educational offer for adults represents a niche that does not seem to understand the continuous requalification and improvement of the workforce. The significant increase in adult education and learning opportunities is indeed vital in ensuring that the three billion people already in the labour market – and their employers – can navigate the turmoil caused by the fourth industrial revolution. Consequently, collaboration between governments, educators and the private sector is crucial for the development and strengthening of the educational infrastructure that enables continuous learning and training opportunities for workers at all stages of their careers. Hence, the *priority characteristics* leading to this reform will be as follows (WEF, 2017):
1. The *transition* from education in the first part of the life cycle to learning at all stages of life.
2. *Modification* of the accreditation system to be based on "micro-accreditations" of skills acquired throughout the life course.

3. *Transfer* of the ownership of learning to learners, i.e. workers / learners should be placed at the centre of the process in order to take ownership of their own training / requalification.

Building a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace implies moving from "education for employment" to "education for employability" as well as "job security" to "professional development". A key strategy could be to integrate skills-based recruitment to complement (or replace) conventional models based on grade levels. Skills recognition systems could thus be organised by governments and industries at national or potentially global level. Such an organisation would create permanent feedback between labour markets and education systems, allowing for continuous and gradual adaptation as opposed to the need for one-size-fits-all reforms (WEF, 2017).

For this transformation to work, we need to reflect on *three fundamental principles* (WEF, 2017):

1. *Ensuring universal and equitable access*, as inequalities created up to secondary education are often reinforced in on-the-job training. Low-skilled workers tend to have less exposure to on-the-job training, while higher-skilled employees tend to have greater exposure.
2. *Multi-stakeholder leadership and involvement*, as although education has an impact on most areas of public and economic life, current education systems almost exclusively follow the guidelines of government agencies, disregarding the representation of other stakeholders. Coordination between ministries, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders could lead to a more comprehensive and effective national skills strategy. Employers have a key role to play in designing a new social pact that includes rethinking their own role as consumers of "ready" human capital. Enterprises should invest and encourage lifelong learning and retraining of their employees, working closely with educators to support the development of general and specialized skills.
3. *Long-term planning and reform* because the average term of office of education ministers around the world is about 1.6 years. However, education reform requires reflection and long-term stability beyond electoral cycles, especially given the transformative challenge of the fourth industrial revolution.

The role of technology in lifelong learning

The potential of open educational resources to support adult learning has not yet been sufficiently explored. The novelty of the concept in this field, as well as the lack of cultural recognition of the learning process outside formal structures, is a barrier. In addition, the pedagogical approach used in most of these initiatives does not fit the needs of adult learners. The very lack of coordination between adult learning initiatives, combined with the lack of credible methods for assessing and recognising open educational learning, is a problem. Also noteworthy is the lack of digital and self-learning skills – and sometimes also language skills – of a generation of learners trained at a time when these skills were not part of the curriculum. (WEF, 2017; Muñoz, Redecker, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2013).

Regardless of the abundance of open educational resources, it is important to recognise when adult learners are able and/or motivated to use them. If they have long been detached from a learning process, it is essential that future externally defined learning pathways continue to exist and provide the necessary support and guidance so that these learners can benefit from the scope and variety of education and training opportunities. Similarly, the need arises to demonstrate the achievement of certain socially recognized and externally

defined objectives. Different ways to get this kind of recognition are already being tried (Muñoz et al., 2013).

Digital credentials (or badges) represent competencies, interests, and achievements gained by the individual through specific projects, programs, courses, or other activities, and there is a learning ecosystem that supports them. This, in turn, consists of *badge issuers, badge earners and badge consumers* (Alliance For Excellent Education [AFEE], 2013):
1. The *badge issuers* are the set of individuals, schools, employers, institutions, communities and groups who create credentials to demonstrate mastery of skills and achievements that are of relevance to the issuer. This will then determine the criteria for earning the badge, including the curriculum, skills and forms of assessment that ascertain whether the individual is deserving of it.
2. The *badge earners* are the individuals who are learning and who want to provide a complete picture of their knowledge, skills and achievements to various audiences.
3. The *badge consumers* are providers of formal and informal education, individuals, employers, communities or other groups who need and/or are interested in learners with the skills and achievements represented by a badge.

It is not yet clear whether such assessment, recognition and certification mechanisms will be officially valued. However, this open learning for adults will have to offer transparent and well-recognized tools that enable the skills developed to be documented. In this sense, Muñoz et al. (2013) propose *four learning scenarios* for 2030 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – The four scenarios for open adult education
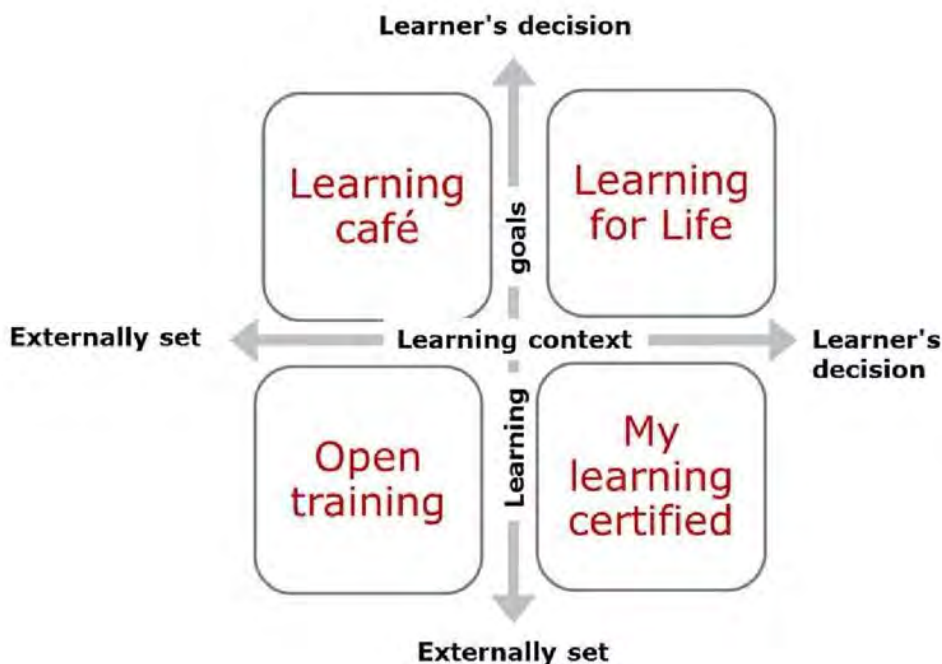
1. "Learning for life" – The learning process is driven by the motivation of the learner who is free to choose, evaluate and combine the learning resources he deems appropriate. Since the learning process focuses on understanding a topic - for example, an individual's illness or a concrete problem that needs solving - there is, at least initially, no need for learning outcomes to be recognized and presumably no guidance is required either.

2. "Learning café" – The learning process is driven by the learner's motivation to obtain knowledge, thus there is no direct need for recognition or certification. However, the learner chooses to seek help and guidance so as not to get lost in an abundant learning universe. Hence, it is more dependent on communities and groups or trusted portals that can guide you in this quest for knowledge through a landscape rich in information and disinformation.

3. "My learning certified" – The learner chooses to learn autonomously and self-directedly, but the learning process is driven by the desire or need to comply with an externally defined curriculum or standard to receive recognition and/or certification for one's achievements. There will therefore be plenty of different learning opportunities and consequently learners will have a high degree of freedom as to what learning resources to use, when and how. However, there will be a general structure that will allow individuals to gain recognition for their achievements.

4. "Open training" – This scenario is a combination of the two previous scenarios, allowing the learner to choose to study a theme, connected to an externally defined (albeit vaguely) pattern, enjoying a more structured, supportive and collaborative learning environment. This scenario may therefore lead to certification, although this may not necessarily be the main objective of the learner.

These four scenarios are not exclusive but complementary and outline different situations and configurations of adult learning. Therefore, all four should coexist and allow the free movement of learners who choose one or the other as their learning objectives and need for guidance change.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: INDISOCIABLE PHENOMENA

Multilingual and intercultural staff
The development of language skills may prove to be a determining factor in the execution of production, buying and selling processes. The Council of Europe has even stressed the importance of investing in foreign language teaching with a view to promoting labour mobility in the single market. The neoclassical economic theory suggests that the mobility of factors of production (labour and capital) increases economic efficiency. In this way, labour mobility can reduce differences in unemployment rates across regions and equalize marginal labour productivity, improving allocative efficiency. However, worker mobility in the European Union remains a limited phenomenon (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018).
Promoting foreign language learning is not only important for facilitating mobility but also for the integration of migrants into the society of the host country. Therefore, the major challenge for European countries will be to encourage citizens' mobility while at the same time accommodating the language needs of newcomers to avoid the exclusion and emergence of separate communities (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018). The question is whether the formula mother tongue plus two foreign languages – MT + 2 – could contribute to the achievement of two apparently contradictory socio-economic

objectives of the European Union: promoting internal mobility and facilitating social inclusion and cohesion. Since only a minority of European citizens are proficient in foreign languages and the effectiveness of education systems in this area has yet to be improved, it is believed that neither the MT + 2 formula nor the promotion of a single vehicular language is appropriate to achieve these goals in the near future (Moeller & Abbott, 2018).

Even though most European citizens, or at least the younger generation, could speak two foreign languages fluently, the MT + 2 formula would probably not be the best language policy to promote mobility and inclusion, unless accompanied by other language policy measures. In fact, it seems impossible to anticipate which language skills will be needed in the future, and there is no guarantee that those learned in compulsory education will be needed when moving abroad in adulthood. Furthermore, an individual may also travel to different countries for different periods of time (Moeller & Abbott, 2018).

A possible answer to this problem would be to invest in learning a widely spoken language that could serve as a vehicular language in several countries. In Europe this role is largely (but not exclusively) played by the English language. However, studies show that English has not yet reached the status of universal basic competency in Europe. In fact, only 7% of citizens are proficient speakers of English as a foreign language. Most fall into the intermediate and elementary levels. Despite massive investments in teaching English in the education system, bilingualism is not expected soon. As a result, there is not yet a common language widely spoken at a good or proficient level by most European citizens. (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018).

Considering that proficiency in an official language of a country increases the likelihood of migrating to that country, language policies aimed at promoting English as the sole vehicular language in Europe will promote mobility towards English-speaking countries rather than to other member states. In fact, while English may be useful in accessing higher education programs in large cities such as Milan and Berlin, as well as in building careers in banks or information technology firms based there, it is probably not enough to complete integration into societies in which Italian and German are still the dominant languages. Consequently, neither the MT + 2 formula nor the English language alone represent a means of resolving the tension between mobility and inclusion. However, they may be complementary to other language policies which should be implemented, such as learning a language on demand, i.e. the ability to learn a language before moving abroad and/or immediately upon arrival at the host country. This should become more relevant, easily accessible and less costly. (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018).

The importance of developing migrants' language skills has been the subject of widespread debate in Europe, with emphasis on local language proficiency as a condition for social and economic integration. Although empirical evidence tends to confirm this view, integration does not depend solely on language proficiency. Its impact is positive on employability as well as on the salary earned by the migrant. However, the ability to work with individuals from a wide variety of cultures, that is, intercultural understanding is a skill increasingly sought by companies that understand the importance of addressing not only the content of a message but also the specific context where it is stated. Collaborating, negotiating meanings, mediating misunderstandings are crucial competencies in a diverse and multilingual world where worldviews, cultural customs and traditions often collide (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018). Hence, it is essential to address the learning and use of language in the workplace by considering three interrelated dimensions (see Figure 2).

The multilingual professional – represents the individual who stands out for his language and cultural skills as well as for his or her linguistic attitudes.

The language repertoire focuses on language practices (all the different languages used by professionals in the company and how they use them) and language learning experiences.

The broad social context implies the external circumstances that influence language practices and are directly related to four social structures: economy, culture, language teaching and language policies).

Figure 2 – Holistic model of workplace multilingualism
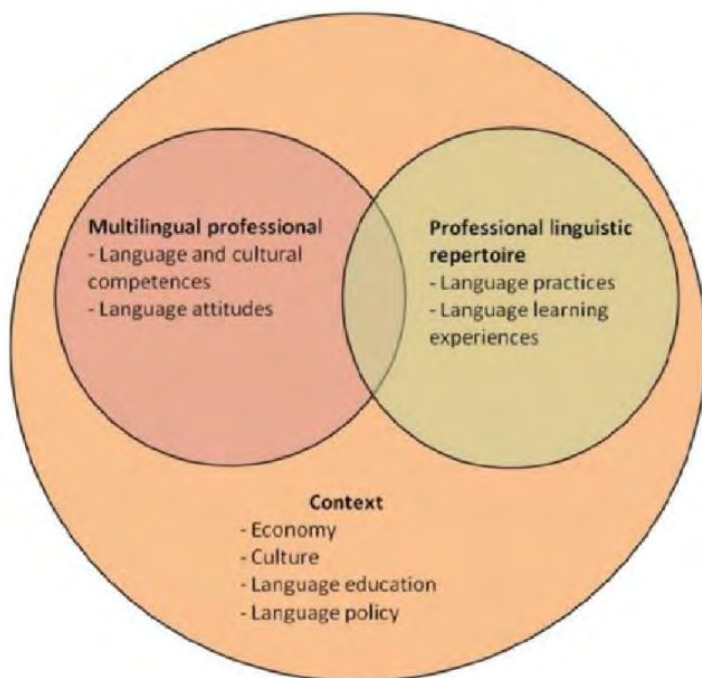
Source: Transcribed from "From bilingualism to multilingualism in the workplace: The case of the Basque Autonomous Community" de K. Worp et al., 2017, *Language Policy*, *16* (4), p. 413.

This model (Figure 2) was applied in a study carried out in the Basque autonomous community following the implementation of a strong SME internationalization policy in the face of the recent economic crisis. As this is a zone where Basque and Spanish are spoken - although this is the socially dominant language - and English has already been introduced as a third language at all levels of education, it is clear that employees have a relatively positive attitude to multilingualism in general, as well as multilingual speakers in particular. However, they consider that the way to deal with cultural differences is learned from practice, as only a minority has access to classes or seminars that address this topic, and these are not usually organised by the companies in which they work. For complex language tasks such as writing a contract or a business offer in a foreign language, companies choose to outsource this work. Moreover, certain language skills of employees are unknown to management as they are not recorded in a database (Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Worp, Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

The multilingual professional as an individual as well as his language repertoire should be considered in the broader social context. Thus, the data collected demonstrate that the economic crisis has relevant consequences for internationalization, financial resources and unemployment, which in turn influences business multilingualism (Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Worp et al., 2017).

One of the consequences of the economic crisis is precisely the growing need for language skills in the workplace. With the local market saturated, exporting products and services is a viable option. However, these plans are usually defined without the development of a supporting language policy. The idea that choosing a market that shares a common language implies that there are no language barriers is incorrect, as cultural barriers can be significant (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Worp et al., 2017).

The economic crisis also makes corporate financial constraints more evident. Consequently, prioritization of expenditure will hardly include an investment in language policy. On the other hand, short-term action can directly influence language practices, as companies only seek solutions for specific purposes when faced, for example, with a language barrier. Given that language learning is a lengthy process, the logic of short-term results is not appropriate (Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Worp et al., 2017).

Moreover, the education system does not seem to adequately prepare students for the use of foreign language in their future workplace. It is believed that language is considered only from an academic perspective and is taught for the sole purpose of learners being able to pass the exams, with little regard for its use for communicative purposes (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Worp et al., 2017). In addition, promoting business internationalisation is carried out by government departments that produce informative guides and organise workshops or conferences on this subject. However, the linguistic component as well as its intercultural dimension are not addressed (Worp et al., 2017).

VPL FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

To better understand the breadth of this project, it is important to look at the four VPL models (Duvekot, Kang & Murray, 2014).

Explanation of the four models
1. VPL as a bridge between Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and the labour market: the *educational model*. The role of VPL in this model is mainly to provide qualifications at the levels of vocational education and training and higher education. Therefore, this model may consist of:
   - An exemption policy based on previously acquired qualifications, which only considers previous formal education and relevant certificates;
   - A broader evidence-based exemption policy, notably on non-formal or informal skills.
   In this model the provider (the qualified educational institution) merely recognizes and accredits in the form of certificates or diplomas. There is no concern about the objectives that the candidates want to achieve or even if the qualification obtained is the best way to achieve them.
2. VPL as an initial qualification acquisition model: the *upgrade model*. In this model VPL focuses on the contribution made by accreditation and certification in obtaining or retaining a job. This can be done in two different ways:

- Through the *recognition and accreditation of competencies* formally and informally developed in the context of the occupation intended by the candidate. The procedure and tools used are, where possible, adapted to the work environment of the individual;
- Through the *recognition and accreditation of competencies* formally or informally developed in the context of the occupation that the candidate intends to maintain.

This model adapts to the candidate's job maintenance or job search objectives, and the skills are tailored to them. Achieving initial qualifications effectively is crucial, so the necessary training is developed by the provider who seeks to offer customizable forms of formal or informal learning.

3. VPL as a model for updating competencies in a structured context: the *human resources development model*. Since individuals develop skills that cannot always relate to existing vocational or higher education qualifications and do so through informal learning and/or work situations, the goal of VPL in this model, focuses on enabling individuals to be updated within a specific context to keep them employable as well as providing them with concrete career opportunities. Personal development is provided through validation and learning in the workplace.

