The many perspectives of the Valuation of Prior Learning in the European workplace

Managing European diversity in lifelong learning

Edited by
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PREFACE

RUUD DUVEKOT

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that *initial education is no longer enough for a lifetime social-economic career.* It is more important to develop your competencies (skills, knowledge, attitude & ambitions) throughout life by realising that `your glass is already half full', and by understanding that everyone always learns in every possible learning environment: formal (school) and non-formal or informal environments (like workplace, at home, volunteering).
The Leonardo-project "Managing European diversity in lifelong learning (VPL2)" aimed at strengthening the use of valuation of non-formal and informal learning for both summative and formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the valuation of prior learning by individuals and organisations, supported by a more demand-led and customer-oriented learning system.

Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) means:
1. Valuation shows the real human potential of personal competencies;
2. VPL is the process of (a) assessing and validating personal competencies within the social-economic context and (b) offering a personal development-strategy;
3. VPL focuses on the individual perspective and makes the (public and private) system customer-driven for the sake of personal development;
4. VPL shows the way how organisations have or should articulate the need for competencies in their HRM, facilitate the learning process of their employees and connect their demand-articulation to the competencies standards of the learning system;
5. Organisations benefit from VPL through individuals' development.

More than 200 case studies were analysed in 11 European countries representing the main European learning cultures: Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The analysis showed that this goal was served by working both top-down as well as bottom-up. The bottom-up approach made the specific needs for lifelong learning on the labour market in different sectors visible. The 'top-down' data showed the various services national and sectoral learning systems are already offering to or designing for the potential users, i.e. the modern, lifelong learning workers. Both approaches were used simultaneously on three sectoral levels (profit, non-profit and voluntary sector) and in the seven different European learning cultures.

Evidence showed that top-down and bottom-up met each other halfway, empowering individuals and organisations to serve their summative and formative purposes by defin-

ing and *creating zones of mutual trust* for the use of validation-principles on a sectoral level in the variety of European learning cultures. Furthermore, analysis of the case studies showed the opportunities for designing individual learning-routes to qualification, certification and career-steps that could be generated by individuals themselves on the basis of their non-formal & informal learning, using portfolios and other available `valuation-services'. In this way, practice showed the potential in the European knowledge-society for:

- citizens to get more control of their careers,
- organisations (profit, non-profit, volunteer, communities and citizenship) to develop better articulation for their need for competencies and
- the learning-system (VET, HE, etc) to become more customer-oriented and demand-led.

The VPL-evidence in this project shows the diversity in lifelong learning across Europe indicating where the common features prevail and where one learning culture can learn from another. The main result of the project is the creation of role models in the workplace. See **www.vpl4.eu** for the data on the vpl-evidence.
In this way we aim at showing that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture, and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the valuation-principles. And why this is so relevant and of great value to the citizens and their organisations of Europe is explained by the 2nd preface by our Lithuanian partner!

DIAGNOSIS: VPL.LT

GIEDRE BELECKIENE & LINA VAITKUTE

It took us nine months to explore the Valuing Prior Learning in Lithuanian organisation's workfloors. The Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training interviewed 21 respondents within 3 sectors (profit, non-profit and volunteer). Case studies revealed a multi-purpose character of VPL. In the profit sector employers use VPL when recruiting new personnel and identifying training needs for the development of staff competence. In the non-profit sector VPL is applied in recruitment, assessing and planning of upskilling processes at institutional level as well as in licensing and certification procedures. A distinctive feature of the non-profit sector is that legal acts regulate sector's human resources qualification development, especially in regulated professions. In the voluntary sector VPL procedures are mainly used for the selection of new volunteers and observation of their competencies as well as the development of their motivation and self-confidence.
Analysis of case studies revealed that organisations dealing with VPL lack both appropriate instruments as well as human resources having relevant experience or training; usually VPL is not linked to formal qualifications; there is a low awareness of VPL among both, individuals and organisations. What is the most interesting thing is that organisations are actually 'doing VPL but they're not realising they're doing it'.

What can be expected in the future? With recent legislation changes, positive VPL developments are awaited. For example, a new edition of Law on VET (approved in 2007) introduces a system of qualifications that should facilitate VPL. It also foresees procedures for recognition of competencies as a qualification or a part of it. In addition, a number of ongoing projects will create favourable conditions for VPL, e.g. Qualification system development; VET standards further development; Creation and development of vocational knowledge and skills assessment system; Development of Open Information, Guidance and Counselling System.

"The unfinished story of VPL…" opens spaces for personal and organisational development, national and international cooperation in exchange of instruments, valuable experience, training of VPL specialists – valuators as well as dissemination of VPL ideas and value. Let's continue the story of VPL together!

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INTRODUCTION

VPL is about empowerment, employability and lifelong learning

RUUD DUVEKOT, GREG SCANLON, ANNE-MARIE CHARRAUD, KEES SCHUUR, DERMOT COUGHLAN, TORILD NILSEN-MOHN, JOS PAULUSSE, RUUD KLARUS

In the current knowledge society, interest is slowly but surely shifting from 'hard' production factors such as machines and instruments to 'soft' factors, human capital and the "knowledge society". (Brinkley & Lee, 2004) Of primary interest are human learning potential, capacity and flexibility, i.e. the individual employability-potential. It makes no difference whether one is working, learning or seeking work. Employability is about getting or keeping the opportunity to perform, to contribute to society, by having a paid job, being a valued volunteer or contributing in other ways to society; in short, employability is about getting or keeping a job. Learning is at the heart of being employable as an individual, while working encompasses all kinds of activity, from paid work to voluntary work and active citizenship. In this way learning is also strongly linked to employability, or the many ways to empower people in order to be a socially and economically active member of society.
In order to be empowered and employable you have to define all your competencies such as knowledge, ambition, skills and attitude. A competence is actually to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from his or her actions. The modern knowledge society has a major interest in capitalising on this, whether through formal learning pathways in the school system during certain periods in life or through non-formal and informal pathways in other periods.

The knowledge society, with its increasing speed of change, needs besides the validation of the competencies, a process of valuation and a market place that supports the changing needs in the flexible market, contexts, and the social-psychological changes of the human beings. Therefore, lifelong learning is about making use of personal competencies. Everyone should be aware that people are always learning everywhere, and above all, not always in a conscious or self-chosen learning situation. The degree in which individuals and the knowledge society consciously build on this is still strongly underexposed and under-utilised. In the knowledge society, the focus is or should be on the individual learning process.
A complicating factor in dealing with this focus is that the formal procedures of teaching, training and assessment describe only a very limited part of the individual learning potential or competencies. Competencies acquired in informal and non-formal situations are also essential for optimal performance on the labour market or in social functions.
This complexity of individual learning and the opportunities it offers for the knowledge society were recognised in Europe in 1995 in the White Paper of the European Commission: *Towards the Learning Society* (1995). While learning within the formal systems for education and training is a distinguishing factor of a modern society, learning that

takes place outside this sphere is much more difficult to identify and value. The proposals of the White Paper used "Lifelong Learning" as a central organising concept. These proposals provided the base for "Valuing Learning" which became one of the Key Messages of the Communication on Lifelong Learning. (European Commission 2001) Since this Communication, the invisibility of all sorts of learning processes has been problematised. This problem was related to all levels of the individual (different employability-potential, knowledge and application levels) and society (all levels: international, national, regional, local, sectoral and organisation).
With that, the focus in Lifelong Learning policy slowly shifted from the traditional approach of 'learning in the classroom' to the wish to utilise 'other learning environments' such as work environment, independent learning, remote learning, implicit learning and leisure activities. This actually meant making use of non-formal and informal learning. This started up the general process of identification, assessment, valuation and accreditation of all formal, non-formal and informal learning. But still the valuing itself is pulled into the formal accreditation system, mainly directed to the formal job descriptions, instead of becoming an individual means to personal ends focusing on one's career-opportunities. Lately, for instance in the European Common Principles on the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2004), we see a shift to the valuation of competencies developed in all possible learning environments. We refer to this as the process of Valuation of Prior Learning. ' Valuing learning' is in a way *dealing with half-filled glasses instead of the traditional half-empty ones!* Other terms used to describe the process are Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning, Recognition of Prior Learning or (in French) Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience.

'Valuing learning' has two main paths, a summative and a formative one. The summative approach aims at an overview of competencies, recognition and valuation. Its goal is certification, where individuals seek this goal.
When 'valuing learning' goes one step further and includes practical learning and/or personal competence-development, we call this the formative approach of 'valuing learning'. This approach is pro-active and aims at development by designing a personal learning, career and development path. 'Valuing learning' is a practical strategy that demonstrates and develops employability-potential for many purposes, that bridges individual learning processes and any kind of their social-economic utilisation of individual competencies.
In the development of lifelong learning, the link between formal and non-formal learning is surely one of the most difficult. In many countries, the formal education systems have become more flexible in recognising non-formal learning. However, most individuals still lack access to a life-long and life-wide learning continuum. The crux therefore is to discuss the way lifelong learning is inevitably moving towards a process steered by the individuals. This 'individual element' is surely a revolutionary breakthrough, overlooking more than 500 years of vocational training where the learner had little influence over formal

learning, while social partners and authorities historically controlled vocational training. The goal of this book is to show the diversity in lifelong learning across Europe indicating where the common features prevail and where one learning culture can learn from another. The road to more self-steered lifelong learning is visible in many different ways across Europe. So, in order to be able to manage lifelong learning it is important to show that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture; and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the valuation-principles. And that's just what this book and the project "Managing European diversity in lifelong learning" are about.

Europe's learning cultures

Each country has its own culture, identity, history and practices on education and training and also has its own approach and system for education and training. We describe this specific approach as the learning culture in a certain country. Since the learning cultures – and therefore, also the policy on 'valuing learning', which is based on this learning culture – can vary widely within Europe, the systems for 'valuing learning' also vary. Many countries have been involved with 'valuing learning' in one way or another, and it is interesting to study the various approaches in more detail. The concept and process of 'valuing learning' provides a perspective with which to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each country's systems and frameworks. This facilitates mutual knowledge exchange in which all countries can have an interest. It can be called bench learning (Karlöf 2001) since the active learning of each other's strong points takes place based on benchmarking.
A cluster model was used in *Making Learning Visible* (Bjørnåvold 2000) to describe the various learning cultures. Mutual learning takes place through geographic proximity and institutional similarities of the countries within each cluster. This has led to the observation that, overall, 'valuing learning' approaches within each cluster often resemble one another.

In *The Unfinished story of 'VPL in Europe* (Duvekot et al 2005) this model was adjusted in order to reflect the current situation in Europe. For example, Switzerland was added to the dual system. Furthermore, the French, Belgian and Dutch systems were added as separate learning cultures, characterised by different types of top-down steering on implementing VPL. In the Leonardo-project *Managing European diversity in lifelong learning* this cluster-approach has been updated and used to analyse the variety of VPL-usage in Europe. The cluster model at present focuses on seven learning cultures. In the course of this project these learning cultures might be described in an even greater variety in order to catch (and respect) Europe's diversity for the sake of embedding VPL on the levels of the *learning individual, organisation and system*.