4. VPL as a *model for lifelong learning* - this is an integrated model within which the other three spheres are subsumed. The individual here assumes himself as a learner in continuous development, and in this process, makes use of the facilities offered to value the skills acquired personally or professionally. Providers (labour organisations, senior job head-hunters, employability coaches) guide individuals in developing their portfolios. Teachers and/or trainers act only and when necessary to certify competencies. The main feature of this model is that the development program is determined and controlled by the individual himself. Institutions are limited to facilitating and providing support.

Figure 3 – The four models of VPL.
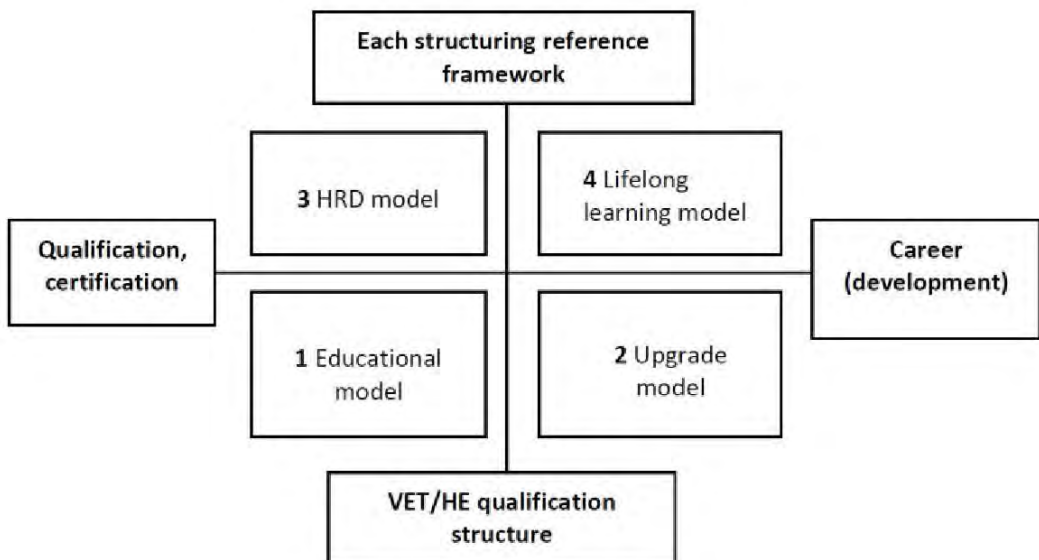
Source: "VPL is about linking the many perspectives of learning citizens" de R. Duvekot et al., 2014, Linkages of VPL: Validation of prior learning as a multi-targeted approach for access to learning opportunities for all, p. 10.

In short, the *VPL approach* helps to (Duvekot, 2014a; Duvekot et al., 2014):

A. Empower and develop individual talent, opening new opportunities for individuals, both in their private lives and in the labour market, by emphasizing the skills they already possess as well as the ideal way to develop and strengthen them;

B. Warn of the need to match the apprenticeship system with the work system. Labour market functions should be expressed in terms of skills and these, in turn, should be linked to a demand for learning. Hence, the learning system should be receptive, transparent, flexible and demand driven in order to provide the necessary personalized approach;

C. Increase people's desire to continue learning by recognizing skills developed in informal and non-formal environments, i.e. it may contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning, as, on one hand, the accreditation of competencies can lead directly to qualifications and, on the other hand, it may make skills to be developed in the work process visible. Therefore, the individuals will not only want to learn in a customer-oriented way, but will better understand how, what, when and why they are learning;

D. Demonstrate which learning environment and/or learning form is the most appropriate for an individual. This could include a combination of, for example, on-the-job training, tutoring, independent learning or distance learning.

METHODOLOGY

We formulated the following problem: to what extent can a training model, based on the VPL approach and supported by principles of the educational sciences, contribute to individual empowerment and, consequently, to an improvement in the organizational quality of Portuguese SMEs? To solve this problem, we defined the following general objectives which will represent two distinct but complementary phases of our project:

1. To know how on-the-job training is carried out in Portuguese SMEs:
   a. To know the legislation on the access and frequency of on-the-job training sessions.
   b. To know how the training and/or requalification of the employees is processed.
   c. To understand how the quality of the training sessions is controlled and/or feedback is obtained from the trainees.

2. To understand the extent to which a training model, based on the VPL approach, provides a (re)qualification of workers that addresses the needs of companies:
   a. To implement a training model in accordance with the proposals presented by key informants.
   b. To evaluate the implemented model.
   c. To draw conclusions.
   d. To propose an on-the-job training model that is feasible and adapted to Portuguese SMEs.

3. To apply principles of educational sciences for quality training:
   a. To mobilise knowledge, articulating theory and practice.
   b. To promote self-directed learning that enables the learner to be involved throughout the training process.
   c. To overcome internal and external barriers through the development of language and intercultural skills.

Participants

This project involves two distinct moments of analysis and data collection – Study 1 and Study 2 – that relate to the general and specific objectives already mentioned and which

complement each other. The participants in Study 1 were those responsible for training academies related to Portuguese SMEs.

The participants in Study 2 were selected based on the analysis of the results obtained in Study 1 and by using the following criteria:

a. Ensure the presence of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and some sectoral diversity.
b. Companies whose employees consider that they have competencies that they cannot develop or demonstrate and for which they do not have any qualifications.
c. Companies that recognize the potential value of training for the development of their activity in the market, but do not feel the beneficial effects of it.
d. Companies that begin to feel the need to fill gaps in different areas.

Instruments and procedures

Study 1 consisted of:

1. Conducting a survey and analysing official documentary sources (i.e., Portuguese legal documentation and European documentation) about on-the-job training.
2. Conducting exploratory interviews with key informants in order to obtain information that can be compared and subsequently applied.

Study 1 allowed us to collect structural data which made it possible to analyse, in an adequate and profound way, the official perspective on aspects of continuing on-the-job training (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994). After analysing the content of the data gathered in Study 1 and establishing the respective conclusions, we proceeded to the definition of a dynamic intervention strategy (Study 2) directly related to general objectives 2 and 3.

Table 1: Category and sector of the selected SMEs

Number of enterprises	Sectors	Categories		
		Medium <250 employees	Small	Micro
3	Computer business	-	1	2
3	Tourism	1	1	1
2	Senior housing	1	1	-
2	Auto repair	-	2	-

Table 2 represents the action plan to be followed with an overview of the training plan.

Table 2: The action plan & Overview of the training plan

Step 1 *(1- 8 October)*	- Realisation of **surveys** to the selected SMEs employees: comparing the official data analysed with the actual experience of the collaborators.
Step 2 *(22nd October to 22nd November)*	- Implementation of the **asynchronous training model based on the VPL reflexive approach**: action-research methodology.
Step 3 *(25-29 November)*	- Realisation of **semi-structured focus group interviews** to the trainees to evaluate the training model.
Length	15 hours (5 sessions of 3 hours each) + 2 hours of individual accompaniment (these will be scheduled according to the availability of the participant/trainee and carried out synchronously or asynchronously).

Themes	Self-awareness; foreign language; interculturality.
Tasks	Mapping of competencies developed along the personal and professional path; Deepening the relationship between the personal Self and the professional Self; Analysing and deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes; Understanding the relationship between self and otherness; Reflecting on the domain of English language skills. Ascertaining the importance of a foreign language in the business context; Analysing own role in establishing the link with the external market.

Data analysis and discussion

Regarding *Study 1* we concluded that the training and/or requalification processes analysed were positive examples in that they included not only the need to combine hard skills and soft skills, but also the importance of workplace learning and the consequent adaptability and versatility of the collaborator. However, bearing in mind that training should consider key elements of the research in education and training, the following aspects seem to have been overlooked:

1. The *definition of a methodology for the evaluation and monitoring of training sessions* that focuses on the development of individual competencies and not only on the evolution of the company;

2. The *combination of moments of non-formal and informal learning*. These concepts seem to be interpreted in a somewhat reductive way, making it difficult to understand if the previous knowledge of the individuals is considered in the training projects.

Hence, we believe that the training model we suggest will allow greater openness to individual perspectives and by emphasizing the reflective nature of learning, it may enable both the development of new skills and the strengthening of skills already developed in informal and non-formal environments, culminating in a more evident empowerment of the individual.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As stated in the *Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning* (2019), VPL plays an essential bridging role between learning and working, giving visibility and value to all forms of learning. Consequently, this project is set to raise awareness of the veiled (yet valid) talent in the workplace, specifically the one hidden in Portuguese SMEs. In fact, most of the active population is concentrated in these enterprises and their informal and non-formal learning experiences are, apparently, not reflected upon or considered either for the future personal development of the worker or for his horizontal, vertical or diagonal mobility. In short, we aim to spark interest, transform mindsets, and demonstrate the value of the VPL approach to individual empowerment.

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Legal Foundations

6

Lieve Van den Brande

To empower VPL further, the VPL community identified a sixth overarching principle for achieving a robust and effective VPL-system. This sixth principle discussed and agreed upon at the 3rd Biennale is on the legal foundations underpinning the validation processes. Countries adopt different approaches to implementing the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A clear legal framework, which coordinates and oversees quality provision of VPL, is the bedrock of a sustainable VPL system.

The following six recommendations - in order of priority - were discussed and agreed at the 3rd VPL Biennale in Berlin being fundamental for any VPL process.[250]

A. VPL arrangements should be embedded in the relevant legal frameworks and relevant policy areas need to be coordinated.

Why is it important?
All EU countries promised to put in place national arrangements for validation, by the end of 2018.[251] Properly functioning VPL arrangements need to be an integral part of legal foundations of countries/regions. If so, they have major impact on national, regional and sector policies and strategies on VPL. Since 2010, there has been a clear increase in the number of EU countries with such strategies in place or under development (e.g. legal frameworks, strategies or policies. In 2010, 17 EU member states were reported having no validation strategy; by 2018, all 36 member states had, or were developing, some type of a validation strategy.[252] The added value of providing a legal foundation for VPL-systems in legal frameworks and policies is acknowledged across the globe, for instance in Canada, South Africa, Hong Kong, and many others.

Where is it working well?
This chapter describes in detail the legal foundations of Belgium (Flanders) and France. Both examples prove that once VPL initiatives are embedded into legal texts, their impact is much greater compared to initiatives that have not gone through political and legal procedures. For example, although the legal framework for VPL in Flanders is only a recent realisation, its impact can already be seen in adult education centres or professional training institutions.

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250 Also see: *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*
251 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)*
252 *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory*

These are seeking information at the coordinating bodies and are preparing themselves to become high-quality validation centres.

The validation system implemented in France has a rich history and stems traditionally from a strong legal basis. Three validation systems are currently implemented and operational: (i) the 'VAP 85' is still largely used in higher education; (ii) the VES through which one can get a diploma or a part of a diploma of higher education by validating studies previously achieved or prior diplomas obtained in France or abroad, without need to follow a study program; and (iii) the VAE which fame has gained interest in the whole world because of its "universal" nature: the VAE covers all sectors of education and training, public or private, all levels of qualifications and concerns all the individuals.[253]

Also outside Europe, excellent examples of integration of VPL policy are available such as in Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Hong Kong, Macedonia, South Africa.[254] These legal foundations were a response to fragmentation of policies on VPL and implemented a common approach with operational targets, medium-term planning and structural funding. Not all legal foundations however cover all sectors. For example, the Faroe Islands focuses first on vocational education which will serve as an example later for other sectors.[255]

As systems evolve and improve over time; it is essential that VPL policies are reviewed so they remain aligned to the systems of which they are part, and so that they remain effective and efficient, based on recent research and good practice. For example, in South Africa VPL policy is revised every five years, providing an opportunity to align it with other new policy developments.

B. VPL legal frameworks should establish an individual's right to access validation and guidance processes and the right to appeal.

Why is it important?
Principles that the individual should be at the centre of his/her own learning pathway and that validation must be able to cater for the diverse needs of different individuals, are central in the emerging validation policies and practices across the world. The purpose of validation is to empower people and make skills visible and valuable for whatever purpose. Validation – identifying what a learner knows and understands – clarifies the real starting point of further learning and work. Validation helps to focus on positive achievements, avoiding unnecessary repetitions and expensive loss of time and money. The individual is central. Each individual has his/her own personalised learning journey made up of a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

There needs to be a legal foundation for VPL to ensure that individuals with prior non-formal and informal learning have access to it, that institutions provide VPL and do not prevent eligible individuals from engaging in VPL-processes or limiting such processes. Often people in contexts of social, economic and political disadvantage are not able to study formally, but instead learn in the course of life or work. In addition, refugees and asylum seekers often have to flee their home countries and arrive in host countries without their qualification and other paperwork. The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning for access to formal learning, credit, or progression in the workplace, is an issue of social justice.

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253 All legal references, laws, decrees, related to validation are available on the national site: *www. vae.gouv.fr*
254 *https://vplbiennale.org/downloads/*
255 The Faroese Vocational Education and Training Office, Yrkisdepilin*: http://yrkisdepilin.fo/*
    Link to the Faroese law on validation, 30.09.2019: *https://logir.fo/Logtingslog/67-fra-15-05-2014-um-forleikameting)*

Legal foundations are needed to ensure that all applicable entities participate in VPL. Individuals also need to know that they have a right to VPL. It is, however, important that it is their choice whether they exercise this right or not. The legal foundations need to provide an enabling context for, and guidance in, VPL.

Legal foundations should also refer to the interconnection of validation and guidance. Individuals should be able to receive support if needed to understand and access the benefits of validation, starting with the identification of learning in their everyday experiences. Several countries recognise that guidance services are crucial in supporting validation. Validation and guidance are thus interconnected. No adequate validation of learning is possible without counselling and advice, and good quality guidance needs to include the validation of acquired learning.

Where is it working well?

The 2002 law of social modernization in France explicitly refers to a right given to the individual and defines the VAE as a new right given to individuals: anyone involved in active life, as an employee, an independent worker or a volunteer, whatever his age, profession, situation, nationality, has the right to have what he has learnt through his experience (les acquis) validated in order to get a qualification, which can be a diploma, a professional title or a certificate of.[256] Since 2002, measures concerning VAE also have been present in all laws relating to guidance, information and lifelong learning, in 2009, 2014, and 2018. The labour code describes in detail the objectives of the VAE, its legal regime and the conditions of its application.

The legal VPL foundation of VPL in the Faroe Islands explicitly refers to utilising validation-processes for affording career possibilities for each citizen. Adults need different personalised guidance in contrast to young people with no or little experiences of working life. The validation process is kept as simple as possible, especially in the beginning of the implementation process.

Looking at the wealth of local, regional and national initiatives and practices some questions however remain. Where is the learner? How do learners access validation facilities? In what way do learners benefit from validation services, and how do they make use of them? How can guidance and validation work together coherently? These questions require attention especially when advocating validation as a right of the citizen.

C. VPL legal frameworks should establish a sustainable funding system.

Why is it important?

For validation to reach individual learners where they live, work and learn, predictable and sustainable funding sources have to available. Financing validation-systems depend on the way that validation arrangements have been organised in each country, as well as on the context, the already existing financial structures and learning culture. One of the important components of a functioning VPL system is a solid funding system underpinning instruments, procedures and support structures. It needs to be acknowledged that a sustainable funding system is mandatory to build up flourishing VPL practices.

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256 All legal references, laws, decrees, related to validation are available on the national site: www. vae.gouv.fr

Where is it working well?

Legal systems providing solid funding of VPL are ubiquitous around the world in for example in the Caribbean community, Chile, the Faroe Islands, Flanders, France, Hong Kong, Macedonia and South Africa.

Financing VPL-systems illustrate several challenges. Estimating costs is one challenge. Another one is identifying the return on investment and the social benefits. A deeper understanding on both aspects would feed the debate on financing validation arrangements.

D. VPL legal frameworks should establish regulating bodies. These bodies should, at the very least, oversee provision, uptake, quality assurance and coordination of VPL systems.

Why is it important?

To ensure high-quality learning outcomes in the VPL system, regulation of the quality assurance of VPL is needed. Ideally, VPL is part of the responsibilities of existing regulatory bodies which are integrated into the legislation of national education and training systems.

Where is it working well?

The legal systems in some countries include regulating bodies with VPL responsibilities. For example, in South Africa, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which oversees the implementation and further development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), is mandated to develop policy and criteria, after consultation with three Quality Councils for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and assessment. These Quality Councils – which oversee the articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks for General and Further Education, Higher Education, and Trades and Occupations respectively – must develop and oversee the implementation of aligned RPL and CAT policies.

For example, in Belgium (Flanders) a common quality framework covers VPL arrangements in all fields. The quality assurance body in formal (adult) education i.e. the Inspectorate of Education is involved in the quality control on VPL within adult education centres. The quality control on VPL in other fields is based on a common quality framework developed by the Inspectorate of Education together with quality assurance bodies from the field of work. Quality assurance procedures are regulated by law and provision and uptake will be monitored. Organisations that offer quality VPL will be recognised and registered. Also, all VPL applicants going through a VPL procedure are registered in a database and the same goes for (part) qualifications awarded. Governmental organisations are designated to coordinate the VPL system.

Quality assurance is in France covered by the 2018 law. A more demanding quality is required from the VPL-providers who must be certified by a quality certification organism which itself is recognised by the national organism COFRAC *(Comité français d'accréditation* or *France Compétences*), the national organism responsible for the governance of the professional qualification system, on the basis of a national standard.

E. Regardless of the learning pathways, to avoid discrimination, (partial) qualifications and certificates should be the same.

Why is it important?

Certification gained through VPL should have the same status as certification gained through traditional education and training. This can be assured if certificates obtained are identical.

Where is it working well?
Various good practices are available, for example in the Caribbean community, Chile, the Faroe Islands, Belgium (Flanders), France, Hong Kong, Macedonia and South Africa.

France is an example of a country with no formal difference between a qualification (or partial qualification) obtained through formal education or through a validation process. Also in Flanders, legislation on VPL confirms that all professional qualifications and partial qualifications delivered after a VPL-process are equivalent to these delivered after a formal learning process (education or training). This principle can be guaranteed because VPL as well as formal vocational/professional education and training (VET) are both based on and linked to the professional qualifications from the NQF, the Flemish Qualification Framework.

VPL's legal foundation in the Faroe Islands

6.1

Establishing a national VPL legal framework

John Dalsgarð

The Faroe Islands is a Nordic nation localized in the North Atlantic Ocean between Scotland and Iceland. The population counts for about 52,000 people. The land area is 1,396 km2 and the maritime area is 274,000 km2. The language is Faroese, which is a branch of the Nordic languages based on Old Norse. The Faroe Islands is a self-governing nation in the Kingdom of Denmark, with its own parliament and government, Løgting and Landstýri respectively.

The Faroese education system is comparable to other Nordic country's education system, covering all levels of education from *kindergarten* to university. The labour force is about 34,500[257] people. 30% of the labour force has a vocational education as their highest education, 10% a gymnasium education, 10% a higher national diploma, 10% a university degree, 8% a maritime education, and 16% (25+ years old) have no formal education after public school. These last 16% are the main target group for VPL in the Faroe Islands. They count for about 4,400 persons, who are between 25 and 69 year.

The Faroese law on validation

The Faroese law on validation (Ll. Nr. 67, 15 May 2014)[258] is constructed around eight aspects, representing what the law entails:

1. The aim of the law.
2. The right for validation – who can be validated.
3. The educations legally covered by validation.
4. The validation process and how the process should be managed.
5. The demand of practitioner's competences.
6. Collaboration between institutions, working life, social partners etc.
7. The coordination of validation.
8. The individual's right to appeal the conclusion from a validation.

The purpose of the law is to provide persons aged 25+ to be validated in connection to education or a job, with the objective of increasing mobility on the labour market and to urge adult people to qualify. The law on validation covers all aspects of the Faroese education system. However, the public school's nine years certificated education is not covered by the law on validation.

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257 The labour force is all persons between 15 and 69 years old.
258 Link to the Faroese law on validation, 30.09.2019: *https://logir.fo/Logtingslog/67-fra-15-05-2014-um-forleikameting*

Nine different laws of educations are embedded in the law on validation:
1. Law on gymnasium education (upper secondary school) – Ll. Nr. 62, 15 May 2012.
2. Law on vocational education and training – Ll. Nr. 94, 29 December 1998.
3. Law on basic technical education (aimed to vocational education and training) – Ll. Nr. 41, 23 April 1999.
4. Law on leisure-time education (third sector education, evening school etc.) – Ll. Nr. 70, 30 June 1983.
5. Law on shorter higher education (business academia) – Ll. Nr. 49, 9 May 2005.
6. Law on training for ship's personnel (the deck hands etc.) – Ll. Nr. 55, 24 April 2001.
7. Law on training in the area of administration, trade and office – Ll. Nr. 107, 29 December 1998.
8. Law on health care training – Ll. Nr. 42, 26 April 2019.
9. Law on the University of the Faroe Islands (higher education) – Ll. Nr. 58, 9 June 2008.

Together these laws provide the framework for the Faroese education system after public school. For some reasons, the law on public school (Ll. Nr. 25, 20 June 1997) is not covered by the law on validation. This is probably a mistake, as the law on public school should indeed be a part of the validation system in the Faroe Islands. At the end of the ninth year the public school provides the pupils with a certificate. Although most of the Faroese people do have a certificate from the public school after nine or 10 years of education, there are people who did not get this important certificate for some reason. It would certainly be a clear benefit to an adult with no formal certificate from the public school to have the possibilities to be validated up against the public school's ninth year certificate if necessary.

Although the law on public school is not mentioned positive in the law on validation, there should be no hindrance or obstacles to make a validation up against the law on public school in practice.

The importance of stakeholders
One of the most important principles in the implementation process has been how to guarantee the quality of the validation process and the value of the outcome from the validation. Therefore, the Ministry's regulation[259] on VPL concerns mostly on the validation process, and try to pin down the need of qualified validation practitioners with the competences necessary

One safe and effective way to reach an optimal outcome concerning the quality of the VPL system in general is to pay close attention to the collaboration between the stakeholders. It is not an easy task because the stakeholders are many and they differ in many ways. We need to be aware that many different parts and different mindsets are involved in the whole framework of validation. The best preconditions for VPL to be reached, is if all relevant stakeholders do their best to understand what benefits they can expect from the validation process as well as from the validation results themselves. To reach this point we need to focus on the importance of collaboration or co-operation between the stakeholders. It is easier said than done. First and foremost because this is a completely new way of thinking about education or competence development compared to the traditional school system, where the schools and the formal system is the main creator and main deliverer of formal education and competences.

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259 Link to the ministry's regulation on VPL, 30.09.2019: *https://logir.fo/Kunngerd/9-fra-02-02-2018-um-forleikameting*

In the Faroese case, the most important stakeholders are the social partners and the trade unions, who at the same time have been the most critical and reluctant partners, when it comes to validation of prior learning.

Traditionally, these stakeholders have managed their trade education and training on their own conditions and premises. Years later the general school system took over a part of the vocational education, mostly the theoretical part, and the Faroese government is now paying the part of the vocational education and training, which is connected to the school period of the education, just as they do with other educations. In many ways it seems to be difficult for these stakeholders to trust a system validating "learning" outside the formal school system and outside the working places without an apprenticeship agreement in place in advance. From a workplace point of view, it should not be too easy to get a vocational education. The trade partners did therefore call for a change in the law on validation, which should allow the Ministry[260] to set the minimum age of a person to 30 years, and the minimum work experiences of 5 years, for certain types of vocational educations and trainings, compared to 25 years of age and 3 years of work experiences.

The stakeholders span from the individual applicant to workplaces, the committee of professions, schools and assessors, teachers, counsellors, institutions etc. Some of these stakeholders are unknown, such as the individuals and the workplaces, while schools, counsellors and assessors are known. Other stakeholders are partly known, such as teachers, administrative staff and trade representatives.

It is important, while implementing the VPL system, to build contact with the stakeholders as they need to feel a kind of ownership of the system, which they indeed are a part of. This should be done mainly with the aim of building up trust and quality around the model to make it more useful.

International standards of validation

The Nordic model for a VPL system is widely addressed in the NVL[261] report *Road Map 2018*[262] indicators. Road Map 2018 is a tool primarily meant for policymakers, providers, organisers, and developers working in the field of VPL to give a picture of how a country's VPL system has developed and on what stage or level a country's VPL system has landed on compared to other countries or regions. The tool can also be used on branch or sector levels. The tool takes to a great extent the European and particularly the Nordic guidelines for VPL in consideration.

Road Map 2018 consists of 84 indicators which are grouped in seven main sections. These sections cover 19 main areas, such as the aim of validation, how the VPL is organized on national, regional and local level, if there is a national system for validation, the stakeholder's responsibility and cooperation, how VPL is financed, how it is coordinated, how VPL is regulated between policy areas, and its ability to relate to or take international regulations and guidelines into consideration. The EU framework on Lifelong Learning such as EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Lifelong Guidance, etc., the so-called mobility tools, are examples of this.

The Faroese VPL model is basically prepared and constructed in accordance with the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning and with the Nordic

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260 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture (Before 16.09.2019 The Ministry of Education, Research and Culture).
261 Nordisk Netværk for Voksnes Læring – Nordic Network for Adult Learning: *https://nvl.org/*
262 *https://nvl.org/Content/Validation-and-the-value-of-competences-Road-Map-2018*

quality insurance model, called *Quality Model for Validation in the Nordic Countries*[263] from 2013. However, the Faroese VPL system is not yet fully developed as the complete and optimal system. Still there are questions about financing in connection to the validation process and the upskilling of the validation practitioners.

The validation process

Although the preconditions for the VPL model should be as good as possible to ensure the quality in the model and in the VPL process itself, the validation process itself needs to be described as detailed and simple as possible. The Faroese law on validation describes the validation as a planned process, containing information, guidance, documentation, mapping and assessment. To prepare and complete a validation process in a qualified and trustworthy way, we have found assistance and inspiration in the *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*[264], the *Quality Model for Validation in Nordic Countries*, and the *Road Map 2018 – Validation and the value of competences*.

In accordance with the Ministry's regulation on VPL, the validation is carried out in consultation and collaboration with a co-ordinator. The validation process and assessment are based on the curriculum and the requirements for a specific education or a job.

The VPL process is carried out in a public body certified by the minister of education and in collaboration with the schools or institutions in charge. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture supports the schools and institutions with guidance and counselling in connection to VPL. The co-ordinator is in close connection to the applicant and communicates to and supports the individual. The VPL practitioners need to have the competences necessary to carry out the validation. Schools conducting validation should establish groups or teams to develop a professional environment to ensure the quality of validation. The assessors should be educated within the programs and subjects that the validation is carried out in. Furthermore, the Ministry's regulation highlights the role of the counsellor and the assessor, the relevant aspects concerning the conclusion from the validation, the individual's rights, and details about how to complain or appeal to the conclusion or the validation outcome.

The VPL quality flow

The preparation and implementation of the Faroese VPL system is in the hand of The National Vocational Careers Service.[265] The National Vocational Careers Service is maintaining and developing the system and preparing and coordinating the VPL process. In connection to vocational education and training, the committee of professions and teachers of profession from the schools are a central part of the preparation process. The aim is to build a system in close cooperation with the schools and other central stakeholders. In the National Vocational Careers Service two persons are managing, preparing and carrying out the VPL process together with the appropriate assessors.

The VPL process is divided into two main parts: the preparation and the assessment. The preparation is mainly a preparation for the assessment where the aim is to find out if there is a basis for validation or not. The first steps in the preparation process are to provide information in general, and to the individual particularly (see figure 1). In both the preparation and the assessment parts, guidance is vital to reach the expected goal and to guarantee the quality of the validation. The preparation part is mainly arranged and carried

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263 *https://nvl.org/Content/Quality-Model-for-Validation-in-the-Nordic-Countries*
264 *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073*
265 The National Vocational Careers Service, Yrkisdepilin: *http://yrkisdepilin.fo/*

out by the co-ordinator and the counsellor, who are working with VPL in the National Vocational Careers Service.

Figure 1. The Faroese VPL quality flow
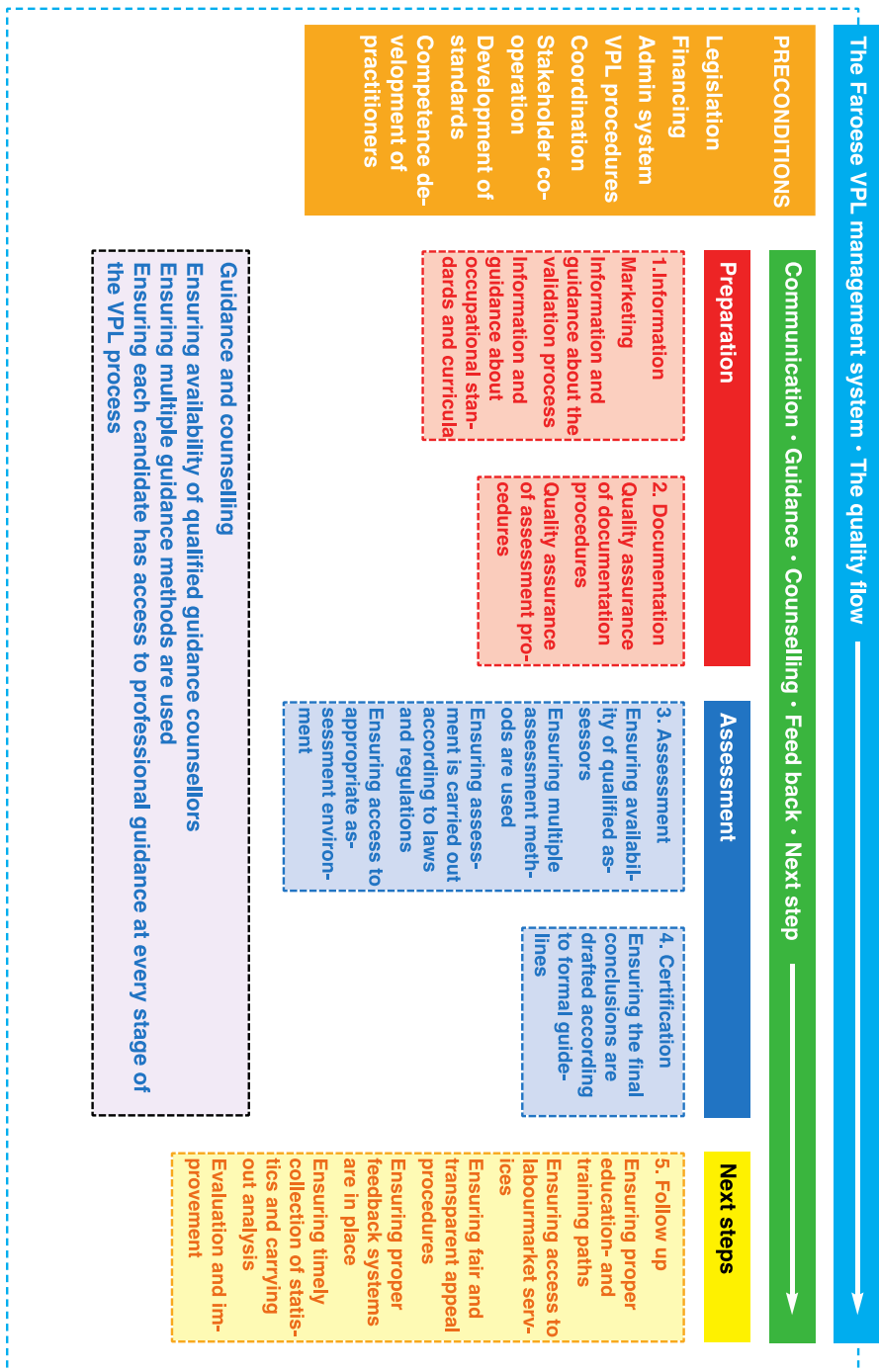
© Yrkisdepilin

Financing the VPL process and its maintenance

The financing of VPL is one of the main challenges connected to the implementation of VPL in the Faroe Islands. It is difficult to say in advance exactly how much the VPL system and the VPL daily activities will cost. In our opinion we should say, that the VPL process should be free of charge for the individual. The actual costs should be divided between the government and the social partners. Instead of paying an admission fee, the applicant – the individual – should have a clear and meaningful reason or aim to be validated. The validation should be carried out in connection with an education – competence development – or it should be done in connection to their job or working possibilities or both education and work.

The cost of the VPL system depends on how comprehensive the system needs to be and to what extension it is developed. Furthermore, the numbers and complexity of applications is also an important factor when considering the cost of VPL.

While VPL is a rather new phenomenon in the Faroese education system, it needs to be explained and communicated to the public to make clear the benefits it has. It covers all. The law and the Ministry's regulation take every single education and training into consideration. Without the financing in place, it is impossible to start validating in all subjects from day one. We need to prioritize what we are doing and find out where to begin the validation.

Although the Faroese law on validation covers all education and training, as well as the jobs, we are only focusing on a few vocational educations and training to begin with. The aim is to develop the needed guidelines for every single education, training, subject, job etc. We believe that we can learn a lot from working this way. The tiny size of our society makes it easier to oversee what occurs in the different areas of education and training and on the job market. However, the lack of manpower with the required qualifications inside the system is currently a big challenge.

The focus has been on the vocational educations, mainly because of the scepticism from certain stakeholders within the certified trades. We believe it will be more effective to start validation in other sectors, such as the school system, for example in upper secondary and higher education, if the job is done properly in the vocational education system in advance. This is mainly because of the many different interests, among all the relevant stakeholders, that often oppose the validation process and thereby prevent effective implementation of the validation.

We need to take care of everybody in the aim of VPL, particularly the individual, as well as the stakeholders, the VPL practitioners, the assessors, the guides, counsellors, teachers and other VPL staff.

The importance of quality

The law sheds light on the need of qualifications connected to the VPL process, particularly the assessors and the guidance personnel. The implementation process involves many persons who are already working full time in the educational and training system. It is difficult to get all these persons involved in the first stage of the VPL implementation process, mainly because it is new to them. Particularly the school leaders need to be trained or educated in the validation system to better understand the benefits from the validation.

In the preparation for VPL we have arranged courses for teachers, guides and counsellors and administrative staff, mainly persons who are working in the vocational education and training, but also from the certified trades and higher education.

It is important to provide these people with a basic understanding of what validation is meant to be used for, and how it should be arranged in connection to different purposes, such as the individual's needs for education or his or her job position.

Furthermore, we have based the validation process on professional and solid guidance with focus on career possibilities. Adult people – between 40 or 50 years of age - need different and more specific and individual guidance than youngsters with no or little experiences of working life.

As simple as possible

We want to keep the validation process as simple as possible, especially in the beginning of the implementation process. We are developing a quality flow for the VPL process. The quality flow is in accordance with the *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* and with the *Quality model for validation in the Nordic countries*.