Figure 1: Europe's main learning cultures

System	Characteristics	Countries
The dual system	Learning while working; social pacts; VET-levels	Germany, Austria, Switzerland
The Mediterranean approach	Regional; flexible and implicit	Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal
The North European model	Government-driven; regional; VET-levels	Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden
The Atlantic model	Demand-steered, portfolio-based vocational training	England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland
The French System	Top-down; legislation; incl. higher education	France, Belgium
The Low Countries model	Supply-driven; shared responsibilities; bottom-up implementation	The Netherlands
The East European model	Top-down; in transition due to entering EU	Bulgaria, Rumania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Baltic States, Slovakia

The Leonardo-project worked along this European pattern, asking many questions, such as:
- What are the features and essential system elements of learning in this cluster?
- Does the cluster primarily focus on academic education or on vocational education?
- How is adult education organised and are concepts such as 'life-long learning' translated into practice?
- What status does a completed vocational training course or an academic education provide?
- Is the policy focused more on individual development, on strengthening sectors or on consolidating the educational concept?

The description of these elements leads us to the nature and content of 'valuing learning' approaches that are developed within various clusters or are still largely in development. Between and within the clusters there is a lot of variation on the 'valuing learning' need, realisation and methods. Together these learning cultures present us a view on the transition that is taking from the present knowledge society towards the learning society. In the next paragraph, we will indicate the critical success factors and learning issues derived from these two projects for the 'transition-debate'.

The project "Managing European diversity in lifelong learning (VPL2)"

The project aimed at strengthening the use of valuation of non-formal and informal learning for both summative and formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the validation of non-formal and informal learning by individuals and organisations, supported by a more demand-driven and customer-oriented learning system. More than 200 case studies were analysed in 11 European countries (Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the UK). The analysis showed that this goal was served by working both top-down as well as bottom-up. The bottom-up approach made visible the specific needs for lifelong learning on the labour market in different sectors. The 'top-down' data showed the various services national and sectoral learning systems are already offering to or designing for the potential users, i.e. the modern, lifelong learning workers. Both approaches were used simultaneously on three sectoral levels (profit, non-profit and voluntary sector) and in the seven different European learning cultures.

The partners worked on the analysis of case studies in the main European learning cultures by:
- gathering, analysing & comparing the practices,
- identifying critical success factors,
- knowledge exchange on weaknesses and strengths,
- formulating a general approach to implement validation-principles in any learning culture,
- showing specific forms of implementation through role models,
- disseminating the results within all learning cultures.

By working in this way (two approaches, three key-sectors and seven European learning cultures) the project enforced the empowerment of individuals and organisations in Europe's knowledge-society as well as making the learning system itself more demand-driven and customer-oriented. In a sense, evidence showed that top-down and bottom-up met each other halfway, empowering individuals and organisations to serve their summative and formative purposes by defining and creating *zones of mutual trust* for the use of validation-principles on a sectoral level in the variety of European learning cultures. Furthermore, analysis of the case studies showed the opportunities for designing individual learning-routes to qualification, certification and career-steps that could be generated by individuals themselves on the basis of their non-formal & informal learning, using portfolios and other available `valuation-services'. In this way, practice showed the potential in the European knowledge-society for:
- citizens to get a better grip on their careers,
- organisations (profit, non-profit, volunteer, communities and citizenship) to develop better articulation for their need for competencies,

– society to make better use of its available competencies,
– the learning-system (VET, HE, etc) to become more customer-oriented and demand-driven.

In this way, the empirical data from the case studies contribute to closing the gap between VET and the labour market with respect to different European cultures. Each case study consists of the description of the validation-process between individuals and organisations and the support that the learning system is giving (or not). In effect, the case studies stress the fact that RPL isn't good enough – it doesn't go far enough. We need to focus on VPL. The benefits to the individual citizen as well as those for the national labour market can be enhanced through the Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL).

VPL can be explained in the following statements:
– *Valuation shows the real human potential* on the basis of the analysis and valuation of personal competencies. *Valuation of Prior Learning is the process of assessing and validating personal competencies* within a specific socio-economic context and offering a personal development strategy. *VPL focuses on the individual perspective* and makes the (public and private) system customer-driven for the sake of personal development.
– *Organisations benefit from VPL* since individuals develop within their context.
– *The VPL process in general consists of five phases:*
  – commitment and awareness of the value of one's competencies
  – recognition of personal competencies
  – valuation and/or validation of these competencies
  – (advice on the) development of one's competencies
  – structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy.

The VPL-evidence in this project shows the diversity in lifelong learning across Europe indicating where the common features prevail and where one learning culture could learn from another. The main result of the project is the creation of role models in the work-place; showing that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture; and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make out of the validation-principles a manageable tool for lifelong learning.

Transition towards the learning society

The general message from this Leonardo-project is that 'valuing learning' is a strong concept giving true evidence of the transition that's going on from the present knowledge society towards the (near) future learning society. Society changes from a knowledge-economy into a learning society where the need for a good balance between the powers of learning individuals, organisations and knowledge infrastructure will be recreated and the

learner gets a real say in lifelong learning. The change is reflected on three levels: economically (employability), socially (empowerment) and educationally (real lifelong learning). A fourth level on which the change is having its impact, can also be distinguished, the civil society.

'Valuing learning' as a learning strategy therefore reflects the change towards a learning society in which the individual learner takes more responsibility for his/her own lifelong learning process. It also means that the individual learner changes the existing 'balance of power' in learning processes themselves because he/she will be guiding lifelong learning with his/her own portfolio. In this portfolio, the learning outcomes that he/she has achieved are documented together with the relevant evidence. These portfolios will create a new balance within learning as a process and contribute a positive change in the individual's social identity.

The goals of 'valuing learning' for the main stakeholders are as follows:
- the individual: stimulating self-investment in learning, showing learning outcomes,
- the organisation: facilitating employees' self-investment and articulation of competencies,
- society: matching learning to needs; steering learning outcomes.

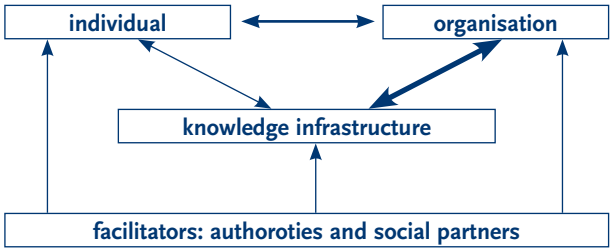
The emphasis on learning outcomes is in line with the development of common structures of education and training across Europe and is associated with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Thus, valuing learning will contribute to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour. At national level, learning outcomes are a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks in order to stimulate economic development and promote social cohesion (European Council 2006).

The conditions for creating the learning society in which these benefits can come to fruition are:
- A transparent, output-oriented knowledge infrastructure;
- Creating mutual trust by focusing on the available quality-system based on the judgement of existing assessment processes used by schools and universities;
- A transparently structured education sector that allows a flexible flow of participants from one layer of sector to another, both intra- as well as inter-sectoral;
- Universal, transparent and interchangeable procedures and reports on the competencies that have been valued;
- Close relations between educational institutions and their surroundings (enterprises, government institutions, institutions in the field of (re) integration of unemployed into the labour market);
- Creating possibilities for developing and executing individual tailor made learning paths;

– Facilities for financing flexible tailor made individual learning routes, such as an individual learning account;
– Clear communication to citizens about the technical and financial arrangements for education and 'valuing learning'.
– Development of an individual right for portfolio-assessment and career-advice.

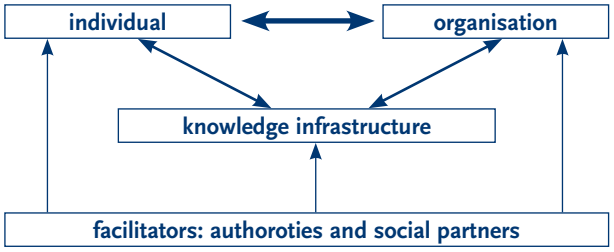
In the figures below, the present and the expected balance of power between these three levels are reflected. Authorities and social partners are facilitating this balance by laws and regulations that take away problems for creating flexible and dynamic learning processes of the learning society. Society is moving towards a way to deal with lifelong learning by creating a dominant relationship between learner and organisation and a second relationship being the dependency of both 'players' on the services rendered by the knowledge infrastructure.

Figure 1: Valuing Learning in the knowledge economy (at present)



Black arrows point out the dominant relationships in both learning areas. Above you can see the imbalance between the main actors in lifelong learning and the focus on summative goals. Below you see in figure 2 that 'empowerment' as the last transition brings balance in the learning-field. The focus can shift now to the formative goals of learning.

Figure 2: Valuing Learning in the learning society (situation in the near future)



Commitment as a key to future implementation

Taking all the lessons into consideration, a successful system for 'valuing learning' able to open up the traditional learning system will at least have to comply with three conditions. Assessment standards should aim at 'civil effect' for the sake of formative goals: they should, in other words, be closely connected to the formative standards used in the workplace; the quality assurance of the assessment procedure has to be efficient, clear and transparent, and, finally, access has to be easy for individuals:

– *An assessment standard aiming at 'civil effect'*. Assessment standards must meet the requirements of validity, acceptance, feasibility and functionality. Standards must be the 'property' of employer and employee. Correspondence with existing national qualification structures for vocational training should be sought. This offers the best possible assurance of the civil effects of qualifications acquired through prior learning assessment procedures, ranging from admissions to and exemptions from particular training courses, to further steps in the career development path.
  This will help education systems to open up and to respond quickly to required changes. For example, the design of standards for assessment is increasingly competence-driven. The standards are linked both to the competence requirements of professional practice and to the content of the supply of education and training. Cross-sector competencies important to employability can also be defined. The capacity to define these assessment standards will also encourage the development of course-independent tests and examinations. The existing tests are rarely course-independent. Finally, the development of a recognition procedure for assessors creates confidence in the value of the accreditation procedure.
  An important condition to create such an open situation is that the standards are made more industry-driven. The labour market should preferably decide for itself which competencies are required for accreditation as a practitioner in a particular profession. This relates not only to knowledge but also to skills and attitudes. In this case, the accreditation must be integrated into the corporate strategy. Only by focusing on formative goals does this usage of civil effect act as a means and not an end in itself and can be a powerful tool in turning learning into a lifelong learning-facilitator of one's employability and empowerment.
– *Quality assurances of the assessment procedures.* In most countries, the government is directly or indirectly responsible for assuring the quality of the assessment standard. The quality of the standard can be controlled by establishing procedures for standard development and by using a programme of requirements for the design of standards (or qualification structures). The key quality criteria are validity, acceptance, functionality, transparency and comparability of structures.
  The quality of prior learning assessment affects various parties with an interest in the assessment results. The government must supervise or regulate the quality (validity, reliability and fairness) of the assessment results. It can delegate these responsibili-

ties to third parties, but remains answerable for quality supervision. The design of the quality assurance system could include an auditing of the assessment centres' internal quality assurance systems (as in the case of ISO certification), together with a system of random investigations of the validity and reliability of assessment results, conducted by independent research institutes. Criteria for the quality of assessment results can be drawn from the general requirements for assessment: validity and reliability. Naturally, both concepts must be operationalised specifically for prior learning assessment procedures.