By keeping the validation process as simple as possible, we can aim at avoiding the process becoming too bureaucratic. There are a lot of rules and guidelines concerning validation of prior learning, both international, regional and on national level. It is important that we make our best to implement all these helpful rules and guidelines to our new VPL system without making the validation process complicated and heavy to come through, both for the individual and the practitioners.

This is a challenging process because one needs to take care of almost every detail in the process, while keeping it simple at the same time. It should also fit into the general education system, in our case the Faroese education system, which in many ways is comparable to the education systems in the Nordic countries, especially the Danish one. The main difference is the number of people who are managing the system to work properly. In Faroe Islands the population is less than one per cent of the Danish and only a half per cent of the Swedish population. In some ways we need to rethink how the system should be constructed, because we are looking intensely to our closest neighbours, mostly Denmark and Iceland, which is only seven times bigger in population than the Faroe Islands. The Faroe Islands look to Denmark mainly because the Faroese law system is indeed the Danish law system or very similar to it. However, the Faroese parliament makes its own laws, Faroese laws, such as the law on validation and all the educational laws as well. We have a look at Iceland mainly because of the size of its society and its historical, cultural and political background, which is very similar to the Faroese, as Iceland has been a part of the Danish kingdom until about 100 years ago.

The Nordic co-operation on validation is a huge benefit for us in the Faroe Islands. Our participation in the Nordic validation network is of vital importance. The implementation of VPL in the Faroe Islands would have been impossible or very difficult to carry out without the Nordic co-operation on adult learning.

Towards a more comprehensive law for VPL in Belgium-Flanders

6.2

Nathalie Druine

Belgium is a federal state with extensive autonomy for the regions and communities. Education is the responsibility of the communities, more precisely the Flemish, the French and the German Community. This contribution focuses on the legal foundations for the VPL-policy in the Flemish Community of Belgium, called Flanders.

The English acronyms of VPL (validation of prior learning) or VNIL (validation of non-formal and informal learning) are not used in The Low Countries. In Flanders and in The Netherlands, it is translated by EVC, *Erkennen van Verworven Competenties* which literally means: 'recognition of acquired competences'. In that sense it extends beyond the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and it also takes into account what was learned in a formal setting but not awarded with a formal (part) qualification. For the ease of reading in this text the acronym VPL is used.

Regulations for VPL existed in Flanders in several sectors and policy fields but an integrated approach was still missing. For many years, attempts were made to reduce the fragmentation and to increase the societal impact of VPL so as to increase the numbers of validation uptake. In July 2015, the concept for an integrated framework for VPL was approved by the Flemish Government. This was the start for a long-lasting regulatory process mainly driven by the ministers of education and of work but with the involvement of many stakeholders. Finally, in July 2019 the parliamentary act and implementation acts on VPL were adopted which initiated a renewed policy on VPL from September 2019 on.

This article first drafts a short history of validation policies in Flanders and elaborates on the elements that enabled a breakthrough. Then the focus is on the content of the new legislation by sketching some of its strengths and challenges. A personal evaluation of the Flemish VPL system and some conclusions, related to the Berlin Declaration, finalizes the article.

First political attention to VPL and legal initiatives
The first policy initiatives for VPL were taken in 2000 in the context of the Lifelong Learning Action Plan of the social partners. The Flemish Government asked for a policy advise on the possibilities of VPL and set up a task force presided by professor Albert Mak. The task force included representatives of policy officers, social partners and advisory boards of the three policy fields Work, Education and Culture and was supported by two research teams. In its report the task force proposed to elaborate concrete pilot projects with relevance to the individuals prior to a more structural policy framework. It made a clear call for an integrated approach across the policy fields.[266] Many interesting pilot projects were set up, often with

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266 Debusscher, M. (2007): *Erkennen van niet-formeel en informeel leren in Vlaanderen (België)*. Brussel: CESOR.

the support of the European Social Fund. Validation instruments for different sectors (e.g. tourism, catering and food sector, out of school care) and professions (e.g. electricians, teachers) were developed.

Not much later, also more structural, legislative initiatives were taken. The first to incorporate VPL into legislation was the sector of *Culture, Youth and Sports*. In the cultural and youth sectors, the focus of VPL was mainly on identifications and documentation of competences in favour of specific groups and on self-assessment rather than on formal assessment. However, the Sports sector set up a formal VPL procedure within the Flemish Trainers' School and so started a long tradition in assessing competences and certifying trainers or instructors.

In 2004 the *Decree on the Certificate of Work Experience* was enacted. The objective of this decree was to recognise professional (or personal) experience by a new professional certificate. Professional competence profiles were translated into assessment standards. If an applicant demonstrated the skills and competences required for a specific occupation in the assessment, the certificate was awarded by the department of Work. The assessment centres were financed on basis of ESF-funding. This initiative worked well for many years and thousands of people were certified in several professions. More than once, representatives had to explain the system at European conferences as it was considered a good practice in VPL. However, it was no permanent answer to the demand for validation of competences. The Certificate of Work Experience was not equivalent to a diploma or professional qualification gained after VET. A more integrated approach was felt necessary.

Also in 2004, but without any link with the previous decree, the *Decree on Flexibility in Higher education* was approved. Against the background of the Bologna process, VPL became part of the flexibility process in higher education. It allowed students to validate learning paths in other institutions or learning gained through personal and professional experience. Nonstandard access, course exemptions by means of credit acquisition and even obtaining a full university qualification based on prior learning and validated competences were made possible. This decentralised system is still in use. Each 'association' (a university with associated university colleges) defines its own rules with low interchangeability with other institutions and a relatively long and expensive procedure for the applicant.

Finally, in 2007 the *Decree on Adult Education* stimulated the adult education centres to elaborate validation procedures and methods of assessment for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Again, the aim was to have more transparency in providing exemptions, to shorten learning paths of adults based on VPL and to encourage lifelong learning. The impact of this legislation was limited due to different reasons. The development of assessments and VPL tools was a huge investment for an Adult Education Centre with no additional funding and consequently low return for the Centre. A full qualification was not possible for the applicants.

Therewith, ten years after the first political interest in VPL, different validation arrangements coexisted. Several sectors were involved: Education (higher education, adult education and even secondary education (the Examination Board)), Work and Culture, Youth & Sport. There were also initiatives by the Civil Service Agency to hire government personnel based on a validation of competences.

A fragmented VPL landscape as a result
However, the result of all the developments was a fragmentation of policies on VPL. Instead of working together, each policy field had created its own vocabulary on VPL and its own

legislation. A common approach with operational targets, medium-term planning and structural funding were lacking[267]. With its advice ('It is time for VPL'), the Social and Economic Council Flanders (SERV) in 2008 put the topic of VPL back on the political agenda where it stayed for many years.

In 2009 the Flemish ministers of Education and of Work for the first time wrote in their policy paper that action was needed. In 2010 the Education Council Flanders (VLOR)[268] underlined the need for a political and legal framework for VPL for all different forms of education and training.

According to the *European Inventory*[269] *on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2010*, Belgium (Flanders) was described having a well-established, but *partial* system of validation *in one or more sectors*. At that time, '*countries were categorised according to their level of development, as being either at a high, medium or low level*'. Only four EU Member States had a highly developed validation system which, according to the Inventory, means that they have (1) a mainstreamed approach to validation within their lifelong-learning system (e.g. legally anchored); (2) an infrastructure supportive of validation; (3) a strong involvement of stakeholders (in particular social partners) and (4) validation affordable for applicants. Although many legal initiatives to validation had been taken, Flanders was categorised in a *medium-low level of VPL development*.

In a position paper of both ministries of Education and of Work, the different obstacles were listed. There was confusion about concepts and definitions of VPL, no coordination between policy domains, a lack of interchangeability, objectivity and quality assurance and most importantly a rather low attractivity of validation compared to other countries. It seemed that VPL was not well known among its target group. Hence, a comprehensive approach was inevitable. Finally, in 2015 the concept for an integrated framework for VPL was approved by the Flemish Government. And the parliamentary act was still far too long in coming.

So, 'what took us so long to achieve a more comprehensive approach'? Or maybe, a better question might be: 'what elements facilitated unexpectedly an integrated approach to validation?'

A breakthrough in VPL policy
In 2015 the fields of education and of work, notably their shared focus on skills and competences had changed. This firstly favoured a change in policy which was not possible before. Important in the subsequent policy discourse was the shift from education and training to competences, from jobseekers to workers and from formal to non-formal and informal learning. Ministers argued now for a different approach in order to meet labour market challenges with a focus on *a better use of competences and talents*. A change occurred in thinking too: not only the development of competences counted, but also the use and recognition of talents.
Secondly, along with this 'shifting discourse', the Flemish education and labour market was ready for a comprehensive approach to VPL because of *the deployment of the Flemish*

267 SERV (2008). *Aanbeveling. 5 voor 12 voor erkennen van competenties (EVC) in Vlaanderen*. Brussel.
268 VLOR. (2010). *Advies over eerder verworven competenties*. Brussel.
269 European Commission in cooperation with Cedefop. *2010 update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning – Executive summary of Final Report.* GHK consulting by Jo Hawley, Manuel Souto Otero and Claire Duchemin.

Qualifications Framework, the VKS (Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur). The VKS was developed in 2004, followed by a consultation among the Flemish stakeholders in 2005 and approved by a Flemish Parliament Act on VKS in 2009 and Implementation Acts in 2011. Specific to the Flemish NQF, a difference is made between educational and professional competences. A professional qualification[270] describes the knowledge and skills an individual needs to exercise a profession. It is drawn up by representatives of the labour market and validated by representatives of the inter-professional social partners, the Public Employment Service and relevant governmental agencies. The Flemish Government recognizes a professional qualification after a positive validation, classification and quality assessment and finally the professional qualification is registered in the qualifications database. One can acquire a professional qualification through (formal) education, but also through (vocational/professional) training or a VPL-procedure.[271]

Thanks to the Flemish Qualifications Framework we could move a step forward in VPL. Validation is the 'process of confirmation by an authorized body that an individual had acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard' (Council Recommendation[272] of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, p. 9). That relevant standard was found in the professional qualifications. VPL could now be based on the same standards as formal education, which could increase its demonstrable social impact.

A third element also influencing a breakthrough in VPL were *European commitments*. Although the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was only a recommendation or advise to the member states without compulsory ratification, it did put pressure on the implementation as member states had to report on the state of affairs of VPL in their countries. In 2016 the Skills Guarantee as part of New Skills Agenda put new pressure on VPL when member states were asked what initiatives they would take for the upskilling of adults with low levels of qualification. Finally, also the 2018 OECD report on Skills Strategy was for the Flemish ministers of Education and Work a last stimulus to proceed with the Parliamentary Act on 'An integrated policy of VPL'.

All these stimuli increased the awareness in the different policy fields involved that the legislation on VPL was important. In April 2019 the Parliamentary Act of on 'An integrated policy on VPL' was adopted by unanimity.

The new legislative framework
The new legislative framework of VPL in Flanders holds many strengths.

A broad definition of VPL
The Parliamentary Act on validation starts with a broad definition of VPL, a copy of the definition incorporated in the Council Recommendation. Each applicant can choose to go through the four successive phases of VPL that are briefly described, i.e. identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The inclusion of this (4-stages) definition

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270 See: *http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/professional-qualifications/*. For an example of the professional qualification of 'child caretaker', in Dutch, see *https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p= VLAAMSE_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:BEROEPSKWALIFICATIE:::NO:1020:P1020_BK_DOSSIER_ID,P1020_HEEFT_ DEELKWALIFICATIES:461,NEE*
271 See: http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/ for a description of the VKS in English.
272 See: *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN*

should direct the policy fields involved to rely on a common and shared definition of VPL. However, the act then narrows its application to the last two steps (assessment and certification of professional competences) or the formal phases of 'validation'. This means that no rules are imposed for the first two steps, the more informal 'recognition' of competences.

VPL linked to the EQF
The act focuses on VPL in 'professional qualifications'. As explained above, these qualifications can be awarded by all (occupational and educational) sectors in Flanders. VPL arrangements can be offered by a public or private organisation acting as a recognised validation body under four conditions:
  - The competences they assess are part of a recognised professional qualification.
  - The assessment tools they use are developed in line with the standards for VPL.
  - The organisations have a quality label at the organisational level.
  - The validation bodies accept a regularly quality control (educational institutions have the quality control of the Inspectorate of Education).

The first two conditions imply a clear synergy between validation arrangements in Flanders and its NQF. Based on the professional qualification, a unique (occupational) validation standard is developed. The content of a validation standard is extensively documented in the Implementation Act. A standard includes the most appropriate methods for assessing the competencies of the professional qualification, the situations addressed in the assessment, relevant infrastructure and materials, an indication of assessment duration, the certificate that is delivered and general quality indications for the assessment. The validation standard is developed by a committee with experts from educational or training providers, sectors or organisations. Before approval, the validation standard is advised by members of the inspection authorities and finally adopted by the ministers of Work and Education.
The assessment tools used by the validation bodies have to be based on the validation standards. Once the tools are validated (by the ministry), they can be shared and used by all validation bodies assessing the same qualification.

VPL as a route to achieve a formal qualification or credits
A successful assessment of competences leads to *a full professional qualification certificate*. In some cases a partial qualification certificate can be delivered (only if the partial qualification has a value on the labour market). When an applicant cannot give proof of all acquired competences from the qualification, but shows the mastery of some relevant competencies, a *certificate of acquired competencies* is awarded. The certificates are fully equivalent with the qualifications and credits delivered after VET inside or outside education.

Information, guidance and counselling
The decree defines that "a validation body must provide the necessary information and guidance to the applicant to go through the validation procedure". However, the topic of guidance is neither refined nor elaborated in the Implementation Act. There is no uniform framework for the guidance provided by the validation bodies. Yet, information and guidance of the applicants is one of the components in the quality control of the validation body once every six years.

For information about VPL and counselling, applicants can go to a learner shop (limited number), a work-store of the PES, the educational institutions or organisations offering training or validation or they can find information on a governmental website.

Quality assurance in VPL
Together with the Parliamentary Act on VPL, the Flemish Parliament approved the "Act on Quality Assurance for vocational training (VPL included) based on a common Quality Framework". The scope of the decree is all the vocational/professional training (and VPL-paths) outside education. Vocational education (VET) is subject to the quality control by the Inspectorate of Education.
The act prescribes the conditions for the certification of professional qualifications by regulating the quality control. The jointly defined quality assurance framework is aligned with the quality assurance framework of the Inspectorate of Education. Generally, for a policy field or sector this means using the jointly defined quality assurance framework; creating an objective and neutral inspection service and relevant procedures and lastly organising a local quality control at least once every six years.

Affordable for the applicant?
VPL in Flanders is not free for the applicant, at least not for most of them. A common cost (for all VPL pathways) is 120 euro, taking into account the indexation. Contributing to one's own VPL costs was referred to by the Flemish policy makers as important for motivational reasons. Nevertheless, the Implementation Act explicitly targets five disadvantaged groups and includes a reduction of the enrolment fee for these groups:
  - Non-working jobseekers.
  - People with an income through social services or a living wage.
  - Asylum seekers and certain other categories of foreigners.
  - Civic integration program participants.
  - Prisoners.
People belonging to one of these groups pay half of the enrolment fee or they are reimbursed by an agency or (future) employer.

Strengths, but also limitations and challenges
The *2012 Council Recommendation* of the EU was used as a guiding principle for the development of the new legislation and will continue to do so as not all of the principles are included or yet realised. It is therefore too early to evaluate the impact of the law, since implementation has only just started. Nevertheless, legislative preparations and policy experimentation projects were set up in a number of adult education centres. Validation standards were developed for 11 professional qualifications. Skills assessment methods and instruments were elaborated in 'development commissions' composed of teachers from the adult education centres, representatives of the job sectors, of the school advisory services, the previous assessment centres and the Public Employment Service. About 90 applicants were already assessed in this period.
A challenging question however remains whether an increasing number of individuals in Flanders will make use of VPL to improve their professional prospects, such as seeking (better) jobs or further education/training. New initiatives in the past led to an increased participation in the first year(s) after introduction but seemed to stagnate and decline afterwards.
Monitoring of enrolment is provided, as well as some data gathering about the applicants. Yet we do not have data on what people do with the outcomes of their validation processes.

Most likely it will be possible for adult education centres to detect whether people enrol in a course after a validation process.

We must hope that the following ministers will bear the costs of fully rolling out the VPL policy. As no extra funding was foreseen, existing budgets have to be re-orientated. The main costs are for the Flemish Government: the ministry of Education and the ministry of Work share the operating costs and the personnel costs in (public) educational institutions and public professional training that operate as validation bodies.
Taking into consideration the gains and risks of the Flemish VPL policy, the principles of the Berlin Declaration can help to show the way forward.

Recommendation of priorities in the Berlin Declaration
This article was based on the supposition that sustainable VPL policies should be embedded in relevant legal frameworks. It is written from the perspective of a policy maker and focuses on the legal foundations of VPL, cf. paragraph 6 of the Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning. According to the Declaration, 'embedding VPL in legislation' is only one of the 34 overarching principles for an effective VPL-system. Yet based on our experience with VPL in Flanders, we can firmly state that once initiatives to empower VPL are written into legal texts, their impact is much greater when compared to initiatives that have not gone through political and legal procedures. However, although the legal framework for VPL in Flanders was only recently realized, its effects can already be seen in adult education centres or professional training institutions. These centres and institutions are preparing themselves to become high-quality validation centres.

The principle of 'embedding VPL in legislation' however is strongly interlinked with other principles. The Flemish legislation on VPL definitely confirms that all professional qualifications and partial qualifications delivered after VPL are equivalent to these delivered after a formal learning process (education or training). This principle can be guaranteed because VPL as well as formal vocational/professional education and training (VET) are both based on and linked to the professional qualifications from the NQF, the Flemish Qualification Framework (§1, Organisational Arrangements).

Moreover, a common quality framework covers VPL arrangements in all fields. The quality assurance body in formal (adult) education i.e. the Inspectorate of Education is also involved in the quality control on VPL within adult education centres. The quality control on VPL in other fields is based on a common quality framework developed by the Inspectorate of Education together with quality assurance bodies from the field of Work (with links to §3, Procedures and Instruments). Quality assurance procedures are regulated by law and provision and uptake will be monitored. Organisations that offer quality VPL will be recognised and registered. Also, all VPL applicants going through a VPL procedure will we be registered in a database and the same will be done with the (part) qualifications awarded. Governmental organisations are designated to coordinate the VPL system.

It is clear that the recommendations on legal foundations in paragraph 6 of the Berlin Declaration are prioritised in the Flanders' approach. Still all the other recommendations interfere in some way or another!

The approval of the new law a decision acts was a first important step. More energy now has to go to broaden its implementation towards other policy domains than Education and Work. As each policy domain will be responsible for its own funding system, more data on the real cost of validation are necessary (§2, Financing). Funding within the field of Education (only for the adult education centres) and Work is made available for the moment but only the future can tell if it is based on a sustainable funding system. It is clear that the Flemish VPL system does not respect all principles on financing. Extra funding for guidance and support - especially in the phases of identification and documentation of competences - was not foreseen as the focus was on the assessment and certification of competences. The individual's right to validation and guidance was not written into the legal framework and (at this moment) no guarantee can be given about the accessibility of VPL to all individuals regardless of financial status.

We conclude that a number of the Berlin Declaration principles are respected, however a full comprehensive approach of VPL is not yet realised. At least in Flanders, one regulation for professional and educational qualifications did not work and the same applies to one system of VPL for higher education and all the other sectors. The question remains whether a fully integrated approach of VPL is actually possible?

The French Legal Framework of Validation of Prior Learning

6.3

Yolande Fermon

Long before the 2012 EU Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, France already had implemented two validation systems, even three if we take into account the validation system created in 1934 to qualify technicians occupying the position of engineers. The more recent ones, the validation of prior personal and professional learning which permitted (and still permits today) to apply to a course of any level of higher education without holding the prerequisite diploma (VAP 85), and the validation of professional prior learning (VAP 92) which allowed to obtain a part of a qualification of school vocational education or higher education set, are based on a strong legal basis : the 1984 law on higher education for the first one and the 1991 law on vocational continuing training for the second.

The current system of validation, also known as VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*) does not depart from this custom. In 2002, it is the so-called law of social modernization which created two new procedures for validation: the VAE and the VES (*Validation des Etudes Supérieures*), as well as the repertory of professional qualifications, the new national qualification framework, the RNCP (*Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles*) and the National Commission of professional qualification (CNCP, *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle*) responsible for its management.[273]

Three validation systems are currently implemented today:
- The VAP 85 is still largely used in higher education as described above in an objective of pursuing studies.
- The VES through which one can get a diploma or a part of a diploma of higher education by validating studies previously achieved or prior diplomas obtained in France or abroad, without need to follow a study program.
- The VAE covers all the sectors of education and training, public or private, all the levels of qualifications and concerns all the individuals.

VAE: the objectives of an integrated system
The 2002 law of social modernization defines the VAE as a new right given to individuals: anyone involved in active life, as an employee, an independent worker or a volunteer, whatever his age, profession, situation, nationality, has the right to have what he has learnt through his experience (les acquis) validated in order to get a qualification, which can be a diploma, a professional title or a certificate of qualification. Though, three conditions are

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273 All legal references, laws, decrees, related to validation are available on the national site: *www. vae.gouv.fr*

required: the person must be able to prove at least 3 years of activity and the chosen qualification has to be firstly registered in the RNCP, secondly directly linked to the field of the professional activity. To realize the validation process, a new 24-hour payed leave is created for the employees.

In the explanatory memorandum of the law, it is recalled that diplomas and professional titles enjoy a strong recognition in France, that many adults give up to follow a qualifying course but that they have acquired valuable skills through their professional experience or in the context of social or associative activities Though this experience is insufficiently taken into account and prevent people to be better recognized and more mobile on the labour market. VAE thus is given two main finalities: it is instrument for securing career paths and a tool for social promotion.

When opening access to a qualification through VAE it is mandatory to have it registered in the RNCP. Therefore, one can see that VAE is in the one hand an isolated measure but, on the other hand, a consubstantial part of the French qualification system. The VAE does not create a parallel system of qualifications; it is just a new path leading to certification like initial or continuing training do.

The intrinsic link VAE maintains with professional certification is not the only one VAE can claim: the VAE is also characterized by its integration into the education system and the national and regional guidance, training and employment policies.

The integration of VAE into the education system is concretely translated by its inclusion in the Education Code which defines it as a path to certification. This also means that the implementation of the VAE is compulsory for all public or private institutions which want to have their certifications registered in the RNCP.

The inclusion of the VAE in the Education code entails a series of provisions defining the procedure such as:

- The type of activities taken into account to calculate the experience (salaried, non-salaried, volunteer, mandate of elected official or union representative, high level athlete position) and also periods of initial or continuing training carried out in a professional environment.
- The duration of the experience and the methods of calculation according to the type of experience.
- The definition of the different mandatory steps of the procedure and their organization: the examination of the admissibility of the application and the possible recommendations given by the awarding bodies; the filling of the application file by the candidate explaining and analyzing his experiences with regard to the standard of the aimed qualification, the evaluation session; the definition of the support (counselling) which remains an optional but highly recommended step.

Nevertheless, for most ministries awarding public qualifications, the regulatory provisions are set out in circulars that specify the implementation of the VAE according to their own organization.

VAE also represents one element of the broad field of lifelong vocational training. As VAE is recognized as "an activity contributing to the development of skills", all the actions relating to it are indirectly funded by the compulsory contributions of companies to continuing

vocational training within the framework of their training plan or within the framework of the personal training account, by the regions, by the State and by the candidates themselves.

Since 2002, measures concerning VAE have been present in all laws relating to guidance, information and lifelong learning, in 2009, 2014, 2018. The labour code describes in detail the objectives of the VAE, its legal regime and the conditions of its application. So, the Labour Code presents a series of provisions on:

- Information and guidance for the public wishing to validate their experience which means provisions on the centers of information and advice, on the awarding bodies, on the organizations authorized to offer professional development advice.
- The objectives and conditions of implementation:
  - Obtaining a full or partial qualification registered in the RNCP.
  - Precision on the admissibility step, for example, obligation for the awarding bodies to respond to the candidate within two months failing which the application will be declared automatically admissible.
  - Provisions related to the rights of the employee as for the VAE leave but also the obligation of the candidate's consent if the company has the initiative of the VAE.
  - Measures concerning the source and the financing mechanism according to the status of the candidate who can be active, self-employed or unemployed.
  - Precisions on the nature of the expenses which can be supported: cost of examining the admissibility file, cost of counselling, of organizing evaluation session, cost of transports, accommodation, meals, etc.
  - Financial support to employees participating to a jury.
  - Description of the optional support service of counselling.

A shared responsibility between some main actors
This integrated system has as a corollary a shared responsibility between different actors: besides the individual who always remains at the center of the device, the State, the Regions, the social partners, the companies, and the public and private institutions play their part in the design and the implementation of the VAE.
The ministry of labour has the initiative of the laws. It is in charge of the coordination of all the ministries which play a role in the VAE, which means the ministries awarding qualifications; it is also responsible for the monitoring and the assessment of the whole system: every year, it gathers the figures from the different ministries which implement the VAE to release national statistics.
On a financial level, the ministry and the national agency for employment may fund collective projects of VAE for jobseekers or for less qualified people sometimes with a partnership with the accredited joint bodies and the Regional Councils. Since the law of decentralization in 2004, the Regional authorities have been given the responsibility of further vocational training of the jobseekers and therefore for their VAE. They are also in charge of the information and guidance delivered to all publics in information and council centers. Besides, they organize and coordinate the phase of counselling on regional level.
As an element of the policy for vocational guidance, further training and employment, VAE can be financed by the Regions through specific projects targeting certain groups of employees, as mentioned above often with the participation of the State and the joint bodies. Most of the Regions also provide a direct help to the individuals, the less qualified persons or the unemployed: this is how we find a "VAE check" in Alsace, a "Validation check" in Brittany

or a "VAE Pass" in Rhône-Alpes. They may bring their help to companies by targeting sectors where skills needs have been identified in the region.

For the social partners, the accredited joint bodies, ("les OPCO", OPérateurs de COmpétences) give advice to the companies which can include validation in their training plans. They finance VAE through two main measures: the training plan of the companies under 50 employees and the work-and-study training leading to a qualification.

The company can have the initiative of validation; in this case it integrates it in its training plan. When the company comprises at least 50 employees, all the expenses are paid by the company through its training plan budget. If it comprises less than 50 employees, the accredited joint body to which the company pays its tax for continuing training covers the expenses. One has to keep in mind that VAE always has to be implemented with the agreement of the employee and that no sanction can be taken against him if he refuses to enter the validation process.

The public and private institutions awarding qualifications ("les certificateurs") carry out the whole procedure, from the reception of the candidates to the holding of the jury: general information on the procedure and first advice given to the applicant for the choice of the qualification, examination of his application, assessment of his VAE file, organization of the jury according to the rules set in the decrees and formal information given to the candidate on the decision of the jury with the eventual recommendations if the candidate has received a partial qualification or no qualification.

It is interesting to note that most of the actions related to VAE are the result of partnerships between different actors. As an example, the 10,000 VAE plan for job seekers implemented through a partnership between Pôle Emploi, AFPA, the regional authorities and companies illustrates the complementarity of actors in the development of VAE.

In 2016, the National agency for employment (Pôle emploi) and AFPA, the national organism for the vocational training of adults (operator of the ministry of labour) have deployed throughout the territory, as part of the plan "500,000 additional training courses for job seekers", a device which allowed to organize the access to a professional title awarded by the ministry of labour, by combining VAE and ad hoc training modules.

The other dimension of this experimentation was territorial, taking into account the needs of companies in order to bring to employment people who have completed their VAE course.

To this end, the employment needs of each territory, the trades in which it was necessary to engage "collective" VAE operations and the job seekers likely to match, were identified by Pôle emploi.

The evolution of the VAE

The important legislative and regulatory device which underlies the VAE is not however a rigid and fixed device. Since 2002, when the VAE was created, numerous laws have changed the landscape of lifelong learning. As a fully-fledged part of lifelong learning and policies for employment, VAE has evolved with the new measures brought by the laws, thus opening up new perspectives for an increasingly large audience. The new measures may concern the access to the procedure, precisions brought on the steps of the procedure itself, its financing or its quality assurance. We will only mention here the most important ones.

The broadening of the access to VAE is one of the consequences and one of the goals of the 2014 and 2016 laws on vocational continuing training and employment. With the 2014 law, VAE is extended to the persons exercising a trade union responsibility or functions as

counsellors in a town, a "département" or a region. The length of the experience is relaxed for the people who have not reached the level 3 of the EQF by including in the 3 years the periods of initial or continuing training achieved in the workplace.

The reduction from 3 year to 1 year of the required duration of the experience is brought in 2016 by the so called Labour Law ("Loi Travail"). Furthermore, the periods of initial or continuing training carried out in a professional environment are included in the one year of experience, thus permitting to new publics wishing to get qualifications corresponding to jobs which do not require a significant experience or to school dropouts to access the procedure. Other measures directly impact the procedure and its different steps:

In 2014, a legal basis is given to the admissibility stage of the application to the VAE, the nature of the support offered to the candidates to write down and analyze their experience is precisely described. The 2016 Labour Law provides for the creation of a single form of admissibility that applies to all the applicants and organizations awarding qualifications. The same law provides that the 5-year time limitation to acquire the missing parts of the qualification is removed. The qualification parts that correspond to a "skills block" (see below), are definitively valid and can be taken into account for the renewal of the application. Besides these legislative developments which directly concern the VAE, the three laws of 2014, 2016 and 2018 contain measures which can impact the development of the procedure. The creation of the personal training account is one of them. This right to education, open to everyone, in the form of an hour account in 2014 becomes a cash account in 2016: everyone has 500 euros that can be accumulated up to 5,000 euros.

The evolution of the concept of professional qualification, now conceived as a set of "skill blocks", that is to say clearly identified parts of a qualification, goes in the direction of facilitating validation in the sense that it allows gradual acquisition of a qualification. With the 2018 law, qualifications must not only be described in skill blocks to be registered in the NQF but also be accompanied by an activity standard, a skills standard and an assessment standard. It thus becomes possible to finance the acquisition of a skill block by continuing training or VAE.

Quality assurance is another area covered by the 2018 law and which contributes to the evolution of the conditions for implementing validation of acquired experience. The 2018 law brings a new definition of the training activity: it is "an activity contributing to skills development"; training activities but also skills audits and VAE are included in this definition. This puts an end to the ambiguity of the previous definition of VAE in the labour Code as a continuing training activity. A more demanding quality is required from the providers of these types of activities who must be certified by a quality certification organism itself recognized by the national organism COFRAC (Comité français d'accréditation) or by France Compétences, the national organism responsible for the governance of the whole professional qualification system, on the basis of a national standard.

In conclusion

One can say that the French legal framework that some may find too precise or even binding has the advantage of ensuring the consistency of the procedure throughout the French territory and also ensuring equal treatment of all citizens, whatever the education sector and the qualification sought. The legislative and regulatory device reflects the integration of the validation system into education, training and employment policies. It expresses the greater or lesser importance given to these matters and the changes desired in these fields by the various governments, changes often dictated by the new needs of the society and economy.

By defining the place occupied by each of the actors in this field, the legislation invites them to play on their complementarity to ensure a successful implementation, allowing thus innovative projects on a national, regional or local level.

Annex: Textes législatifs et réglementaires
All legal references related to validation are available on *www. vae.gouv.fr*

Lois
2 Loi n°2018-771 du 5.9.18, art. 9
3 Loi n°2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels, art. 78
4 Loi n°2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels, art. 60
5 Loi n°2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels, art.75
6 Loi n°2014-288 du 5 mars 2014 relative à la formation professionnelle, à l'emploi et à la démocratie sociale. Article 6.
7 Loi n°2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002 de modernisation sociale

Décrets
Décret n°2019-1303 du 6 décembre 2019 relatif à la diffusion des coordonnées des centres de conseils sur la validation des acquis de l'expérience sur le portail national dédié à la validation des acquis de l'expérience
Décret n°2019-1119 du 31.10.19 (JO du 3.11.19) relatif à la mise en œuvre de la validation des acquis et de l'expérience et comportant d'autres dispositions relatives aux commissions professionnelles consultatives en matière de certification professionnelle et aux organismes financeurs du projet de transition professionnelle
Décret n°2017-774 du 4.5.17 (JO du 6.5.17) relatif à la responsabilité sociale des plateformes de mise en relation par voie électronique
Décret n°2017-1135 du 4 juillet 2017 relatif à la mise en œuvre de la validation des acquis de l'expérience
Décret n°2014-1354 du 12 novembre 2014 portant diverses mesures relatives à la validation des acquis de l'expérience
Décret n°2004-607 du 21 juin 2004 étendant au ministère chargé de la culture les dispositions du décret n° 2002-615 du 26 avril 2002 pris pour l'application de l'article L. 900-1 du code du travail et des articles L. 335-5 et L. 335-6 du code de l'éducation relatif à la validation des acquis de l'expérience pour la délivrance d'une certification professionnelle.
Décret n°2002-1460 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif au contrôle des organismes qui assistent des candidats à une validation des acquis de l'expérience et modifiant le titre IX du livre IX du code du travail (deuxième partie : Décrets en Conseil d'État)

Codes
Code du travail partie législative : Art. L3142-42 et suiv. ; Art. L6315-1 ; Art. L6422-3 et s. ;Art. L6423-1et s. ; Art. L6361-1 et s. ; Art. L6411-1
Code du travail partie réglementaire: Art. R6412-1;Art. R6422-1; Art. R6422-1 à R6422-12; Art. R6423-1 à R6423-5
Code de l'éducation partie législative : Art. L214-12; Art. L214-13
Code de l'éducation partie réglementaire : Art. R335-5 et s;. Art. R361-2

The VPL-prizes 2019

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The VPL Biennale called for examples of best practice in three categories. The competition offered applicants from around the world an opportunity to communicate best practice, helping to further develop and implement effective VPL systems.

The three categories of the VPL-prize 2019 were:
- **Products** include tools and instruments that make learning outcomes visible or help assess them.
- **Procedures** include structured pathways for getting learning outcomes validated, trainings for assessor and guidance counsellors, or mechanisms for quality assurance of validation processes.
- **Policies** include regional, national or industry guidelines, laws and regulations on validation of prior learning.

The Jury of the VPL Prizes 2019 was chaired by Kirsten Aagaard.
The three prize-winners for each category are presented in this chapter.