– *Accessibility of procedures.* Prior learning assessment procedures must be accessible to individuals and companies. Accessibility is determined by the recognition and acceptance of the accreditation. It is also determined by the accessibility of the organisations that implement the assessment procedures and their affordability. Access to competence recognition systems is determined by the features of the system itself and by the availability of financial resources. Decentralised supply of assessments increases the accessibility of the system. 'Decentralised' refers to the regional distribution of prior learning assessment and implementation of the procedures at the employee's place of work or training course.
  Another condition for accessibility is that the system is workable and efficient for users. Time-consuming and bureaucratic procedures are disastrous to accessibility. The funding of prior learning assessment procedures is a fundamental condition for the use of the system. A decentralised and workable system that nevertheless costs the users too much will reduce access to the procedures.

To conclude, when these three conditions are met, commitment to transition will develop fully. There will be plenty of space to build strong commitment for new ways of learning, both within circles of government, education sector and social partners. Commitment after all is the most essential precondition for making use of prior learning assessment and thereby changing the 'look' of the formal learning system. Commitment means that all parties involved will take up their own responsibility. For the education sector, this will not be very easy since learning is traditionally more supply-oriented than demand-oriented. Competence-based learning and prior learning assessment will however make learning more a matter of fun again, since learning will be made more to measure. The motivation of the learners will therefore be much higher. For teachers and schools, this will then also be very stimulating and inspiring.
But above all, VPL focuses on the individual perspective and makes the learning system (even) more customer-driven for the sake of personal development. Organisations benefit from VPL since individuals develop themselves within the organisation-context and learn to create demand-steered lifelong learning strategies on the basis of the articulation of their need for specific and/or generic competencies.
In this sense one could state that learning will not only be a matter of employability but also of enjoyability!

VPL it is, once again!

In this book we aim at showing the diversity of the use of VPL within the European learning area. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the possibilities for designing and implementing a competence-based knowledge-infrastructure in which on national, sectoral and even organisational level all the existing services will be offered in due time in an integral approach to individuals and organisations. All contributions tell their own story, showing the diversity of VPL and its contribution to implementing lifelong learning within Europe. They either tell a more general story or a specific one. The goal is to learn from this diversity.

Experimentations with the Valuation of Prior Learning are numerous in Europe. A first glance at the different countries that took part in the project 'Managing European diversity in lifelong learning' shows a diversity of practices not only due to economical differences but also to political and cultural aspects.
In the first chapter the methodology that was developed and used in this project is presented by Anne-Marie Charraud and Ruud Duvekot.
The hypothesis of the project concerned the idea that this diversity of VPL-practices could actually help solving the problems that countries, especially their citizens and organisations, encounter in their efforts to make effective and efficient use of lifelong learning-strategies for the sake of economical and social progress. Collecting many case studies on VPL together might give 'bottom-up' evidence of sharing problems and solutions across the countries present in this project and give a glimpse of solutions regardless of language and culture differences. It might even be the case that within the different learning cultures systems were set up with more common (referential of values, procedures organised, actors involved….) than different issues. This would mean that 'a half-filled glass' – as the metaphor for the so-called lifelong learner – can be looked upon form different angles; it might even be filled up with many different kinds of liquid and flavours. But it remains a half-filled glass!
So the aim was to find out what the common grounds for the use of VPL are in the diversity of Europe's lifelong learning. On the basis of these common grounds we expected to be able to learn from each other and communicate more properly on the major challenges the Learning Society faces: the need for more self-management of competencies, more demand-articulation on the labour market and a stronger focus on learning-made-to-measure in the learning system. And as it turned out, the project-partners ended up with five grids to get a better grip on the VPL-evidence presented in the case studies.

In the VPL project participants from 19 organisations located in 11 European countries wrote about 200 case descriptions including a SWOT-analysis on VPL projects or activities. The descriptions concerned VPL projects in profit, not for profit as well as the voluntary sector. A total of 128 of these cases was used in the course of this project for

performing an in-depth cross-case analysis. This analysisis presented in the 2nd chapter by Ruud Klarus, Kees Schuur and Karen van Hoeij.
The aim of the cross-case analysis was to answer the question whether the differences between countries would mean that the aim of drawing up a European framework on VPL is possible or stays a mission impossible. We differentiated between profit, not for profit and voluntary sector. This made is possible to answer the question whether sectoral or national differences are more important in creating VPL procedures, pre-requisites for VPL, formal acceptance and public support for VPL.
By using the SWOT analyses we were able to compare strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of VPL in the different sectors and countries. This makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that play a central role in developing VPL in different contexts. In the analyses a distinction is also made between a systems and an individual point of view. Developing understanding of these contextual factors and using different perspectives may create a common and shared agenda on the next step towards that European framework.

Jens Bjørnåvold discusses in his contribution the potential impact of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) on policies and practises in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The main question asked is whether the EQF – and the emerging National Qualifications Frameworks – may facilitate the introduction of permanent, high quality approaches to the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in all European countries?
The European Parliament when speaking on the EQF, made a particular reference to the link between the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Parliament underlined that the EQF should be seen as an instrument for building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, for example by broadening the basis of qualifications and opening up towards the learning taking place outside formal institutions and systems. The emphasis of the European Parliament can thus be seen as indication of the increasing importance attributed to validation all over Europe. But it can also be seen as an indication that the EQF is seen as an instrument for promoting a more comprehensive approach to validation in Europe.
Bjørnåvold states that whether the EQF actually will function as an instrument for promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning, still is an open question. The strong momentum created around the EQF, based on a general acceptance of the relevance of the framework, may however be seen as an opportunity for pursuing a more systematic policy in this field.

The contribution from John Konrad in the fourth chapter discusses the ways in which the Common European Principles on the Identification and Validation of Non-formal Learning (2004) and the Education and Training 2010 work programme has shaped a UK

response to the draft occupational and training standards developed. The selected context is Initial Teacher Education and Training for the Lifelong Learning Sector. There are a number of qualifications proposed as a means of delivering the statutory requirement for Teacher qualification from September 2007. This context will be described in more detail below. The context provided by the EuroguideVAL project is discussed and then the ways in which a pilot Unit was developed and submitted for approval to Lifelong Learning UK. Finally, some possible implications are identified in the context of the European Union Lisbon Objectives.

The Irish case presented by Dermot Coughlan and Greg Scanlon in the 5th chapter gives strong evidence of on the one hand the difficulties of obtaining valuable case studies for the project and on the other hand the added value for promoting lifelong learning once having described and analysed them. It proves that the real winner is the individual learner.
The Irish contribution firstly describes the difficult process of collecting the case studies on a national basis. From a starting point of wondering if they could identify sufficient case studies to be in a position to state that the review was a "national" one the Irish team arrived at the position where they had to take some hard decisions regarding which cases they would eventually include in the report. The overall finding however is that the recognition and validation of prior learning is very much part of the national educational agenda. Through the work of the NQAI, FETAC and HETAC it is clear that there is a commitment from the Irish national bodies to not just support the practice of recognition and validation of prior learning but to put systems and regulations in place to ensure that all educational establishments have policies and procedures in place to facilitate this development. Through the support of the VPL2 project the efforts of these bodies have been strengthened in a number of ways but the primary one was the organisation of a national dissemination event at the University of Limerick.
Secondly, the Irish case proves that the real achievement of VPL is not at the institutional level but at the level of the individual learner. For the many individuals who for one reason or another saw the door to the continuum of educational advancement firmly closed in their faces, the recognition and validation of prior learning has opened individual pathways for all learners to achieve their educational goals. The recognition and validation of prior learning is a way to achieve this. More importantly however because of the uniqueness of each individuals own experience, the use of this tool will assist in ensuring that the massification of education retains an element of the individual.

Ruud Duvekot argues in the 6th chapter that the underlying premise of VPL is the principle of *valuing learning*, or an understanding that most learning takes place both independently of educational programme and on an ongoing basis. VPL is inextricably linked to empowerment, or activation of lifelong learning for the purposes of employability. The

developing process of professional training and the analysis of the developing VPL system can shed light on the changing relationships between actors in current professional training, and may even offer a few glimpses of developments in:
– learning, the transition to lifelong learning strategies;
– working, the transition to employability;
– civic activation/re-activation, the transition to individual empowerment.
This contribution begins by defining some of the most important terms within VPL and follows with an outline of the development in the Netherlands of professional training from the Middle Ages to the present. Thereafter, an elaboration is presented on today's perspectives on professional training, with a central focus on presenting a general VPL process model.

The 7th chapter by Anne-Marie Charraud describes the French approach in the field of VPL. It explains the different legal and practical issues contributing to the settlement of the "Validation des Acquis d'Expérience – VAE". After an historical description this contribution presents the state of art of the process set up in 2002. This approach permits to explore the large range of VPL aims and practices which coexist under the term of VPL. The different steps of the French approach can be read as a kind of inventory of practices and problematics related to VPL.

Torild Nilsen-Mohn reflects in her contribution on the need for better linking of formal, non-formal and informal learning in the Nordic countries. This has been a goal of many Nordic initiatives and projects both at national and local levels. Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is believed to open up for more flexible pathways between formal education and training and workplace and institutional learning. Most effort has been made in relation to establishing formal procedures in the education system where the curricula of the formal education system have been the main standard on which basis an individual's non-formal and informal learning is assessed and recognised. But in all the Nordic countries there is an ongoing discussion about the risk of marginalising or ignoring competencies that have value for employers and the labour market. In all of the Nordic countries the tripartite cooperation between government, the social partners and other stakeholders has formed a shared responsibility and may make it easier to develop unified systems of valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The chapter by Bénédicte Halba focuses on the way the VPL2 project has contributed to enhance volunteering as a key issue in Valuing Prior Learning and how far volunteering can bring an added-value to the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship, in the society of competence. The main challenge lies in the acceptance of voluntary work as an added value to one's portfolio. After that comes the realisation that these competencies really matter and make a stronger personal case for the sake of employability and further

– lifelong – learning. Surely a relevance that needs more acceptance and especially recognition.

Anita Calonder Gerster and Kees Schuur aim in the tenth chapter at describing a framework, including benchmarktool, for:
- Defining the principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and informal learning
- Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality
- Setting up a frame of reference for the application

This framework is intended to become a Charter that sets out to give a major contribution to realizing a society that empowers individuals to act in an autonomous way (individual success) and to participate and integrate in modern society and in the labour market (success for society). The efforts are concentrating on building a sustainable Competence Culture within an active, permanent and wide dissemination of Lifelong Learning.
The questionnaire is an accompanying instrument to the Charter and serves as a benchmark tool by testing any VPL-system / -procedure. It conveys institutions, providers' insight in the principles essential for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal, non-formal and informal learning. It specifies the processes, procedures and supporting actions, which guarantee access and quality.

In the contribution of Paul Bonsema from the Hogeschool van Amsterdam in the Netherlands a method is presented to value the work experience of industrial employees and to accredit the results in an engineering program at bachelor level. The toolkit developed will be described and explained. This method was used by the Hogeschool in a pilot project with Corus, an international high-quality steel manufacturer in the Netherlands. The results of this pilot project are discussed and evaluated. This case offers many interesting features to be aware of when intending to set up VPL-activities. It shows the necessity to build up cooperation between a company and a school ánd – above all – the worker as the individual learner at the heart of the VPL-process. Apart from this the example of Corus shows that it's necessary not only to focus on the instrumental dimension but also on the fact that raising awareness and showing the profits of VPL for all concerned parties is crucial for implementing lifelong learning-strategies.