A Balancing Act

7.1

Describing skills acquired in the workplace

VIRKE, the Enterprise Federation of Norway

Introduced by Tormod Skjerve

'A Balancing Act' is a model and method to describe skills acquired in the workplace, so that they can be understood in the wider context of working life as well as in the formal education system. For most of us, it is much easier to document and make others understand our formal education than it is to explain and gain recognition for the skills we have acquired through work experience and internal training. 'A Balancing Act' is integrating working life in systems of validation of prior learning. The integration is based on two main pillars, namely the understanding of skills acquired in the workplace and establishing referencing points in the work life for validation of skills.

The unique character of 'A Balancing Act' is the creation of a framework that's …
… simple to understand in terms of terminology and visibility.
… applicable for all sectors and organisations in the work life.
… reflects fully the very dynamic nature of skills development in working life.

The goal is that everyone is able to understand the result of the learning that occurs at the workplace. 'A Balancing Act' was developed as a concept in collaboration with several retail chains but has later on also been successfully tested in other sectors on the labour market. The concept proved to be encompassing all skills necessary in work life and to be applicable and relevant for all sectors. Employers and employees recognize and appreciate the balancing act-metaphor.

How 'A Balancing Act' is improving the VPL-system
Norway currently has a system for validation of prior learning that gives an individual the right to a comparative assessment of their skills against the formal education system's qualification standards at every level. There is, however, no comparable validation mechanism for workplace standards. Developing qualification standards and using learning outcomes in the workplace will provide a simple and natural process for individuals to validate their prior learning against workplace standards just as they do with education standards.
This will provide benefits for society, as individuals who excel in the workplace will be able to document this more easily and more accurately. It will lead to a fairer and more positive assessment of skills developed in the workplace. Workplace skills standards will provide a method and language which is much more suitable for the skills acquired in the workplace

than school curricula and education qualifications. Our model makes it as easy to use workplace skills standards as the reference point for validation of prior learning as it is to use education standards.

Terminology and challenges

We have to differentiate between describing skills and validating skills. 'A Balancing Act' is advocating that skills should be described within the concept they are acquired, using relevant terminology and reflecting the nature of learning process.

Describing tasks is easier than talking about skills. 'A Balancing Act' is looking behind the tasks and making visible the set of skills a person needs to carry out the task in a proper way.

For the purpose of VPL, we also make a differentiation between skills and personal qualities. Rather often we see a mix of qualities and skills in job advertising and job descriptions. 'A Balancing Act' is about identification and description of skills and not about personal qualities.

'Responsibility' is the only area where one can see a clear correlation between a skills hierarchy and an organizational hierarchy. In order to describe how progression takes place with regard to the area of responsibility, we need to consider two elements in the role: what mandate is there to make decisions, and what level of complexity is involved.

The mandate to make decisions can be determined by looking at:
  - To what extent the role requires one to make decisions individually.
  - To what extent decisions can be made beyond the mandatory requirements but within the mandate for the role.
  - The responsibility of the role for assisting others to make good decisions.

The greater the scope and area of influence the decisions have, the higher the level of responsibility in the role. Complexity accounts for the breadth of knowledge and experience required for the tasks for the role. The greater the scope and the consequences, the more complex the responsibility is for a given role.

The Balance Model

The idea for the balance model came about during the interview process with shop managers. It was obvious that the interviewees acquired skills not by in-depth training on all subject matter in a structured manner, but by developing the skills required simultaneously and making it all fit together in a fluid and flexible way. Their day-to-day work is not only complex, with many different tasks, but it is full of contrasting demands. Hence the balancing act. Figure 1 represents the balancing.

The balance model has been created:
- As a framework to discuss skills and the demand for skills and skills development internally in an organisation, from an employee and employer perspective.
- To raise awareness of the significance and content of each individual skill.
- As a contribution towards describing and evaluating skills in the formal education system, especially when it comes the relevance of a course of study and description of learning objectives and learning outcomes.
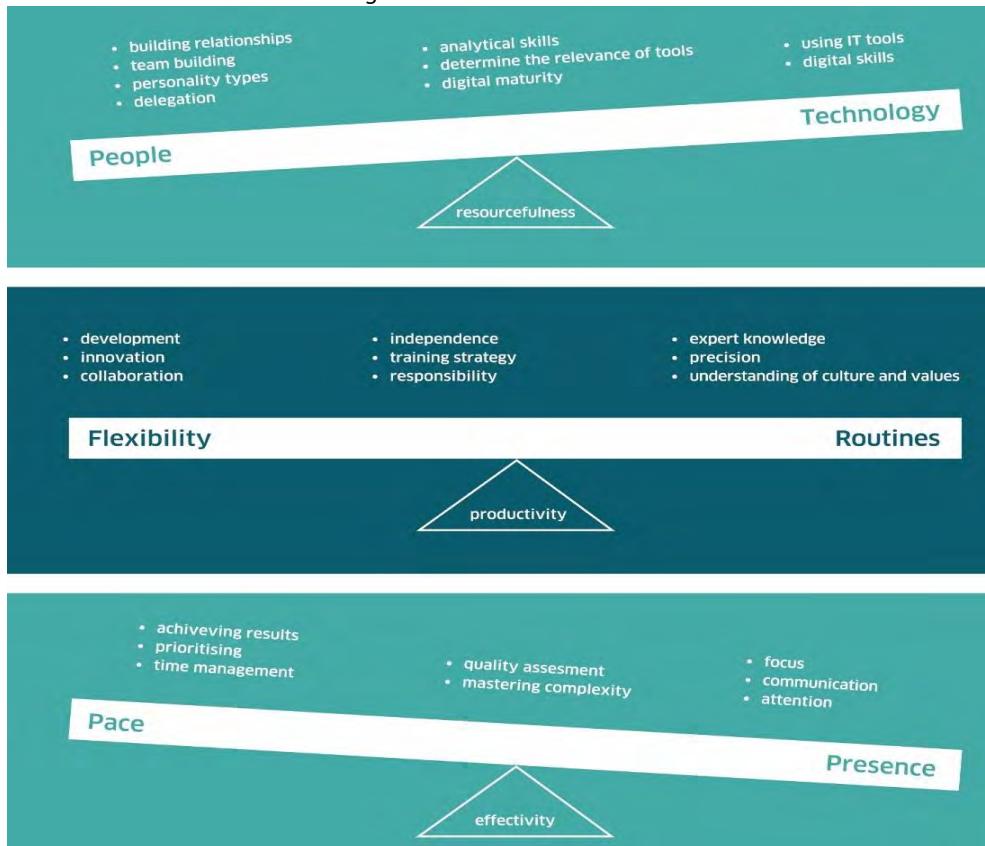
Source: virke.no

One of the main challenges faced while creating this model has been to maintain the dynamic nature of training and development that takes place in an organisation/ branche/sector while simultaneously attempting to introduce a common framework for describing skills in working life in general.

The art of balancing

The model is based on balance. Individuals in working life are considered to be 'balancing artists'. This is a fundamental, defining element of skills development in working life. It is necessary to have the ability to develop a differentiated and sometimes conflicting set of skills and have the capacity to put these into practice. For example, it is common that people would need to find the balance between routinely carrying out the tasks set out in the job and simultaneously have the ability to be flexible and innovative. The need to balance routine tasks with the hectic and ever-changing day-to-day demands is evident in many jobs. No two days are the same, but some things need to be the same every day.

This model identifies what these conflicting elements, that require balancing, are. We call them "balance points". Each balance point contains the necessary skills. It is therefore important for every individual to have sufficient skills in each balance point to succeed. It is, however, also crucial to have the necessary skills to find the right balance between these

balance points during daily work to achieve the best possible results. The model has three sets of balance points. This means that the model provides a framework with nine different points for identifying and describing skills.

A balancing act is more like trying to stand on a balance ball, than maintaining a seesaw in perfect balance. A balancing act is not about maintaining skills in a perfect state of balance, but rather managing skills when change and movement are constant.

The three dimensions of balancing act

1. People – Technology
People entails being able to relate to people, like customers, clients, colleagues, patients, etc. in a positive manner, is significant to every role in working life.

Technology considers that every role in the workplace demands some sort of IT or digital skills. Technology is a tool for people, and people give value to technology.

The balance between people and technology point describes level of understanding and complexity to be able to use relevant technology and digital tools.

Balance results in resourcefulness. Understanding and managing the balance between people and technology is the key for resourcefulness based on the following assumptions:
- An essential understanding of technological developments for optimum usage.
- Being able to assess which technology is relevant for a role/function so that individuals can prioritize correctly and avoid wasting time and resources on technology that adds no value to the completion of a task.
- Being able to assess which tasks/functions are best carried out by technology instead of people.
- The ability to connect people and technology in a way which adds value to the organisation, the individual and society.

2. Flexibility – Routines
Flexibility is about being able to think of change as positive. This is not necessarily about being able to adjust to changes others have made, rather, the ability to create change oneself. This includes a desire to make improvements, the ability to continually develop your own skills, having a positive attitude towards being in new situations that require new solutions and finding ways to get others to work together even when it is difficult. Flexibility demands dealing with challenges in a constructive and solution-focused way. It is about having the ability to gather information, to inspire others and to continually develop your expertise in new ways.

Routines are grounded in two different perspectives on routine skills:
- Professional knowledge that is required for a person to carry out the job and understand the role. This is the main link to formal qualifications and the education system.
- The ability to act according to decisions made by others and be able to relate to the culture and values of the organisation.

Innovation and improvement must challenge routines. The ability to see challenges and identify improvements is a skill that lies between flexibility and routines. This includes the ability to take responsibility for oneself and for others, which requires individuals to be capable of being independent. Between these two balance points, we also find the ability to make good decisions about changes in the product range, renewing one's own skill set and about strategic issues.

The key to productivity lies in the balance between routine and flexibility. Being overly interested in innovation without taking routines seriously or keeping old routines in place that are no longer serving their purpose, will negatively affect productivity.

3. Pace – Presence
Pace is about having the essential ability to make decisions and deliver results, but in some jobs also literally having the capacity to move continuously and rapidly throughout the workday. It is essentially having the ability to prioritize, knowing what the most important task is to complete, in which order and when. Time management skills are crucial. It can be challenging for many to deal with this fast pace. Having the capacity to do the job requires both physical and mental training.

Presence is about having the ability to concentrate - that is, being able to stay present in a time-consuming situation and pay full attention to the person or task at hand. The ability to be present is crucial for good customer and client management. It is also important for a manager to be present and available to employees who want to have a discussion, to dedicate time to guiding others and to communicate in a positive way.

Finding the appropriate balance between pace and presence is demanding and can lead to a constantly guilty conscience. It is therefore important not only to find good ways of achieving balance but also managing the fact that optimal balance is rarely achieved. Part of the challenge is that this balance is extremely dynamic – there is a constant need to assess what the right balance is at any given time.

The key to being effective in the workplace is about continuously striving to find a good balance between pace and presence. If effectivity becomes just about maintaining a fast pace in the workplace then it is highly likely that the skill of being present dwindles and this will affect both how effective one is, but also the quality of work delivered.

The dynamism in the model
When using the balance model, it is important to be aware of the dynamism and flexibility that the framework incorporates. To illustrate this point, four areas can be described where the model allows a great deal of flexibility:
1. The same skill can be placed similarly in the model but weighted differently depending on the role and function.
2. The same skill can be placed in different places within the model depending on the role/function that requires the skill.
3. The same type of role/function could have varying sets of skills.
4. Some skills can be more significant and more comprehensive than others in a specific role.

Therefore, in order to describe skills acquired in the workplace in a satisfactory way, it is necessary to ensure and allow for difference in scope and weighting of certain key skills. This can be done by the use of learning outcomes, and it is important that these descriptions express the breadth and depth involved. Learning outcomes, however, are not sufficient for communicating which skills are more crucial to carrying out the role/function than others.

How can one deal with the challenge that a skill might be placed anywhere in the model? The balance model answers this by creating room for skills to be split up. By examining the nuances within a skill, different perspectives can be identified and described in key skills and learning outcomes placed in different parts of the balance model.

The method for communication of skills

The Balance Model entails a process with four consecutive steps:

STEP 1: by using interviews, written material and the balance model we can achieve an overview of skills required. These skills are displayed in detail by using the balance model, so that it is easy to see what the core of each skill is, and which skills must be present in order to create the best possible balance in the job.

Figure 2: the steps in the Balance Model

STEP | STEP | STEP | STEP
01 | 02 | 03 | 04
THE BALANCE MODEL | KEY SKILLS | LEARNING OUTCOMES | QUALIFICATIONS

Source: virke.no

STEP 2: if we want someone to understand the skills necessary to master a or to understand a role/function or an individual skill set, which of the skills defined in step 1 are the most important? These are what we call key skills. They illustrate what is most significant to carrying out a specific role/function, and the number should not exceed 15.

STEP 3: learning objectives need to be understood where the learning takes place, both by the people that teach and those that learn. The objectives can be full of internal jargon and refer to expressions used internally, and it is no limit to number of objectives.

But it's the learning outcomes that should be communicated and the outcomes need to be understood beyond where the learning takes place. That means they must be able to be communicated and understood externally. Therefore, internal jargon and internal operating systems need to be translated into widely understood terminology. The number of learning outcomes should be 1-2 for each of the key skills.

STEP 4: the criteria for defining an education standard or a skills standard as a qualification should be the same, regardless of where the learning occurs or who awards the qualification. As part of 'A Balancing Act' an outline of the criteria that should be required for a qualification is suggested. It is considered to be easy to fulfil most of these criteria in the workplace, and in the formal education system. The most challenging areas are the learning outcomes and the quality assurance aspect. Learning outcomes are important for understanding qualifications. Quality assurance of qualifications is important for their reliability.

Impact on skills policy

Developing skills standards and using learning outcomes in work life and for individuals will provide a proper process for validating prior learning against workplace standards, and also

improving labour market mobility, integration and inclusion. Improving the system for validation of prior learning using the 'Balancing Act' concept, has a positive impact on elements within a strategy for skills policy.[274]

Mobility
Describing skills standards for jobs in different parts of the labour market and individual skills in terms of key skills and learning outcomes, we can see how skills developed in one sector fit into skills standards in other sectors. Example: 'Understanding the economy' is a key skill for a shop manager, a head of unit in the health sector and a craft artist, and the learning outcomes describing the skill are almost identical for the three very different roles in working life. Using 'A Balancing Act' is also useful for internal mobility within sectors or enterprises.

Integration and inclusion
The 'Balancing Act' concept opens up for the identification and validation of refugees' skills developed in their previous roles and functions in working life. Example: refugees from Syria have documentation of formal education and qualifications, but when interviewing the refugees their job experience is normally not from their field of education. That means the documentation of potential skills in terms of qualifications are very different from the skills they have developed in working life after graduating.
Moreover, 'A Balancing Act' concept has proven to give a unique support to people that are identified as low skilled, meaning low formal education or working experience from sectors classified as low-skill sectors, through documenting their actual skills in a terminology that give value to the skills they master.

Follow-up projects by autumn 2019
A variety of follow-up projects is running since 2019:
- For the Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions (LO Norway) – describing the skills developed as trade unions representative and introducing the 'Balancing Act' concept in the trade unions.
- Using 'A Balancing Act' concept to identify future skill needs in retail in a cooperation between the sectoral social partners at national and European level.
- Analytical study of education standards and skills standards targeting the same role in working life and the description of learning outcomes.
- Further work on the integration of the working life in VPL-systems, improving mobility, integration, inclusion and career guidance.
- 40 interviews have been conducted for the development of skills standards in retail and health care sectors, and 16 interviews to identify and describe immigrants' and refugees' skills. We will carry out approximately 30 more interviews in the follow-up projects 2019.
- A second report from the project "A Balancing Act" will be launched in October 2020, and available in English end of 2020. This new publication is based on the testing of the "Balancing Act"-concept in various sectors of work life and using different approaches. It will present 5 cases in detail and, based on this documentation, will contain some learning points and recommendations for further implementation and strengthen the understanding and validation of skills developed in work life. Particular focus will be on the relationship between learning in work life and the formal education system.

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274 «A Balancing Act» is part of the «*Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021*»

IQ Network Brandenburg

7.2

IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH Ostbrandenburg, Germany

Introduced by Violetta Seubert

Due to the high influx of refugees into Germany in 2015 and 2016 and the related increased interests of their integration into the labour market or the vocational training system, the issue of vocational specific competence assessment has become increasingly important. It is well known that a sustainable integration of refugees and migrants into a society succeeds primarily through participation in the economic life. However, the access to the labour market encounters many problems and special difficulties if the persons concerned have no formal proof of their professional competences and qualifications, not to mention the language deficits. In most countries of origin there is no vocational training system comparable to the German system and the practice of many occupations is not linked to formal certificates. In the craft trades, commercial or industrial-technical professions, occupation-specific competences are often acquired through non-formal and informal learning processes. In general, it can be assumed that over two-thirds of refugees who came to Germany in 2015 and 2016 do not have completed any formal vocational training. However, a large number of them have professional experience, unfortunately they do not have any proof, such as work certificates, which could confirm this. As a result, professional know-how on the German labour market is often misjudged or not recognised at all, so that many migrants and refugees end up in long-term or even permanent unemployment.

An economy that strives for prosperity and social peace and takes its humanitarian obligations seriously cannot afford such a state of affairs in the long term. And let us not forget the demographic and technological developments which directly influence the economic situation in Germany and which are already being felt in all sectors of the economy. There is no doubt that even people without formal qualifications often have relevant labour market skills acquired through work experience and other informal and non-formal learning processes. The challenge is to be able to integrate them into the labour market or the vocational training system in a sustainable and socially acceptable way. However, access to the formal economy on the basis of informal labour market relevant competences can only be successful if all labour market actors accept this way of acquiring competences. This requires instruments that make existing vocational skills visible to the economy and labour market administration institutions. In this context, the validation of prior learning plays an important role. On the one hand, this requires a strong political willingness to finance the development and implementation of VPL instruments. On the other hand, the local business community is asked to foster openness for employing refugees and migrants.

Against this backdrop, the political consensus on the economic necessity and social responsibility have led to a number of measures to facilitate early entry into the labour market and vocational training system entry for refugees and migrants, such as the competence assessment within the IQ Network Brandenburg.

IQ Brandenburg - Competence Assessment: implementation partners
The project "IQ Brandenburg - Competence Assessment" was implemented between 2016 and 2018 by the IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH within the framework of the "Integration through Qualification (IQ)" programme and was funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS). The strong political backing necessary to fully support the project was provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Employment Agency (BA) at the federal level and by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Women and Family of the federal state of Brandenburg (MASF). As a 100 % subsidiary of the CCI Ostbrandenburg the IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH is a service provider for Vocational Education and Training (VET) at regional, national and international level and it has an efficient and well developed cooperation structures, which are required for the development and implementation of measures aimed at increasing labour market participation of disadvantaged groups, such as unemployed or persons without formal vocational education qualification.
In the course of the project, the team has built up a reliable cooperation network consisting of political institutions at state and municipal level, institutions of the labour market administration, chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of crafts and the Brandenburg Chamber of Agriculture as well as institutions for integrative refugee work and training centres. This broadly diversified and reliable network has ensured fast and efficient project implementation and increased the acceptance of the competence assessment procedure in society and the regional economy.

IQ Brandenburg - Competence Assessment: framework conditions
The overall objective of the project "IQ Brandenburg - Competence Assessment" was to integrate refugees and migrants into qualified work or vocational training system and to improve their employability. In order to achieve this, a central point was to create a validation procedure that was easily accessible to the target group, that provided the necessary transparency about the participants' occupational knowledge and skills and that supported the development of educational chains.

Against this background, the following framework conditions for the validation procedure were defined:
- Access requirements as flexible as possible.
- Appropriate time frame.
- Possibility of a self-determined entry into different phases of validation.
- Unbureaucratic and easily accessible.
- Time availability and local accessibility.
- Voluntary participation.
- Participation free of charge as financed by public funds.

The target group was defined as follows:
- Refugees, regardless of their residence status, and persons with migration background.
- Age of majority reached.

- Resident in Brandenburg.
- German language skills at least at level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- No formal vocational qualifications in the profession to be validated, but years of experience in that profession.
- Unemployed or precariously employed.

Structured mechanisms and instruments of the VPL procedure
As a result of the work, the project team developed and implemented a standardised procedure for the validation of informally acquired occupation-specific competencies according to uniform standards in all non-regulated dual training occupations in the German vocational training system, taking strict account of the special needs of refugees and migrants, such as their language skills or biographical, school or occupational background.

Figure 1: Content focus of the VPL competence assessment procedure[275]
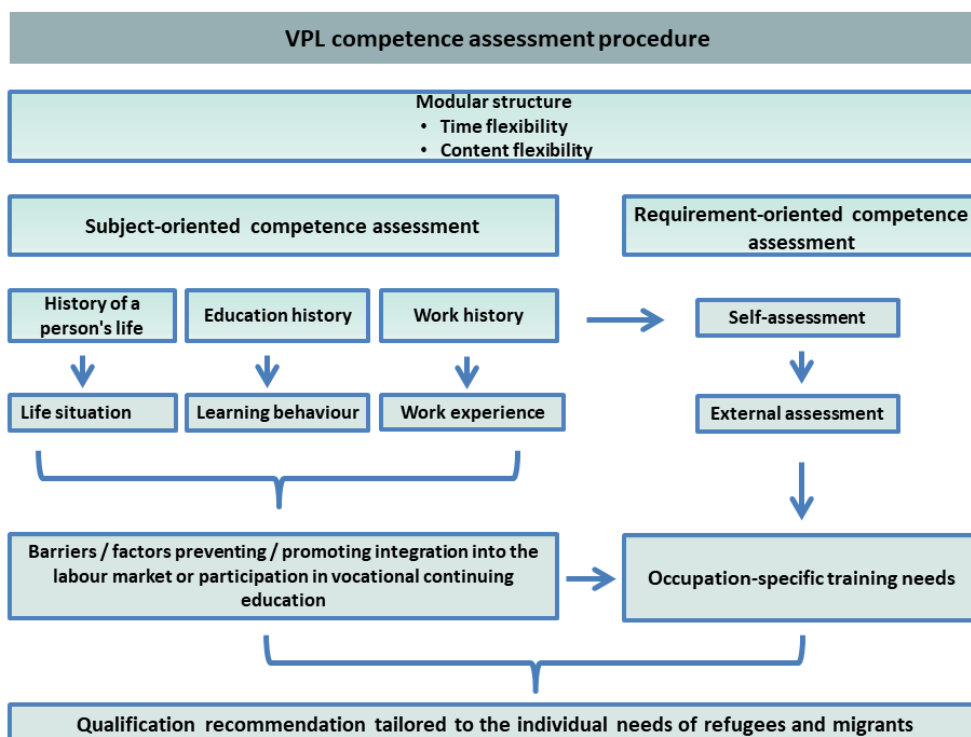
The validation procedure had two main objectives: firstly, to create transparency about the professional knowledge and skills of refugees and migrants without formal vocational qualifications but with relevant work experience, and secondly, to facilitate access to the vocational qualification system and the labour market. The procedure served to identify, systematically record and document informally and non-formally acquired competences in non-regulated professions, to evaluate, verify and certify them. Its modular structure and

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275 All figures are published under full responsibility of the author.

target group-oriented mix of methods enabled all persons to participate in the competence assessment according to their individual language requirements. To this end, the project team was set up in an intercultural, interdisciplinary and multilingual way. In order to ensure the most effective integration into the Brandenburg labour market, the entire process was accompanied by intensive support and counselling tailored to the individual needs of those seeking advice. At the end of the process, a final detailed consultation with each participant took place, so that each person and the responsible employment agency received an individual and targeted qualification recommendation, which was drawn up in close cooperation with the experts (development of education chains).

In this way, supplemented by appropriate support measures, the competence profile of all participants was gradually expanded in order to prepare them optimally for the demands of the labour market. After passing the competence assessment, the participants were enabled to take the next steps towards qualified employment.

The entire concept of the procedure was based on an individual and holistic conception of human beings and was equally geared to the life and work experience and the cultural characteristics of refugees and migrants. The biographical approach was the prerequisite for determining a comprehensive competence profile of the person seeking advice and formed the starting point of the procedure. The procedure primarily served to systematically record and document informal and non-formal vocational competences as well as their evaluation, verification and certification. A further objective was to increase the employability of the participants. The biographical approach aimed at strengthening the participants' self-confidence and uncovering their potential. This procedure contained both subject-oriented and demand-oriented elements; the methods applied were based on self- and external assessment and allowed a participative and reflexive approach. The aim was to make not only conscious but also unconscious competences, skills and abilities visible, to activate them and to use them to increase individual employability.

The competence assessment procedure was built modularly in a structured way and consisted of the four following modules: M1- Competence-oriented counselling with the aim of identifying key competences (balance-sheet based) and defining the reference profession, self-assessment of professional competences; M2+M3- theoretical and practical external assessment in companies and educational institutions; M4: coaching and support in goal-oriented career planning.

In assessing own professional experience, the participants could choose between three characteristics: "I have much / little / no experience in doing this activity..." There were also three different levels of competence in the external assessment: "0" Competence does not correspond to the required level - competence is not available or hardly exists, participant cannot perform the activity. "1" Competence corresponds little to the required level - competence is recognisable, but not very pronounced - participant can only perform the activity with the help of third parties. "2" Competence largely corresponds to the required level: competence is present- participant can carry out the activity independently. In the external assessment, only those activities were evaluated which were assessed as "much or little experience". The competence levels "1" and "2" were indicated on the certificate. Levels "0" and "1" formed the basis for the qualification recommendation in the specified profession.

The instruments for self-assessment and external assessment were standardised and applicable to every non-regulated occupation in the German dual training system. To ensure the quality of the validation procedures, all validators were individually trained in the use of these instruments. Furthermore, the project staff accompanied all practical validations on site.

Figure 2: Modularity of the competence assessment procedure

Modular competence assessment procedure max. 10 days

Occupation-specific competence assessment max. 7 days

German knowledge is sufficient (B1-B2)

Competence assessment is based on the contents of the respective training regulations and exam questions

competencies are not available

Modul 2 Theoretical assessment of professional competencies

competence assessment procedure can be initiated

competencies are available

max. 1 day

Modul 1 Competence-oriented consultation German level A1-A2

Recording the life / education and employment biography -reference profession Barriers / factors that prevent / promote labor market integration or participation in continuing education

German knowledge is not sufficient

Modul 3 Practical assessment of professional competencies

Competence assessment in companies and in the workshops of educational institutions

max. 2 days

Modul 4 Coaching and support

Advice on job prospects, possible qualifications, vocational training Coaching / accompaniment on entry into work, vocational training, qualification

competence assessment procedure can not be initiated

If the competence assessment is successful, the participant will receive a participation certificate from IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH Ostbrandenburg

A very important element of the competence assessment procedure was the certificate and the corresponding qualification recommendation, which was handed out to the participant and forwarded to the responsible employment agency. The certificate was issued as resource- and not deficit-oriented document. Therefore, the participant was certified only two levels of competence: participant can carry out the activity independently, participant

needs support from third parties. The competence levels: participant needs support from third parties and competence is not recognisable, formed the basis for a qualification recommendation.

Figure 3: Example of a certificate (front and back)

IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH
ULTBRANDENBURG

Teilnahmebescheinigung

XX
geb. am XX.XX.XX

hat an der berufsspezifischen Kompetenzfeststellung in Anlehnung an die
Ausbildungsordnung in dualem Ausbildungsberuf
„Friseur/in"

am

27.08.2018 und 29.08.2018

in

Bernau bei Berlin

teilgenommen und wurde in folgenden Schwerpunkten

☐ theoretisch in einer Prüfungssituation

☒ praktisch anhand von Arbeitsproben

getestet.

Inhaltliche Schwerpunkte:

❖ vorbereitende Arbeiten, Beratung und Kundenbetreuung
❖ Frisurenberatung per Computer oder Frisurenkatalog
❖ Haare und Kopfhaut behandeln
❖ Frisuren formen
❖ Dauerwellen legen
❖ Haare glätten
❖ Haarfarbe verändern
❖ Haare schneiden Herrenfach
❖ Make-up, Augenbrauen, Wimpern sowie Fingernägel gestalten, Handpflege durchführen
❖ Organisatorische Aufgaben erledigen
❖ Kosmetika sowie Haarpflegeprodukte für den Verkauf ansprechend im Schaufenster, in Vitrinen oder auf Regalen präsentieren
  (Erläuterungen siehe Rückseite)

Frankfurt (Oder), 03.09.2018

Geschäftsführer

IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH, vertreten durch den Geschäftsführer Peter Wölffling

Hausanschrift:	Postanschrift:	Telefon:	0335 5621-2000	Internet:	www.ihk-projekt.de
Puschkinstraße 12b	PF 1280	Fax:	0335 5621-2001	E-Mail:	projekt@ihk-projekt.de
15236 Frankfurt (Oder)	15202 Frankfurt (Oder)				

Die berufsspezifische Kompetenzfeststellung erfolgte am 27.08.2018 und 29.08.2018 durch:

SBH Nord GmbH
Schwanebecker Chaussee 14a, 16321 Bernau bei Berlin

Die Schwerpunkte wurden wie folgt bewertet:

	Fachliche Feststellung*
Vorbereitende Arbeiten, Beratung und Kundenbetreuung	
Kunden begrüßen und nach den Wünschen fragen, Typberatung, im Gespräch mit den Kunden das weitere Vorgehen festlegen	1
Haare, Kopfhaut, Gesicht, Fingernägel im Hinblick auf die eventuelle Behandlung individuell beurteilen, unterschiedliche Techniken vorstellen, besondere Vor- oder auch Nachteile erläutern (Pflege der Kopfhaut, Pflege-, Schnitt-, Form- und Färbetechniken der Haare, dekorative Kosmetik und Maniküre)	1
die benötigten Präparate, Werkzeuge und Geräte auswählen und bereitstellen, Handtücher bereitlegen, den Kunden zum Schutz ihrer Kleidung Frisierumhänge umlegen	2
durch das Gespräch mit den Kunden eine vertrauensvolle Atmosphäre schaffen	1
Kunden mit Lesematerial versorgen, eventuell Getränke anbieten	2
Frisurenberatung per Computer oder Frisurenkatalog	
die Gesichter der Kunden z.B. mit einer Digitalkamera aufnehmen	1
die gewünschte oder am besten geeignete Frisur im Bildkatalog des Computers aussuchen	1
das Bild bearbeiten, das Ergebnis ausdrucken und mit den Kunden besprechen	1
Haare und Kopfhaut behandeln	
Haare kämmen und scheiteln (auf Hauterhebungen, wunde Stellen oder Schuppen untersuchen)	1
Kopfhaut und Haare waschen	2
Pflegeprodukte auftragen, einwirken lassen und ausspülen, Kopfmassage anbieten	1
Frisuren formen	
Haare bürsten und durchkämmen, Haare ausfrisieren, ggf. toupieren, Frisur mit Haarspray, Haarlack oder Gel fixieren	1
Dauerwellen legen	
Wickel abnehmen und die Haare ausspülen	1
Haare glätten	
Haare mit Hitzeschutzmittel behandeln und mit Glätteisen glatt ziehen	2
Haarfarbe verändern	
ausspülen und entsprechende haarpflegende Nachbehandlung durchführen	2
Haare schneiden Herrenfach	
Haare entsprechend der gewünschten Frisur erstellen, Bart rasieren bzw. schneiden	2
Make-up, Augenbrauen, Wimpern sowie Fingernägel gestalten, Handpflege durchführen	
Augenbrauen in Form zupfen, ggf. Augenbrauen und Wimpern färben	1
Organisatorische Aufgaben erledigen	
Termine vereinbaren, Kundenkartei pflegen, Produkte bestellen, allgemeine Bürotätigkeiten erledigen	1
Kosmetika sowie Haarpflegeprodukte für den Verkauf ansprechend im Schaufenster, in Vitrinen oder auf Regalen präsentieren	1

*1: Entspricht wenig dem geforderten Niveau- Kompetenz ist erkennbar, jedoch wenig ausgeprägt –Teilnehmer/Teilnehmerin kann die Tätigkeit nur mit Hilfestellung Dritter ausführen.
2: Entspricht weitgehend dem geforderten Niveau: Kompetenz ist vorhanden- Teilnehmer/Teilnehmerin kann die Tätigkeit selbständig ausführen.

IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH, vertreten durch den Geschäftsführer Peter Wölffling

Hausanschrift:	**Postanschrift:**	**Telefon:** 0335 5621-2000	**Internet:** www.ihk-projekt.de
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*Figure 4: Example of a qualification recommendation*

For employers and employment agencies, the results summarised in resource-oriented certificate were understandable and usable to offer suitable job or training measures.

IQ Brandenburg - Competence Assessment: sustainability and effectiveness
The beneficiaries of the validation procedure were unemployed, precariously or not qualification-adequate employed migrants and refugees without a formal vocational qualification. A broad mix of methods adapted to the needs of the participants enabled

people with different language requirements to participate in the validation procedure. During the project period 593 persons took part in the initial counselling for occupational competence assessment, 210 persons participated in the validation process, 76 found a job after the assessment, 59 of them in their tested occupation, 12 found a vocational training place or started a retraining measure.


Figure 5: Impact data
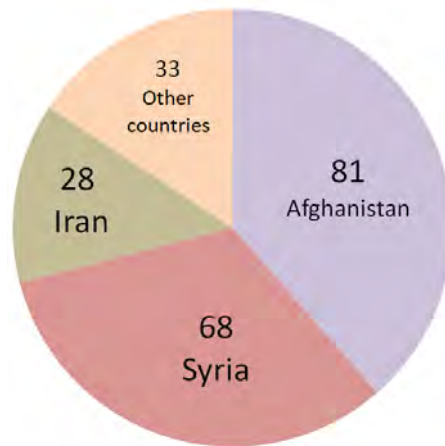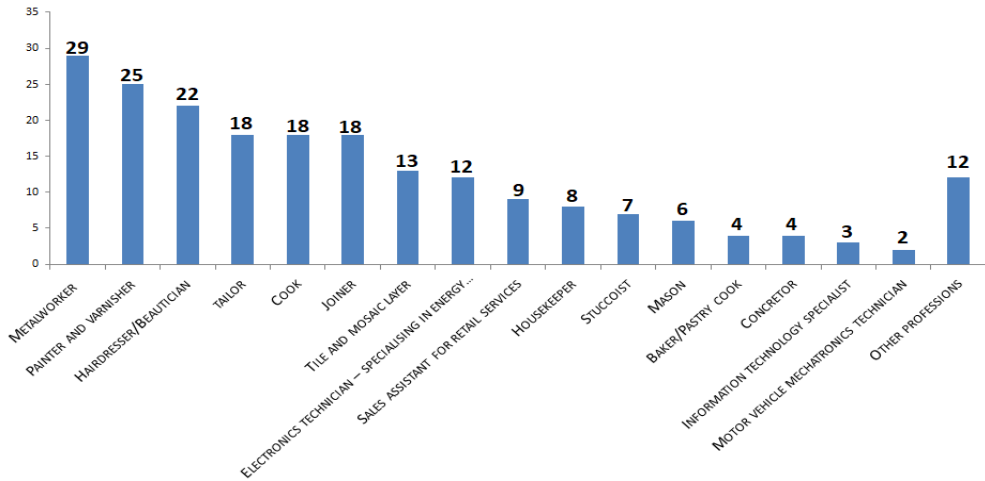
The access to the formal economy based on informal labour market relevant competences can only succeed if all labour market actors accept this way of acquiring skills. In order to ensure the acceptance of the Brandenburg economy, numerous meetings with the regional chambers were held. In several bilateral meetings with the chambers' experts, the possibilities of a valid competence assessment procedure and the practicable approach with regard to the target group were discussed. The joint meetings provided valuable information on the requirements for the VPL procedure, especially with regard to the process modularity, the documentation of the occupation-specific competence assessment and the content of the certificates. The information gained from the expert discussions was incorporated into

the process description of the procedure and formed the basis for the preparation of standardised checklists and documentation templates suitable for regional and institutional transfer. This was a very time-consuming and complex process in order to develop a practicable competence assessment procedure that would be recognised by the business community.