The Italian context for developing and implementing VPL is described in the chapter by Luca Ferrari and Elisa Mancinelli. They present an Equal project "Spring Out" coordinated by Enaip foundation of Rimini, set up both in a European and an Italian framework. The analysis of the Italian experience represents the focus of this chapter: after an early overview of the valuation of prior learning in the Italian political framework, a specific action developed within the project by the "Service of students of special needs" of the

University of Bologna. In particular a model of "*Bilan de competènce*" aiming at improving job opportunities at local level, for the groups of individuals (the target of the project) with psychiatric disability is described in detail.

Jos Paulusse argues in his article that many people willing to work do not have a job because they are not able to show their competencies. Characteristics of these groups are that they receive a disability pension or a social security allowance or another financial support and often their willingness to work is not apparent! In this chapter the 'inverse reality' for these people is described and emphasized.
No job and a social security benefit are contradictory to the often quoted phrase 'the labour markets needs you' which is nowadays the slogan of employers and governments. The uncertainty of employers for the social and financial consequences when an employee is not 100% able to do the job is one of the causes. These 'special' people or people with talents have problems proving their willingness to work, their ability to work and their reliability. He stresses the need to change the practice, up-side down, VPL for the individual! Give these people first of all the possibility to show their competencies in practice, to show their work ability and to prove their reliability by offering them a work place and judge their efficiency afterwards. This will show that individuals in reality are more employable than is now assumed or realised, because of too strict rules and regulations. To make use of this group of people has a lot more advantages for society in social, financial and personal terms than only reduction of social benefits.

The next chapter is about developments in Germany. Anett Walter describes the VPL-context in Eastern Germany. After working on the topic "recognition and valuation of prior learning" for several years, there are some approaches in the German education system, where previously acquired competencies are recognised and valuated. In addition the individual is able to use informally and non-formally acquired skills and knowledge for their further vocational training.
In this chapter Walter describes some good practices of VPL. The focus is not on the educational institutions but on enterprises, authorities, volunteer associations, schools and disadvantaged people. Following the adoption of the concept of lifelong learning by many organisations throughout Europe they are developing instruments and methods to recognise and validate it. The objective is to connect learning effectively with the individual's and organisation's development. The innovative examples presented in this chapter show the *VPL islands* coming from 'the bottom up'.

Hana Cicháková, Mario Stretti, Helena Marinková stress in their chapter that the present concept of lifelong learning focuses on the responsibility of each individual for his/her own job and educational career. The aims of implementing lifelong learning-strategies as well as those of creating the European Area of lifelong learning require developing sys-

tems of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning at the national level in all EU countries. At the level of policy innovation in the Czech Republic a number of strategic and programme documents have been adopted the implementation of which should create necessary preconditions for setting up the national VPL system. The need of VPL has not been primarily caused by situation on the labour market, which is considerably deregulated, but by too rigid circumstances in the field of formal education in the Czech Republic. The VPL shall benefit especially groups of inhabitants at risk of unemployment. These groups comprise people without vocational qualification or with a qualification which does not enable them assertion on the labour market. Another reason for involvement of candidates into the VPL system can be their effort to acquire qualification for the field (branch) of qualified work in which they already have had their own business or been employed.

Five Steps Up is a tool developed and presented by Erica Aalsma, Ruud Duvekot and Lex Sanou. It provides for a practical tool that can be used whenever someone needs to or wants to coach a VPL process. *Five Steps Up* is designed for advisors who face VPL issues in their work with companies or organisations: what steps to take and how to make sure that you are not missing important aspects of the process? This guide shows you how to get started with *Five Steps Up*.

In the final chapter the 2nd contribution on VPL in the German context is presented by Ursel Kreh and Wolfgang Klenk. Their case description is on the need to rectify the shortage of teachers in schools providing vocational education. The Southern German state of Baden-Württemberg introduced a special (temporary) programme enabling a direct entry of university graduates with career and life experience into teaching positions in vocational schools, particularly for engineering science subjects.

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1 GETTING A GRIP WITH A GRID

The methodology for analysing case studies on the Valuation of Prior Learning

ANNE-MARIE CHARRAUD & RUUD DUVEKOT

Experimentations with the Valuation of Prior Learning are numerous in Europe. A first glance at the different countries that took part in the project 'Managing European diversity in lifelong learning' shows a diversity of practices not only due to economical differences but also to political and cultural aspects. The hypothesis of the project concerned the idea that this diversity of VPL-practices could actually help solving the problems that countries, especially their citizens and organisations, encounter in their efforts to make effective and efficient use of lifelong learning-strategies for the sake of economical and social progress. Collecting many case studies on VPL together might give 'bottom-up' evidence of sharing problems and solutions across the countries present in this project and give a glimpse of solutions regardless of language and culture differences. It might even be the case that within the different learning cultures systems were set up with more common (referential of values, procedures organised, actors involved.) than different issues. This would mean that 'a half-filled glass' – as the metaphor for the so-called lifelong learner – can be looked upon form different angles; it might even be filled up with many different kinds of liquid and flavours. But it remains a half-filled glass!
So the aim was to find out what the common grounds for the use of VPL are in the diversity of Europe's lifelong learning. On the basis of these common grounds we expected to be able to learn from each other and communicate more properly on the major challenges the Learning Society faces: the need for more self-management of competencies, more demand-articulation on the labour market and a stronger focus on learning-made-to-measure in the learning system. And as it turned out, we ended up with four grids and one list of key-issues to get a grip on the VPL-evidence presented in the case studies.

The cases

The project aimed at strengthening the use of valuation of non-formal and informal learning for both summative and formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the validation-or recognition principles by individuals and organisations, supported by a more demand-steered and customer-oriented learning system.
The goal of the project was to work both top-down and bottom-up and make the specific needs for learning outcomes visible on the labour market and the Lifelong learning as well as showing the services that national and sectoral valuation systems are already offering (or designing) to facilitate the potential users, i.e. the modern, lifelong learning workers. Both approaches were done simultaneously in eleven countries, by nineteen project partners, on three sectoral levels, in two user groups and in seven different European learning cultures, being:

The dual system	Germany and Switzerland
The Mediterranean approach	Italy and Cyprus
The North European model	Norway
The Atlantic model	Ireland and United Kingdom
The French System	France, Belgium
The Low Countries model	The Netherlands
The East European model	Czech Republic and Lithuania

This typology is based on the results of the VPL1-project in the period 2002-2005 (Duvekot et al 2005). In this network-project the typology of the cluster model developed by Jens Bjørnåvold in 'Making Learning Visible' (2000) was adapted to the differences in the varied ways countries dealt with the valuation and validation of prior learning.

The key-sectors in which the cases were to be located were profit, non-profit and voluntary work (unpaid work). The expected number of cases at the start of the project was about 350 cases. Shortly after the collection of the cases started evidence proved that it was going to take too much time to meet both the qualitative criteria as well as the quantitative criteria of the project. So, it was either a question of cutting down the number of questions in the analysis-grid or cutting down the case-load. The discussion on this resulted in a smaller case-load of about 200 cases, covering all seven learning cultures, the three sectors and both the organisation as well as the individual levels. It was considered to be of more value to get the qualitative results of the project instead of just the quantitative ones.

Requirements for case studies

The case-load of each partner had to be based on concrete VPL-processes that individuals from an organisation had undertaken. A VPL-process was described as 'any form of a process in which specific goals concerning certification (summative) or career-development (formative) are obtained by means of combining one's formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes in a portfolio'.

So, a case study could be described in the analysis-grid as long as it involved:

a an individual that goes through a specific VPL-process; obligatory is to make visible in which of the sectors – profit, non-profit and voluntary – this individual is working,
b a VPL-procedure (or any kind of procedure that is based on the recognition and valuation of competencies),
c a concrete outcome of the process: summative and/or formative.

Each case study consisted of the description of the valuation-process between individuals and organisations and the support that the valuation system was giving. Thus delivering information for showing the diversity in lifelong learning and systems of values used for recognition of the learning outcomes through Europe and with respect to the different

approaches demonstrating where the common features prevailed and where one learning culture could possibly learn from another learning culture. The analysis of summative and formative purposes in the learning cultures could therefore be steered at the heart of the analysis of the case studies. How to deal with the empirical data was crucial for this project.

Collection of case studies: the first two grids

To verify the hypothesis of the project, described in the introduction of this chapter, the partners decided to elaborate a common grid which would act as the support for the enquiries. After a first test of the grid it was observed that some partners made enquiries concerning individual cases and others described systems of VPL that focused on bigger numbers of individuals. So two levels of enquiry appeared and helped to modify the first test towards the production of two different grids: one for individual cases and the other for the description of organisation-cases. In appendices 1 and 2 you can find these two grids.

Both grids were set up to explore five aspects:

1 Guideline giving information permitting the identification of the action,
2 Contexts and aims which purpose is to describe the reason why the action is set up,
3 Processes and procedures used and practiced to develop the action,
4 Results obtained according to the purpose announced,
5 A SWOT commenting on the results and the reasons of the success or the problems not solved.

The content of each item was very similar in the two grids but it was adapted to the level of enquiry. In the organisation-grid an extra item was added, namely the way quality control was included by the organisation in charge of the system concerning the action This kind of information couldn't be obtained when the enquiry concerned individuals. Actually more than two hundred case studies were described using the formats presented in appendices 1 and 2.

The in-case analysis: the 3rd gird

A third grid was designed to propose a cross approach of the results of the information collected in the cases on a national level. In this way the filled-in grids were providing information on five selected domains showing the shared problems and/or solutions. This in-case analysis, being the analysis of the case studies the partner collected, permitted to put in the same glance the two levels of enquiry, about organisation and about individuals, especially when the action concerned them both. The grid for this in-case analysis is presented in appendix 3.

The five domains that had to be filled in for all cases were:
1 Issue to be resolved, including aims for organisation and individual levels
2 stimulus from context and access to reference levels
3 VPL-reference-level: summative and/or formative; actors involved
4 Impact of VPL
5 Recommendations per casus

For this in-case analysis, a typology was build to classify the answers in order to prepare a synthesis across the cases done for each country.

The cross-case analysis: list of key-issues

The goal of making a cross-case analysis between the countries to find out which problems and solutions are shared was served by focusing on the SWOT's in the case studies. The partners worked on this in four panels; two worked on the Strengths and the Weaknesses and two on Opportunities and Threats. The result was a first glance at the many key-issues that were raised in the case studies. In appendix 4 you can see the list of key-issues. This list is based on the SWOT's of 128 of the more than 200 case studies available. It is a lengthy list and shows quite a clear picture of at first sight diverse VPL-practice in Europe. A closer look however as was done in this panel-work made clear that many key-issues are shared and indeed show more comparison than difference across the European countries dealing with the necessity to set up lifelong learning and recognition of learning outcomes-strategies.

A final, rough sketch: the 4th grid

The amount of information collected was so enormous that it was necessary to begin with a first analysis giving an idea of the contexts (see appendix 5) where the actions concerning VPL were set up. For the reason of showing the necessity of setting up a follow-up project for this VPL2-project the so-called Final Enquiry was designed to show the richness of the material collected. The follow-up project could be titled VPL3 and analyse in more depth the results of the investigations made for VPL2.

In the Final Enquiry a link was made between the typology of aims of the different cases as this was described in the in-case analysis (see appendix 3) and the key-issues that were based on the cross-case analysis (see appendix 4). The results of the Final Enquiry showed a great diversity of the issues that were and could be connected with the aims that laid at the basis for the need for VPL in the many cases. Interesting was to see that there was indeed a great variety of issues but that there were no big differences between countries and corresponding sectors. The issues that were mentioned for instance for the issues in the voluntary sector-cases had a lot to do with recruitment and quality issues in many partner countries. For the profit sector-cases there was a 'red thread' visible across Europe

showing shared strenghts (cost reduction and rethinking HR), weaknesses (access for sme's and lack of VPL-support), opportunities (co-makership and motivation) and threats (fear of failure and lack of responsibility).
So, a very general result of this Final Enquiry was the prove that VPL functions in many and different ways for a big variety of problems or issues to be solved. Being able to show and describe this diversity of the VPL2-project therefore can be regarded as one of the main results of this project. It shows that we can communicate and exchange knowledge and experiences more on questions relating to make a better use of VPL in the different European learning cultures; it also shows that it is possible to find a common ground for describing the different issues VPL could be the answer for; and therefore, the case-load of this project shows the opportunities that lay ahead to learn from each other in Europe despite of the many cultural and lingual differences. But the rich material of this project surely calls for a more in-depth analysis.

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Appendix 1

Grid for the description of INDIVIDUAL case studies

Leonardo project VPL-2

Partner: ……..

1. Guideline		
1.0	Country, sector & initiating organisation	
1.1	Date of the case study	
1.2	Description of the individual case	
1.3	Introduction/markers/keywords	
1.4	Outcomes pursued by the individual at the origin of his introduction in a VPL process : - profit (money, esteem, career step, etc) - efficiency (timesaving, leaning made to measure) - enjoyability (investment in learning is fun)	
1.5	The expected outcome, award, qualification or other effect to which validation of informal/non-formal learning is integrated	
1.6	Status of the award, if it exists (e.g. certification, institutional or professional recognition)	

2. Context and aims		
2.1	Initiator in charge of the action described	
2.2	Links between the individual and the initiator	
2.3	How the individual came in contact with the initiator of the action	

2.4	Individual's background before the action of VPL	
2.5	What is the individual problem that has/had to be solved ?	
2.6	What is the opportunity that opened up to solve the problem?	
2.7	Where and how did VPL become an option? Who initiated VPL?	
2.8	Why is non-formal and informal learning accepted?	
2.9	Are there other parties or stakeholders in introducing the individual in the action described ?	
2.10	Which laws & legal texts (e.g. collective agreements) are involved?	
2.11	Any special agreements or measures involved (on national, sectoral, organisational levels)?	

3. Processes and procedures		
3.1	Describe the elements of learning that will be valuated? (For example: knowledge, skills, ambitions, attitude, generic & specific competencies, know-how, performance, experience, etc.)	
3.2	Which learning environments are involved? e.g. school, workplace, private life, others	
3.3	What are the steps in the procedure to be followed by the applicant?	
3.4	How is the applicant informed/contacted?	
3.5	What tools/instruments/methods are used for identification and valuation of competencies? (e.g. portfolio, interview, demonstration, Europass)	
3.6	What kinds of proof can be submitted?	
3.7	Which criteria are used to accept candidates for the procedure?	

3.8	How is informal learning measured and valuated?	
3.9	What kinds of advice/feedback may be made by assessors or mentors, guiders, peers, examinators, etc? Split your answer up in: - certification (summative) - personal development (formative) - other	
3.10	What is exempted on the basis of VPL? (e.g. courses/ units/modules of study: specific tasks set within units: demonstration of competencies)	
3.11	which percentage of the certificate/ diploma can be awarded through informal/non-formal learning? (on a scale from 1 - 100%)	
3.12	What are the subsequent steps in the valuation process?	

4. Results		
4.1	Which results were in effect reached through VPL action ?	
4.2	Validation: summative results Number & types of certification	
4.3	Valuation: formative results Number and types of development-plans or career opportunities	
4.4	Effects of those results for one's own personal or professional life	

5. SWOT	
Strengths of VPL in the case study:	Opportunities of VPL in the case study:
Weaknesses of VPL in the case study:	Threats of VPL in the case study:

Appendix 2

Grid for the description of SYSTEM case studies

Leonardo project VPL-2

Partner: .....

1. Guideline		
1.0	Country, sector & initiating organisation	
1.1	Date of the case study	
1.2	Description of case study	
1.3	Introduction/markers/keywords	
1.4	Value of the process and outcomes: - profit (money, esteem, career step, etc) - efficiency (timesaving, leaning made to measure) - enjoyability (investment in learning is fun) [Fill in for initiator and specify if possible also the value for others involved]	
1.5	The expected outcome, award, qualification or other effect to which validation of informal/non-formal learning is integrated	
1.6	Status of the award, if it exists (e.g. certification, institutional or professional recognition)	

2. Context and aims		
2.1	Initiator in charge of the action described	
2.2	Target group aimed by the initiator: - group description (e.g. workers, teachers/trainers, unemployed, etc.); qualitative & quantitative - paid or unpaid work	
2.3	Aims for the initiator	

2.4	Aims for the target group pursued by the initiator of the action	
2.5	What is the problem that has/had to be solved ?	
2.6	What is the opportunity that opened up to solve the problem?	
2.7	Where and how did VPL become an option? Who initiated VPL?	
2.8	Why is non-formal and informal learning accepted?	
2.9	Which other parties or stakeholders are involved to set up the action described ?	
2.10	Which laws & legal texts (e.g. collective agreements) are involved?	
2.11	Any special agreements or measures involved (on national, sectoral, organisational levels)?	

3. Processes and procedures		
3.1	Describe the elements of learning that will be valuated? (For example: knowledge, skills, ambitions, attitude, generic & specific competencies, know-how, performance, experience, etc.)	
3.2	Which learning environments are involved? e.g. school, workplace, private life, others	
3.3	What are the steps in the procedure to be followed by the applicant?	
3.4	How is the applicant informed/contacted?	
3.5	What tools/instruments/methods are used for identification and valuation of competencies? (e.g. portfolio, interview, demonstration, Europass)	
3.6	What kinds of proof can be submitted?	
3.7	Which criteria are used to accept candidates for the procedure?	

3.8	How is informal learning measured and valuated?	
3.9	What kinds of advice/feedback may be made by assessors or mentors, guiders, peers, examinators, etc? Split your answer up in: - certification (summative) - personal development (formative) - other	
3.10	What is exempted on the basis of VPL? (e.g. courses/ units/modules of study: specific tasks set within units: demonstration of competencies)	
3.11	which percentage of the certificate/ diploma can be awarded through informal/non-formal learning? (on a scale from 1 - 100%)	
3.12	What are the subsequent steps in the valuation process?	

4. Quality control		
4.1	Which functions are filled in within the process and procedure? Include the number and required qualifications of each function! e.g. assessor, advisor, instructor, certificatory, guider, etc.	
4.2	How is the quality of the functions and the procedure guaranteed in the VPL process ?	
4.3	Which authorities are in charge of quality control?	
4.4	Which extra measures are taken to guarantee the quality of the procedure?	

5. Results		
5.1	Which results were in effect reached? - for the organisation in charge - for the target group	
5.2	Validation: summative results Number & types of certification	
5.3	Valuation: formative results Number and types of development-plans or career opportunities	
5.4	Effects on other stakeholders and/or knowledge infrastructure	
5.5	Financial results for the initiator (positive/negative). Specify the type of this result, e.g. less/more absence of leave, less/more learning costs,less/more productivity, less spending on recruitment, out-placement, etc.	

6. SWOT	
Strengths of VPL in the case study:	Opportunities of VPL in the case study:
Weaknesses of VPL in the case study:	Threats of VPL in the case study:

Appendix 3

Grid for in-case analysis

Case studies concerning: ..... (country & learning culture)
Brought by: ..... (name and organisation)

1. Issue to be resolved, incl. aims for organisation and individual levels

Typ 1A. The aims of systems and organisations	Typ 1B. The aims pursued by the individuals
a. Improvement of one's qualification b. Development of employability of specific target group c. Recruitment procedure d. Legibility of qualification for specific target group (e.g. women, job seekers) e. Guidance f. Development of competencies g. Other, ...	g. Need for certification or qualification for insertion or promotion h. Need for exemption of a part of a curriculum i. Need of recognition to be recruited (esp. in a regulated activity) j. Need of personal and social recognition in a specific environment k. Other, ...

Instruction: with the number also indicate the sector: P = profit; N = non-profit; V = voluntary work

Nr sector	Case	Issue	Aim of organisation	1A	Aim of individual	1B

2. Stimulus from context and level of implementation used for VPL

Typ 2A. Socio-political context for VPL	2B. Socio-economic context stimulating the individual in the VPL-action	2C. Level of implementation
a. legislation b. culture c. institutional elements d. psychological elements e. finance f. other, ...	g. enterprise context permitting VPL h. pedagogical context i. institutional context j. psychological elements k. access to financial subsidies for VPL l. other, ...	m. at national level n. at sectoral level o. local or institution level p. NGO's/organisation able to accompany people in the system q. Qualified counsellors able to guide in VPL r. Enterprise level (job descriptions) s. Other, ...

Nr	Case	Socio-political context	2A	Socio-economic context	2B	Reference levels	2C

3. VPL-reference-level: summative and/or formative; actors involved

3a. Nature of VPL	3b. VPL procedure and methods	3c. Actors involved in VPL-procedure
a. Linked to certification, diplomas, titles, ...	I = Identification of competencies	a. Teachers
b. Linked to training programmes	A = Assesment of competencies	b. Qualified workers
c. Linked to a working (sectoral) reference	V = Validation of competencies	c. Psychological professionals
d. Creation of a new system of reference		d. Companies hierarchy
e. Linked to quality assurance systems	P = portfolio	e. National bodies
	T = tests and examination	f. Other
	In = interview	
	O = observation	
	C = can choose more than 1	
	X = other, ...	