Figure 6: sustainability of the VPL-procedure
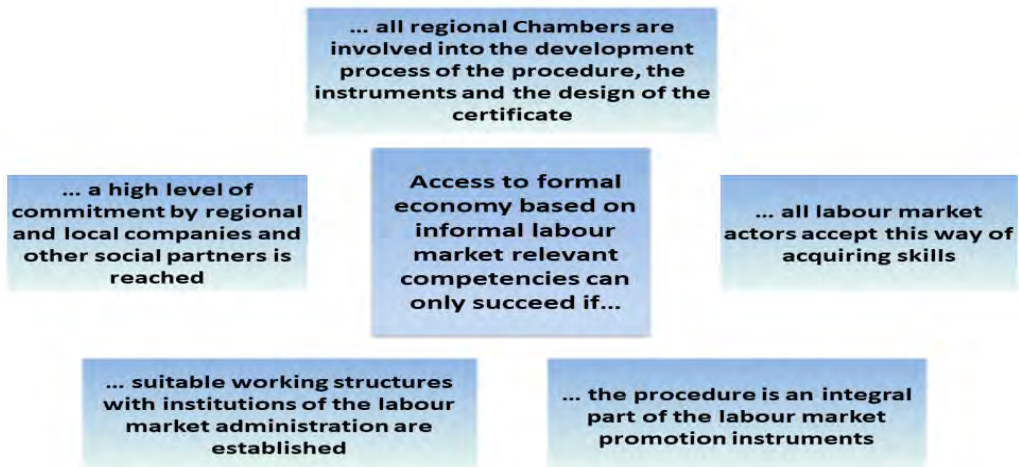
In addition, numerous appointments with institutions of the Brandenburg labour market administration pursued to a large extent the goal of establishing suitable work structures in order to make cooperation as efficient as possible with regard to the interlocking of instruments of labour market promotion.

Concluding remarks

The competence assessment procedure of the IHK Projektgesellschaft mbH is an innovative instrument for sustainable labour market and training integration of migrants and refugees. The procedure is largely in line with the Berlin Declaration on the Validation of Prior Learning, although unfortunately not in all points, such as the legal basis. However, there is a high degree of overlap both in the design of the documentation instruments and the individual process steps and in the definition of the framework conditions.

As the Declaration recommends, all relevant actors from politics, business and labour market administration were involved in the development of the instruments and the establishment of cooperation structures right from the beginning of the project. And this was necessary to ensure acceptance in the economy and society on the one hand and to set high quality standards on the other. The conditions for access to the procedure were defined in such a way that the largest possible number of people could participate in the project. At this point it must be mentioned that the composition of the project team played a decisive role in the successful implementation of the competence assessment procedure. The multidisciplinarity, multiculturalism and multilingualism of the team helped to ensure that people from different professional, linguistic and cultural backgrounds could participate in the project. The group of refugee women in particular could be addressed in a targeted and culturally sensitive manner. In order to bring the persons successfully through the validation

process, the participants were intensively supported in every phase of the process. The recommendations of the Berlin Declaration on the Validation of Prior Learning are particularly reflected in the design of the procedural mechanisms and instruments. In particular, the modularity of the procedure proved to be very useful in carrying out the competence assessment. The flexibility in terms of time and content made it possible for many people to participate in the procedure, taking into account their family situation (e.g. childcare) or their language requirements (only practical competence assessment).

In summary, effective integration of migrants and refugees into the labour and education market requires advanced VPL procedures, both from a social and economic point of view, and a society and economy open to new solutions. The Berlin Declaration on the Validation of Prior Learning provides a very comprehensive framework for the development and implementation of such procedures.

Validation Guidelines

7.3

A starting point for boosting validation in policies

Regione Piemonte, Italy

Introduced by Teresa Valentino

For many years Italy has been lacking a National framework of qualifications inventory and certification standards, while other Countries in Europe already were implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning. In that context Regione Piemonte has been providing one of the most structured certification systems for formal learning since the early years 2000. The regional law which gave origins to this system was based on European principles like citizen's right to mobility, recognition of prior learning and transparency of qualifications. In order to make those rights real, Regione Piemonte has been offering a regional inventory of professional profiles described by competences, a set of procedures for accreditation and computer assisted release of certificates.

As a consequence of the "2012 European Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning", Italy has recently known an interesting implementation of the National certification system, which has been built through a series of laws and decrees (Law 92/2012, Decree 13/2013, Decree 30/06/2015, Decree 8/01/2018 on NQF) defined by State and Regions. In coherence with the evolution at national level, in 2016 Regione Piemonte made a step forward, introducing in its system a set of subjects, procedures and instruments concerning validation and certification of non-formal and informal learning, which were previously realised only in experimentations.

The regional guidelines represent the starting point for developing a validation policy which has been implemented in the past two years through two different authorization procedures:
1. Validation services are financed within Region's public calls where they can be related to other sectorial instruments (e.g. labour services for demand/offer matching).
2. Validation services are authorised by Regione Piemonte, which is the entitling body for certification of both formal and non-formal learning. In this case the services are financed through other funds like European or inter- professional funds.

These regional guidelines provide for standards required by the national certification system concerning operators, process and certification:
- Define entitled subjects for non-formal and informal learning validation.
- Provide for operators specifically trained under regional supervision: they are experts of validation and are responsible for the entire process.
- Set out standard procedures and instruments for each of the three phases of the service (identification, validation, certification).

- Establish standard documents and certificates to be released.

The Validation guidelines have been approved after a testing realised within a pilot project. The first trained operators have been required to give feedback and suggestions which have been included in the final approved guidelines. The following link shows an interview made in October 2018 within a regional campaign to advertise and explain to people - in a simple and direct way- WHAT Regione Piemonte does with ESF financing concerning non formal learning validation. The campaign is called "LO SAPEVI CHE" ("Did you know that?"):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-AgR74CpGs

Reasons for experimenting and previous experiences
During the past 20 years, following European recommendations, Regione Piemonte has implemented non-formal learning validation experimentations despite the lack of a national certification system.
Experimenting is our approach because we believe that you need evidence also in policy, above all when there's something new coming out from regulations and laws. And of course, you need courage, strength and patience because new ideas need time to settle down, even if they work. The first moves in that field were made in the early 2000, targeting family care givers, aiming to emersion of competences acquired through the so called "black job" and trying to give a perspective to those workers who were willing to keep on learning within other training courses.
In 2010 Regione Piemonte was partner of the transnational project "CO.LO.R for migrants" based on experimentation of both ECVET dispositive and validation of competences in care giving and constructions sectors. The project had interesting partnership made by other Regions (Toscana, Agenzia Regionale per il Lavoro – Arlas Regione Campania) and Scotland.
When national regulations moved on giving the Country a set of national standards concerning process and certificates to be released, it was necessary for Regione Piemonte to adjust its own system and catch the opportunity to boost it to further development through the implementation of the first guidelines on non-formal learning validation.
Validation guidelines establish subjects, procedures and instrument to identify, validate and certify previous experience in workplace, free time or volunteering. They are a milestone for developing VLP in Regione Piemonte: thanks to guidelines we managed to turn our expertise in validation into a structured system ready for further evolution.

The goal of the experimentation
Considering the 2012 European recommendation on validation of non-formal learning which gave the deadline (2018) for building national systems of certification in Member States, Italian laws identified in 2013 Regions as "Entitling bodies" for certification of non-formal learning referred to regional qualifications. One of the laws' demands was to identify the "Entitled Bodies" which were to be the only subjects authorised to release the validation services.
In this perspective, Regione Piemonte needed to establish which among the accredited bodies were to be entitled and at the same time provide the system new operators competent for realising these services which were not ruled by the system so far. Finally, and above all, it was necessary to regulate in detail "how" to realise these services which have been released only in experimentations.

The expected output was:
- Establishing conditions for identifying "entitled body".
- Providing operators with specific training in order to create a register of Experts responsible for the whole process.
- Setting out the phases of the validation process (identification, validation and certification);
- Determining standards for intermediate and final certification.

The approach and methodology
Building and releasing the guidelines was a process based on "scientific" and "grass root" approaches. In order to test whether the guidelines would fit in real practical situations, they were tested by involving accredited bodies of our system in the following process steps:
1. Definition of a draft of guidelines based on national requirements on entitling and entitled bodies, phases of the process, instruments, certification requirements and operators needed for the service.
2. Training on the draft of the guidelines.
3. A "group zero" is composed by operators from accredited bodies for training and labour services (public and private) and a regional officer (*the author of the present article)*. The group zero is given specific training on the draft of guidelines.
4. Group zero members organise a *cascade training* on guidelines in the whole Region. The territory is divided in 4 areas and training is granted for each area of the Region. The training on national and regional laws is provided by the regional officer, while the guidelines are taught directly by the other component of group zero.
5. Experimentation of the services with real people. An accredited body with trained operators worked in order to involve people from their database who could be interested in such a new service.
6. Feedback from the experimentation: suggestions and critical points are taken into account for final approval of the regional validation guidelines.

Financial investment and sustainability
The whole experimentation which brought to the final validation Guidelines and whose outputs and activities can be summoned up in training, experimentation, final meeting for result diffusion, demanded 200.000 euros.
The cost of the identification, validation and certification service itself has been established considering similar labour services and it is 35 euros per hour. The service duration has been estimated as follows:
- Identification 4 hours.
- Validation 8 hours.
- Certification depends on the type of qualification. Those who obtain first validation of all the competences which compose a qualification can access to formal examination and gain qualification.

Sustainability is certainly assured and there's a monitoring and follow up of the operators. By the way, the system is still at its first development level and the number of beneficiaries is increasing year by year.
Eventually we aim at identifying a specific standard cost for this service because, due to the intervention required of a labour expert during the validation phase, it is not exactly correspondent to a common "labour service". At the same time, it is not correspondent to a

training service. This is the reason why we periodically meet the operators and try to understand which solutions could fit better the peculiarities of this service.

The experimentation - interviews to beneficiaries and Experts of validation service. I suggest to watch the previous interview first because it gives you the framework in which we experimented: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqZ4b15ViRs

Impact of our experimentation
Building validation guidelines was a process involving different beneficiaries.
First was created the temporary grouping composed by accredited bodies for public and private labour services and for training which were entrusted to realise the experimentation. Then followed the widespread cascade training to the operators: 172 Experts responsible for the process and 150 counsellors trained. These two specific system figures were required by national standards and therefore it was necessary to train them and to give them a role in the regional regulations.
The validation services experimentation involved 139 people: 84 obtained validation certificate and 49 succeeded in obtaining a complete qualification certificate.

After the approval of the guidelines, validation services were realised for:
- Civil Service volunteers (166 people);
- Specific projects authorised by Regione Piemonte but financed by other funds (150 people). Among the projects authorised we had "Discorsi Migranti" which aimed to tackle three crucial aspects for migrants: house, health and competences. Validation was realised within the track "competence" and the project was selected to be presented at the First European Validation Festival in Brussels, organised by the European Commission, in 2018.
- Moreover, we manage to put validation services in labour active policies "*Buono servizio al Lavoro*". It's a specific measure which offers a range of financed services to unemployed people and disadvantaged people (it's described in the first interview).
- It was possible in 2018 for us to preview a validation in a Regional Directive addressing the care givers. We manage to put together all measures of validation, credits recognition, training and traditional labour services. We will have the results next year.
- Last year validation has been introduced in national agreements between State and Regions on some new professions in order to give value to previous experiences. Therefore, we could establish also in our regional rules that it was possible to have less hour of training through validation experiences.

For an interview about the project "Discorsi Migranti", with a description of the validation system: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0tjVrurVmM

Transferability
Validation guidelines can certainly be transferred to other context because contents are consistent to European regulations and the approach is participatory. However, some factors need to be taken into account. it is necessary to analyse national laws of the host country, consider previous cases already realised in that country, make sure to have a good base of operators and bodies willing to work in strict contact with competent administration. It is extremely important that the competent administration devote time and resources to each phase of the process described because operators constantly make questions and need

answer. Of course, funding is essential and, as written before, this case is not very expensive though there are other costs to be considered, like extra work for operators and public officers in order to for example find the accredited body which organise a specific qualification.

The key word to be successful is "create a net and keep it alive". Probably in some context this could mean to have some cultural change, but the result is to feel part of a community where public and private really can make the difference.

Recommendation and Berlin Declaration: a point of view

I would just give some hints concerning how I see the future of validation in my country and they might be useful for countries which have similar elements like complex political framework, cultural peculiarities, organisational and financing challenges.

When we come out from "validation professional environment", the perception about making formal certificates from work experience is so *unbelievable* that common people and also administrator, which are not exactly involved in this topic, hardly can *imagine that it is real and possible.* It is not still clear and transparent where validation leads and why validation is as important as fighting unemployment. Moreover, the enterprises system seems not to be so conscious or ready to welcome validation among workers and also trade unions are only partially aware of the opportunities given.

Costs of validation are not yet fixed. We are trying to work in our meeting among Regions and State to find out from the best regional practices how can we sort it out.

We use instruments linked to the source of financing, which is ESF, with its rules and strict boundaries but we try to practice validation every time because we believe that only through a good number of cases you can relay identify the right cost of the services. (Track 2)

I can see some principal factors which contribute to uncertainty and that can be tackled:
- Common people need more information about validation, what exactly is about, which opportunities can give, how much does it costs, who can release the services. They need to know that is a practice realised in many other Countries and it is not just like a slogan. As I usually tell, *I want validation on television* (*immediately after the advertisement of a brand-new car*).
- Validation also needs institutional communication which helps citizens and administrators to be sure about the framework in which we work (Track 6). Europe should coordinate communication in this delicate phase planning it together with member States. It is necessary that practitioners and administrators are not alone in such a delicate phase.
- Administrators and stakeholders have to make organisational arrangements (Track 1) in order to establish who makes what and how, following which procedures and to build a community based on trust (Track 5). It is true now we have a national system, but implementation takes time and the temptation to *"play with the new toy"* can lead to a confusing future for our Country. Validation needs trust from the market actors. You will not boost something that is not recognized and valued by the employers and as a consequence by the workers neither.
- Events like the VPL Biennale and the European Validation festival, should somehow be more capable to "create a net, and keep it" (Track 4). Participating to International and European events is an occasion to see that things actually can happen, to share points of view on common problems, to elaborate new ideas, to learn and to feel more European thanks to the exchange with other people and the huge amount of new information

received. I think this energy and net among professional should be kept alive somehow, also through video call or webinar or visits from the EC in our country.

Every day we try to open new roads for validation services solving problems. Every problem sorted out is a step forward to the optimum. We do it because we believe and want that one day our citizens will find and choose these services just like today they can find and choose a training course.

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The VPL Biennale is about Validation of Prior Learning -systematics for lifelong learning, working, and living. It's about sharing experiences, information, knowledge, ideas and visions on VPL as an essential part of lifelong learning. And it is about the creative process of recognizing each other's successes, problems and solutions in 'the international VPL-community'.

The VPL-Biennale concept was designed and initiated by the *Foundation European Centre Valuation Prior Learning (EC-VPL)* for the Erasmus+ project ALLinHE in 2012. Its focus was on social inclusion for all in learning and working environments by developing VPL-approaches to link target groups with learning opportunities. After Rotterdam 2014 and Aarhus 2017, the 3rd VPL Biennale was hosted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Berlin, Germany, May 7-8, 2019. This Biennale aimed at strengthening the global platform for policy makers, practitioners, users, researchers and other stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of Validation of Prior Learning in learning and working processes. SAQA will host the upcoming 4th VPL Biennale in South-Africa in 2022.

The **main theme** of the 3rd VPL Biennale in 2019 was *"Making Policy Work – Validation of Prior Learning for education and the labour market"*. The following questions were central to the conference and its work sessions:

- How can bridges be built among stakeholders from the worlds of business, volunteering, and education in order for VPL results to have value?
- What forms of financing have to be in place in order to make VPL accessible to all learners?
- What kinds of procedures and instruments provide valid results and can cater for a large number of candidates?
- What support structures have to be available in order to reach disadvantaged learners?
- What follow-up measures are required for validation to facilitate further learning and enhanced career paths?
- What issues need to be addressed by laws and regulations for VPL to be effective?

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