Nr	Case	Nature of VPL	3a	Procedure and methods	3b	Actors involved	3c

4. Impact of VPL

Two kinds of impact are asked for:
1) For the individual: VPL as a change agent in the action (pilot, ...) itself
2) For the organisation: VPL as innovation coming out of the action (indirect and expected)

Nr	Case	1. (Concrete) outcome of the action for the individual(s) in the organisation	2. Outcome of VPL on organisational level

5. Recommendations per casus

Nr	Case	Recommendations for the case	Recommendations from the case on SWOT for VPL in general

Appendix 4

Key issues from SWOT's of all the cases

	ORGANISATION			INDIVIDUAL	
	Profit	Non-profit	Volunteer	Profit	Non-profit
S T R E N G H T S	1. Partnership of stakeholder 2. Mobility of competencies 3. Bottom up 4. Cost reduction 5. Rethinking HR management 6. Transparency 7. Shared benefits	8. Partnership of the stakeholder 9. Motivation 10. Employability 11. Awareness 12. Social inclusion 13. Vision 14. Mobility (across sectors/borders) 15. Equality 16. (career) guidance 17. Assessment standards 18. Quality control 19. RPL 20. Partial certification	21. Self-esteem 22. Learning environment 23. Motivation 24. Valuation 25. Portfolio 26. Accessibility (PR) 27. Formative 28. Voluntary 29. International 30. Professional administration.	31. Self-esteem 32. Motivation 33. Individualised 34. Effective 35. Formative 36. Pro-activity 37. Enjoyment 38. Personal development	39. Self-esteem 40. Self-confidence 41. Motivation 42. Individualised learning 43. Cost & speed 44. Exemptions 45. Employability 46. Enjoyment

	ORGANISATION			INDIVIDUAL	
	Profit	Non-profit	Volunteer	Profit	Non-profit
WEAKNESSES	47. Lack of VPL framework 48. Lack of quality control 49. Cost and time consuming 50. Lack of VPL trainers (mentors) 51. Access (SME's) 52. Lack of information	53. Lack of instruments 54. Lack of quality control 55. Time consuming 56. Training of assessors 57. Resources 58. Culture 59. Mismatch (curriculum) 60. Long procedure 61. Lack of information 62. Lack of awareness 63. Legislative obstacles	64. Lack of professionals 65. Lack of quality 66. Time consuming 67. Expensive 68. Restricted recognitions 69. No follow-up 70. Professionals displacing volunteers 71. Complex procedures cause demotivation	72. Costs 73. Access 74. Subjectivity 75. Lack of trainers 76. Only summative 77. Gap between theory and practice 78. Benefit related motivation	79. High costs 80. Access 81. Time consuming 82. Culture (mainly summative) 83. Information
OPPORTUNITIES	84. Promotes LLL 85. Mobility, transparency 86. National standard 87. HRM/strategy 88. learning organisation 89. image of trainers 90. developing 91. learning made to measure 92. Control of learning individual 93. Move awareness 94. Higher academic education 95. Strategic tool for labour	129. Cooperation 130. Social dialogue 131. Acceptance of certificate by companies 132. Labour market situation (transitive economy) 133. Improve the professional level 134. Access to education 135. Competencies recognised 136. Career development 137. Future looks good 138. Standardisation (of the final examination)	167. More transparency in education possibilities 168. Better connection between voluntary organisations and 169. educational institutions 170. Career development 171. Improve of the training facilities 172. Evaluating formal learning on branches level 173. Make people learn again		

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	96. Market strategy 97. Develop & educate 98. All function levels 99. Sustainable & anti-cyclical 100. Motivation 101. Standard procedure 102. Learning made to measure 103. Recognition of competencies 104. Widened chances for employees 105. Career advancement without university degree 106. Intellectual property/ knowledge remains in the company 107. Intensive work on existing knowledge 108. Less absence & leave 109. Productivity 110. Transparency in VET system 111. Mutual recognition	139. New study model professional enlightenment 140. Career advancement without a university degree 141. Academic degree without (traditional) customary requirement 142. Real world (teaching connected to) 143. Reintegration 144. Cooperation formal education & institutions / HRM 145. Learning line (chaotic circle) 146. Low/formal education – high expertise 147. Role model 148. Changing knowledge-society 149. Authentic competencies 150. Enrich training offer 151. New mediation tools	174. Better connection voluntary organisation & education institutes. 175. Better understanding of potential of work 176. Valuing human resources 177. Mobilising public-civil resources 178. Support of the social sector 179. Find a job 180. Dissemination of tools 181. Collaboration 182. Improve of the training facilities 183. More professionalism 184. Better image 185. More transparency in education possible 186. More cooperation between sectors (sport / education) 187. Increase in educational level		

	ORGANISATION			INDIVIDUAL	
	Profit	Non-profit	Volunteer	Profit	Non-profit
OPPORTUNITIES	112. Evidence to all existing learning processes 113. Changes for learning in sme's 114. Requirements are identifiable 115. Mobility & placement 116. Network-build up 117. Companies as learning organisations 118. Self reflection practices 119. Image & reputation of trainers 120. Not only looking for certificates but competence 121. Productive 122. National standard 123. Extension of one's diploma 124. Stimulation / individual 125. Less absence 126. Productivity 127. Motivation 128. Self reflection	152. Support opportunities 153. Support and value investment in training 154. Tailor-made routes 155. Regional cooperation 156. Recognition of drop-outs 157. Success rate 158. Reflect on own experiences 159. Common language 160. Transferability 161. Account the richness of learning outcomes 162. Improve profile 163. Enhance social dialogue 164. Greater integration 165. Designing own training path 166. Success rate			

T H R E A T S	188. Lack of understanding of VPL 189. Purely judgemental procedure 190. Not well known 191. Fear of failure 192. No discipline or self responsibility 193. Misses ability to accurately access 194. Not seen as equivalent to education 195. Disability to reflect on own competencies 196. Certification is leading model 197. Non-transferability 198. Less acceptance by other colleagues 199. Lack of theoretical skills 200. Jealousy 201. Individual fear of increasing demand 202. Only aimed at educational needs of enterprises	207. Overestimation of capabilities 208. Need for final examination at school 209. Decision in hands of schools 210. Labour market (lack of positions) 211. Proof of practice expertise 212. Ability to accurately assess 213. Reduced level of recognition 214. Not directly transferable 215. Costs 216. Fear of less quality & status 217. Quality level of trainers 218. Problem issue of guidance 219. Lack of money 220. Loss of quality status 221. Lack of tailor-made training	231. Lack of information about value certificates 232. Costs 233. Not enough perspective on the labour market 234. To time consuming 235. Accessibility versus quality 236. Too few persons involved 237. Increasing commercial competition 238. validation of evidence 239. Time-consuming		

	ORGANISATION			INDIVIDUAL	
	Profit	Non-profit	Volunteer	Profit	Non-profit
T H R E A T S	203. Competition between institutions 204. Bureaucracy 205. Education doesn't flexibilise its education 206. Cost-benefit is not obvious	222. Not maintaining flexibility 223. Competence Based education causes new problems 224. Use for summative purposes 225. Expectations not coupled to labour market conditions 226. Risk of rigid control structure 227. Too innovative > resistance 228. Not used as intended 229. Discouraging for employees 230. Afraid to loose employees	231. Lack of information about value certificates 232. Costs 233. Not enough perspective on the labour market 234. To time consuming 235. Accessibility versus quality 236. Too few persons involved 237. Increasing commercial competition 238. validation of evidence 239. Time-consuming		

Appendix 5

Final Enquiry into national case studies on VPL

On the basis of the key-issues fill in the matrix below. The matrix is designed to show the state of the art and the relevant issues in the partner-countries.

Fill in:
Column 1: name of the case study
Column 2 & 3: typology of the case study (see your cross case analysis !)
Column 4: key-issues = strenghts & opportunities. See the list of key-issues
Column 5: key-issues = weaknesses & threats. See the list of key-issues

Fill in at least one and at the most three important key-issues for every case study. Use the words from the listed key-issues. You are also challenged to fill in the question concerning your comment on the key-issues according to the national political or societal aspects in your cases.

1	2	3	4	5
Case study	Typology of aims (organisation)	Typology of aims (individuals)	Key-issues strengths & opportunities	Key-issues weaknesses and threats

Any comments according to the national political or societal aspects:

VPL IN EUROPE: THERE IS MORE THAT UNITES THAN DIVIDES

2

A cross-case synthesis of 128 VPL-projects in 11 different European countries

RUUD KLARUS, KEES SCHUUR, KAREN VAN HOEIJ

Introduction

In the VPL project participants from 19 organisations based in 11 European countries wrote 128 case descriptions including a SWOT-analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) on VPL projects or activities. The descriptions concerned VPL projects in the profit, non-profit and the voluntary sectors.

The aim of the cross-case analysis was to answer the question of whether the differences between countries would mean that the aim of drawing up a European framework on VPL is possible or remains a 'mission impossible'. We differentiated between profit, non-profit and voluntary sectors. This made is possible to answer the question whether sectoral or national differences are more important in creating VPL procedures, pre-requisites for VPL, formal acceptance and public support for VPL.
By using the SWOT analysis we were able to compare at least the strengths, the weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats of VPL in the different sectors and countries. This makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that play a central role in developing VPL in different contexts. In the analysis a distinction is also made between a systems and an individual point of view. Developing understanding of these contextual factors and using different perspectives may create a common and shared agenda on the next step towards that European framework.

By using expert-panels from the different countries we were able to validate the conclusions of the analysis and at the same time we created a shared "quality language", shared interpretations of key words on VPL.
So, this cross-case analysis is not about good, better or best VPL practices. It is about trying to find grass root fundamentals, quality factors and policy principles that lead to VPL systems of high quality from a system as well as an individual's point of view.
We did this, not by using sophisticated research techniques, but by using the experiences and know how of experts in a process of discussion and decision making focused on general agreement on the most important quality demands and (national) preconditions for VPL.

Research questions

The first question of the cross-case analysis is: What are the differences and similarities in strengths, weaknesses of and opportunities and threats for VPL projects in the profit, non-profit and voluntary sectors within different countries in Europe?

Answers on these questions offer information to shed light on the following questions:
- Are the national contexts decisive in the creation of those differences or are the specific characteristics of the three sectors of main influence?
- What conclusions can be drawn, comparing the SWOT-analysis in the 128 cases, about the conditions for a successful development, implementation, acceptance and utilization of VPL?

Method

A case study research is a "preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context." (Yin, 2003) Yin's concept of case studies analysis and cross-case synthesis was used as a strategy to organise the process of discussion and decision making in and by the VPL2 team.
In the cross-case synthesis we used 128 case studies from the VPL2 project, made by different authors (for an overview please see the list of references available on www.VPL4.eu). The cases were developed as part of the VPL2 project. The investigators, being the authors of this chapter, had little control over events, the case-descriptions were made by different authors in their own national context. The authors on their part also had no control over the cases they wrote about.
The case-descriptions are based however on the same format. This format, including specifications for the description, was made in a joint process with the authors of the cases. The case descriptions were made according to a format all partners discussed and agreed upon. See also chapter 1 in this book.
An important part of the case study was that an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) was made. We used the SWOT analysis of each case as input for the cross-case synthesis.

The synthesis was made in two phases:
1 Comparing whether the aims of VPL in different sectors (profit, non-profit and voluntary) are due to national characteristics or due to characteristics of the sectors themselves.
2 A cross-case synthesis of SWOT analysis made in all the case studies

Comparing VPL aims of sectors

To make a cross-case synthesis we had to answer the question whether there is much influence from the national context on the aims of the projects within the three sectors: profit, non-profit and voluntary. When the influence of the national context on the aims

of VPL in the three sectors is obvious than it is difficult to compare sectors. In this case we in fact are not comparing sector differences, but comparing differences in national policy, legislation and national systems.
To remove the doubt if it was not possible to make any distinction between the countries, but only between the sectors, a separate analysis was necessary. By using all the aims of the cases we could analyse what the differences and similarities between the countries and the sectors were.
The data we used for this were the aims descriptions of the same cases mentioned before.

Figure 1: Example of the extract from the aims descriptions of the cases across different sectors and countries

code	Profit system aims	Profit individual aims	Non-profit system aims	Non-profit individual aims	Voluntary system aims
DE-13	finding a highly motivated and qualified employee, who is willing to keep on learning	Getting employed, finding a new job, earning money, thus more self-esteem, personal and professional development			
NL-8			The Open University needs to attract more students and wants to become more easily accessible. Drop-out rate is very high. Quality is served with VPL as an intake-tool (anyone can apply for a module or programme!)	By getting exemptions the motivation to finish a programme is strengthened	

By "reading" the columns (reading vertically) we can conclude whether the differences of aims between countries are essential/remarkable (see figure 1). By "reading" the rows (reading horizontally) we can conclude whether the differences of aims between sectors are essential/remarkable. We concluded that the differences between the sector-aims are more remarkable than the differences between countries as far are the described cases/sectors concerned.

Analysing SWOT results/information

The cross-case analysis was aimed to look at the overall picture of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the implementation of VPL throughout 11 different European countries.
On the basis of the various case studies made by experts in all the countries the cross-case analysis was conducted. The case studies were elaborate analysis on VPL projects, in 11 different countries, made by international experts. This analysis was based on information written from a system perspective as well as from an individual perspective on the characteristics of the VPL projects (see chapter 1). Within this analysis a SWOT structure was included. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of every case were described by the analyser. These short but complete summaries of the case studies were brought together and made a valid basis for the cross-case analysis.

Figure 2: Example of SWOT analysis as basis for cross-case analysis.

country	code	organization	sector	strengths	weaknesses	opportunities	threats
NL	NL-1	Ministry of Labour and social affairs	Non-profit	Possibility to dig out 'hidden' competencies	No assessor training	Possibility to give non qualified workers and unemployed people a chance to improve their profile.	No quality standard available

During an intensive international meeting with all the experts on VPL a tight schedule was followed to make the cross-case analysis and come to agreed answers to the research questions. Method and schedule for making the cross-case analysis consisted of 4 rounds of analysis:

Round 1: Highlighting
During this round you work individually.
Aim of round 1: Select the main points.

Each individual receives a hand-out with a collection of Strengths & Weaknesses or Opportunities & Threats. Everybody will highlight keywords and phrases that they find important on these hand-outs.

					Strengths
NL	NL-1	Ministry of Labour and social affairs	Non-profit	Individual	– Possibility to dig out 'hidden' competencies – Possibility to give value to past experiences work-wise – Benefits as regards the individual's self-esteem and – knowledge of his/her own potential

Round 2: Labelling

During this round you work in the small panels. (A, B, C or D)
Aim of round 2: Label all the important points, and make the distinction between sectors.

Together with the others, who received the same hand-out, you start labelling the key-words and phrases. Use the cards to distinguish the different sectors; profit, non-profit and volunteer.

Strengths profit

– more effective and thorough training paths
– individualised training paths
– tailor made competence development

Round 3: Sharing your findings

During this round you pair up with the other panel: A+B and C+D
Aim of round 3: round off your analysis and prepare the presentation.
Your panel pairs up with the other panel who also analysed the Strengths & Weaknesses or the Opportunities & Threats. Together you compare the outcomes of your analysis and formulate a conclusion.

Round 4: The presentations

We concluded the meeting with two presentations. The group of Strengths & Weaknesses as well as the group of Opportunities & Threats gives a short presentation about their findings.

Groups

Group 1 **Strengths & Weaknesses**		**Group 2** **Opportunities & Threats**	
Panel A **Cases 1-64**	**Panel B** **Cases 65-128**	**Panel C** **Cases 1-64**	**Panel D** **Cases 65-128**

The panel members were VPL experts from 11 different countries. In each panel 5 to 6 experts from different countries participated. Each panel decided which key words were central in the text of each S-W-O-T paragraph of a case. So within each case, keywords were given for strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. This means that a general consensus based on deliberate discussion had to be reached within each panel. At the end each keyword was based on an overall assessment of at least 5 experts from different countries.

The same panels also decided on the labels to categorize the keywords. This was time consuming but also a communicative and valid way of analysing the case studies. The labels are: Attitude, Transparency, HRM/HRD, Image, Quality, Labour market policy, Costs and benefits, Participation and connection, Legislation.

Communication and discussion between experts from different countries increases validity of conclusions and at the same time helps to create a shared language on VPL. This is one of the preliminaries for a shared European framework on VPL, being one of the aims of the VPL2 project.
From this perspective the cross-case analysis was a mix of empirical data analysis and action research.
Keywords and labels were combined in a team of the three researchers in a group decision process also based on consensus.
We did not use statistical elaboration of the group decision processes, as inter-rater reliability, the individual choices of the panel members, were not the object of the research. We wanted only the result (keywords and labels) to be agreed upon by the panel as a whole.

The same panels also decided on the labels to categorize the keywords (see for an example of results figure 4). A time consuming but also a communicative and valid way of analysing the case studies.The labels are: Attitude, Transparency, HRM/HRD, Image, Quality, Labour market policy, Costs and benefits, Participation and connection, Legislation.

Figure 3: Extract from categorising the Opportunities.

Labels	Profit sector	Non-profit sector	Voluntary sector
Attitude	Less absence & leave Self-reflection practices stimulation of individual learning made to measure	Reflect about their own experiences tailor made routes Self-esteem Enriched training offer Teaching connected to the real world	_____
Transparency	National standard Standard procedure Transparency in VET system Mutual recognition Requirements are identifiable	Standardisation Common language	More transparency in education possibilities

Communication and discussion between experts from different countries increases the validity of the conclusions and at the same time helps to create a shared language on VPL. This is one of the preliminaries for a shared European framework on VPL, which is one of the aims of the VPL2 project. From this perspective the cross-case analysis was a mix of empirical data analysis, action research and grounded theory.

Results: do the aims of VPL differ in the countries involved?

In the cross-case analysis two questions were posed:
1 Do the aims of VPL differ in the countries involved?
2 What conclusions can be drawn on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of VPL, irrespective of the national contexts of the cases studied?

In this section we answer the first question. The questions concerning the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats will be answered in section 5.
Not all the participating 11 countries could be evaluated on the aims of projects in all three sectors. Because not all countries presented information about all three sectors at the time the analysis took place. So for some countries the information of the voluntary sector was not available and for other countries there was no information available regarding the profit or non-profit sectors. In appendix 1 an example is shown of the results of analysing case studies on their aims.

In the *profit sector* VPL is viewed from a system perspective, especially used as an instrument for efficiency in HRM.
Most aims in all countries are focused on:

a Human capital accounting and thereby accounting competence needs of the organisation.
b Using insight into the existing stock of competence in the organisation for strategic policy choices of the organisation.
c Lowering the costs of training en education.
d Upskilling personnel because of the need for more highly educated employees.
e Quality control of professionals.
f Using assessments in selection procedures.
g Flexible adjustment to new competence demands in new industries and newly developed jobs.
h Managing individual demands and wishes on the one hand and the organisational targets and demands on the other.

Using the labels that were stated by the panels in the cross-case analysis we could say that *balancing costs and benefits* is the most important aim of VPL in the profit sector from a systems point of view. Human capital accounting, selection of personnel and getting qualified as a means for mobility on the (internal) *labour market*, are other often mentioned aims.
Personnel development *(HRD)*, creating a better *image* of the sector and *participation* of individuals are mentioned, but not that often.

Conclusion: in the profit sector VPL is, from an individual perspective, especially used to gain official qualifications, to be employed, for better earnings and career development. Other considerations in all countries are cost reduction on training and, again for individuals in the new member states, obtaining European certificates
The general conclusion however is that there is no clear difference in the aims of using VPL in the profit sectors between the different countries. There is however one exception. Especially in the "new" member states the aims of VPL are more explicitly influenced by and directed towards meeting European legislation and quality demands.

In the *non-profit sector* VPL is, from a system perspective, used as a way to:

a Realise government policy: For example to increase numbers of highly qualified workers, to create more flexibility in the educational system, create more relations between educational system, the labour market and industry, creating a system for quality control on assessment.
b Realise labour market policy in sectors where there are shortages (nursing, teachers).
c Like the non-profit sector, cope more efficiently with costs of training and create more efficient learning routes.

Increase in general (as in the profit sector) the professional level of the work force.

In the non-profit sector VPL is, from an individual perspective, especially used to:
a Increase self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation and ensure that learning is fun.
b Get formal recognition or to get exemption for part of a course of study.
c Get higher status or a better job.

VPL in the non-profit sector is used more as an instrument for personal enjoyment and development as well as for career management. Keywords that are frequently used are: increased self-confidence and self-esteem, increased motivation, learning is fun, exemption, getting formal recognition, getting higher status or a better job.

Conclusion: in the non-profit sector there is a clear distinction between the aims of the system and the aims of the individual. The 'stakeholders' in the system are looking for increasing qualification of the labourers and for greater cost-benefit of education. The individual is more concerned with his or her own development, building trust in one's own competencies and of the personal advantages such as exemptions and a better job. There is no clear difference in the aims of using VPL in the non-profit sectors between the different countries.

The cases at system level in the *voluntary sector* were limited in number, so only an indication can be given. The general view is that VPL is, from a system perspective, especially used to:
a Increase the quality of volunteer work towards a more professional organisation.
b Increase the learning of volunteers.

In contrast with the aims of VPL volunteer projects at system level, the values at individual level are different:
a Motivation of self-esteem and satisfaction.
b Exemptions and learning made-to-measure.
c Describing own competencies.
d Employability.
Professionalizing the organisation is important from the system point of view, but the individual is more concerned with personal advantages. This might be because of the characteristics of volunteer work and the motivation of the volunteer to do this type work without any payment. The organisation most likely has to develop itself, because of the higher quality criteria by society (diplomas required to do certain activities, compete with commercial organisations, etc.).
Conclusion: there is no clear difference in the aims of using VPL in the voluntary sector between the different countries.

Differences between sectors?

Most label-categories can be applied in all three sectors. In the voluntary sector however the categories of attitude and quality are relatively often used. But especially the categories of participation and image are used most with keywords from the case descriptions.

Results: what conclusions can be drawn on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of VPL, irrespective of the national contexts of the cases studied?

In the case studies made by experts in the different countries, information was described about aims and expected outcomes of VPL activities, contextual information, processes and procedures, quality control and results. In each case-description an analysis was also made of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of that particular case. This part of the case studies was used in the cross-case synthesis. The objective of the SWOT is to identify which factors are influencing the implementation and use of VPL.

Figure 4: SWOT analysis

	Helpful (to achieving the objective)	Harmful (to achieving the objective)
Internal (attributes of the organisation)	STRENGTHS attributes of the organization that are helpful to achievement of the objective.	WEAKNESSES attributes of the organization that are harmful to achievement of the objective.
External (attributes of the environment)	OPPORTUNITIES external conditions that are helpful to achievement of the objective	THREATS external conditions that are harmful to achievement of the objective

The SWOT is used as input to the creative generation of possible strategies, by asking and answering the following four questions many times:

1 How can we *Use* each Strength?
2 How can we *Stop* each Weakness?
3 How can we *Exploit* each Opportunity?
4 How can we *Defend* against each Threat?

A SWOT-analysis leads to a more aggregated level of information. This is information that gives a general impression about the state of affairs in the different sectors (profit, non-profit, voluntary). Knowing what the different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are in these sectors can also create a general view about not only what a general framework can look like, but most of all under what conditions VPL can be developed and be useful.

In the expert-panels the keywords were categorized into 9 quality aspects: attitude, transparency, HRD/HRM, image, quality, labour market effects, costs and benefits, participation and connection, legislation.

Strengths

1 attitude

According to the case-descriptions VPL influences the individual's attitude in different ways.
It motivates for further competence development. VPL influences one's own satisfaction with the existing level of competence in a positive way because it makes competencies transparent and valuable. This in turn leads to increased self-esteem and self-awareness.
To put it another way, as was done in one of the case-descriptions: VPL empowers a proactive attitude by making personal development plans based on actual information of already acquired competencies.

2 transparency

VPL contributes to transparency by using institutionalized frameworks, e.g. valid competence or qualification standards, standardised job profiles and skill requirements. By doing this it creates comparability between individual competence profiles.
Besides qualification standards, VPL also creates common principles for educational assessment (in the non-profit sector) and a common language on valuation (in the profit sector).

3 HRD/HRM

VPL procedures are useful for HRM/HRD because they influence positively the effectiveness of competence development. The procedures remain close to the reality of individual development and the individual's real context. It creates an opportunity for formative assessment as well as (partial) certification. Valuing prior learning gives a starting point for individualised learning (pathways) using different kind (formal, informal) learning environments.
Another aspect of HRD, career guidance, offers an information basis about the individual experience and acquired competencies.
In the profit sector, VPL procedures lead to rethinking R-management concepts. It proves that there are ways/procedures at hand that make non-formal or informal learning accountable. The need for course-based training is adjusted using the possibilities of work, even the regular daily routines, as an opportunity for learning.
In most cases, positive effects on the participation in HRD activities (education and training) are mentioned. Access to and participation in education is also due to the creation of tailor-made learning. This is made possible because of assessment of already developed

competencies. In the profit sector the possibility to focus in VPL "on the most important competencies" instead of a narrow focus on course content, is underlined.

4 image

An often-stated strength of VPL is its influence on the image of learning, work experience and voluntary work. It changes the idea of learning thought of by many individuals as "not for us kind of people". Competence development seems to be a part of work and of voluntary work, and can be enjoyable as that. On the other hand it makes voluntary work more attractive because of the possibility of recognition of competencies acquired by being engaged in (voluntary) work. It offers, especially in the cases of voluntary work, a more professional image for this sector. Indeed professionalism is a keyword often used to express the way VPL changes the image of voluntary work. Adequate valuation, being accepted (as a consequence of VPL) as a real learning environment, the use of standardised procedures are all expressions of the ambition to obtain a professional image.
In the profit sector (remarkably enough not mentioned in the non-profit sector), VPL is bridging the gap between vocational education and training and makes it more attractive for employees as well as employers.

5 quality

VPL creates an incentive for quality development in guidance and assessment.
In the profit sector the use of assessment standards and procedures for quality control are mentioned as contributing to quality development. It was also said that VPL procedures are "fair and equal" because they are not based on educational content but on work based standards making it possible to give work based learning the same learning potential as school based learning.
VPL procedures ask for meticulous administration of personal competence information. This also creates a professional behaviour in the profit, non-profit and voluntary sectors.

6 labour market

Labour market policy is made concrete by VPL in different ways. In the case descriptions a positive effect on mobility of the workforce is mentioned, mobility of competencies as well as enhanced mobility of employees. In the case studies, examples are given of VPL procedures creating individual mobility within organisations, between organisations, within sectors and between sectors as well as across national borders.

7 costs and benefits

From the point of view of costs and benefits, VPL offers a valid and reliable knowledge-base for exemption, thereby making exemption procedures more accepted and individualised valuation and recognition procedures less "second hand".
In most cases in the profit and non-profit sectors, cost reduction is an important advan-

tage of VPL. It is a used as a means for speeding up competence development, leading to less time-consuming qualification periods. In one of the cases in the non-profit sector it was expressed by an individual participant that VPL created for him "more time for other and new learning activities".

8 participation and connection

Participation is supported by VPL in different ways: by creating partnerships, by creating connection and by cooperation.
Participation and social inclusion are strengthened by VPL as a result of creating equal possibilities for the valuation of individual competencies and offering better access to qualification.

9 legislation

According to the case studies, there is no contribution of VPL to the quality of legislation. Or to look at this the other way round: legislation is not contributing to VPL in the case studies described.

Weaknesses

1 attitude

The attitude of individuals is far more related to expected benefits. Benefits related to career development, income and access to the labour market. This means that attitude is mostly externally motivated. Intrinsic motivation like personal development and growth or personal awareness of one's own capacities is not absent, but subordinated. Creating support for VPL means that it should be recognised that the clearness of external results of VPL should be taken into account.
From a systems perspective, lack of awareness of VPL and VPL possibilities is mentioned as a weakness. Taking into account the message from an individual's point of view ("What's in it for me?") means however that a "lack of awareness" will only change if external benefits are clear and are proven to be true. Focussing on intrinsic motivation only will surely not lead to increased motivation for VPL.

2 transparency

For most individuals a complex procedure causes lack of transparency and leads to demotivation.
Also from a system perspective the lack of a VPL framework (aims, procedures, results, follow up) and lack of information (where to go to, how to enrol, costs and other conditions) creates a threshold for the use of VPL-opportunities. Especially when, as is the case for a relative new phenomenon like VPL, there is not yet a homogeneous attitude towards

informal learning and no "etiquette" on valuing the results of informal learning.
Individuals as well as organisations want clear information about a transparent procedure and dislike "fuzzy" information about abstract goals.

3 HRD/HRM

Contrary to what was said about the external motivation for VPL (individual benefits on career development and income) from the perspective of human resources a narrow focus on summative assessment (certification) is seen as a weakness. Summative assessment as an exclusive goal of VPL takes away from the importance of the formative value of VPL. Formative is used here in the sense of support of personal development and growth without the necessity of obtaining certificates or diplomas.
Following this line of argument it is not unexpected that qualification requirements were called "absurd", or "too high". After all, when summative assessment is the only goal and the requirements are (too) high, VPL will not lead to valuing prior learning. Instead it will deny the value of informal or non-formal learning and experience. From a systems point of view there were no remarks about weaknesses as far as HRD/HRM is concerned.

4 image

Remarkably no weaknesses are mentioned in the case descriptions as far as it concerns the image of VPL from the individual perspective. Is this because VPL takes the individual perspective, the individual interests, as it's general starting point?
From the perspective of institutional interests, the lack of familiarity was mentioned. Because lack of acceptance was also mentioned as a weak aspect of VPL it might remind us of the story about the chicken and the egg. As long as VPL is not familiar, it will not be accepted. The reverse is also true.
At the same time we might conclude that the information about the quality of VPL-procedures (see below) lack of acceptance is also due to a lack of quality.

5 quality

The quality of VPL is, from an individual point of view, influenced by the unclear mapping of individual needs and an unclear mapping of the individual (personal, social, work) situation.

- A gap between theory (what they assess) and practice (what I have done and learned).
- A mismatch between recognised competencies and the curriculum that is offered (no tailor made learning pathway) causes frustration and a lack of trust in VPL.
- In the voluntary sector a lack of follow up after the VPL procedure means that the benefits that could be gained just vanish.

The most serious weaknesses that were mentioned from a system perspective concern the quality of assessment standards, procedures and assessor competencies: no quality control, no VPL trainers, lack of instruments and inflexible procedures. inexperienced VPL assessors, who do their work by trial and error.

In the voluntary sector more specific quality is negatively influenced by lack of professionals and ill-structured procedures. Sometimes this leads to invalid VPL results. As one of the case studies mentioned: The assessment results were "fooled by team solidarity". These omissions have an extra serious effect on quality (and as a result on acceptance) when there is no quality assurance either. It should be underlined however that in countries were there is quality control (mostly as a result of VPL being part of national educational legislation) the acceptance of VPL is not mentioned as a weakness.
Quality is also threatened as a result of an over-dependency on knowledge. Because candidates developed their competencies in an informal or non-formal learning situation it is not valid and fair to use tests based on knowledge reproduction and on knowledge content taken directly from textbooks used in formal educational institutes. Instead knowledge should be tested on the basis of assessments that take the practical context wherein knowledge is used as the assessment context.

6 labour market policy

From the individual perspective a weakness of VPL is the risk that by recognition of competencies and a follow-up in terms of additional training, more professionals enter the voluntary sector displacing volunteers.
At the systems level an important weakness can be that company based VPL ties employees more to the company and diminishes the possibilities on the external labour market.
On the labour market, VPL has to capture his place in the area of demand and supply of competencies. VPL is not widely accepted and as a result the added value of VPL is much smaller than it could be. Quality of assessment should create more trust in VPL-dossiers (portfolio's).

7 costs and benefits

There seems to be no doubt about the benefits in the described cases. The weaknesses mentioned are about the high costs of VPL for individuals and about the time consuming procedures. This was especially mentioned in the non-profit cases. In the profit sector, costs seem to be no problem and the benefits are seemingly also clear.
The same weaknesses were described from the systems point of view: lack of resources and long procedures in the non-profit sector are also problematic from an institutional point of view.
In the voluntary sector costs were not mentioned as a weakness. This is probably due to the fact that the described projects all work with extra funding for VPL activities.

8 participation and connection

When all relevant stakeholders are not included in VPL systems, difficulties are created in the transfer from work to education, from one sector to another. Lack of connection between organisations also creates problems with access and difficulties with financing enrolment because for example social welfare organisations are not involved.

9 legislation

In the case-descriptions, not many weaknesses caused by legislation are mentioned. The reason for his might be that there is no legislation on how to organize VPL in most countries. In countries where there is legislation, the weaknesses mentioned concern the qualification requirements. Not the fact that there are requirements (that is called a strength in most cases) but that the requirements on qualification are too high or not differentiated enough.
Legislative obstacles are mentioned nevertheless from a systems perspective. Obstacles like financial support, mismatches between the educational and the industrial sector, lack of or difficult connections between different parts within the educational system. The most important weakness mentioned were that there are no formalised national vocational standards with which to compare the results of prior learning. Lack of standards means that valuation is only possible based on private, company bound VPL, recognition that is tied to particular companies. This can create difficulties in labour market mobility and is the opposite to a more flexible labour market.

Opportunities

1 attitude

In the profit and non-profit sectors, VPL is seen as a positive contribution for self-reflection and to create tailor-made development pathways.
In the profit sector the opportunities lie in the decrease in absenteeism and leave and in the stimulation of the individual, both directed at an increase of productivity.
In the non-profit sector opportunities lie in increased self-esteem and an improved training scheme, better connected to the real world.
It is remarkable that in the voluntary sector no opportunities are mentioned regarding attitude. A reason for this could be that the attitude of unpaid labourers has a specific character, different from that in the profit and non-profit sector where employees receive a salary.

2 transparency

VPL stimulates the use of (national) standards and a common language that leads towards a mutual recognition. For the voluntary sector is opens insight into educational opportunities.

3 HRD/HRM

In all sectors the importance of VPL for career development is very high as is lifelong learning and better recognition of what has been learned. Competencies will be better recognised and a better career advancement can be expected.

In the voluntary sector less importance is given to formal recognition in the form of diplomas.

4 image

The opportunity for quality is only mentioned in the non-profit and voluntary sectors. Both see opportunities in professionalizing and new tools. From an organisational point of view opportunities are seen in terms of recognition. The volunteers themselves underline the improvement of the training.

5 participation and connection

All sectors see better cooperation as an opportunity from VPL. Cases in the non-profit and voluntary sectors see more opportunities than the profit sector and more specific in co-operation with education and in developing better learning pathways.

6 labour market policy

The opportunities in the market policy differ per sector. The profit sector sees more opportunity in raising awareness, mobility and exploiting existing knowledge. The non-profit sector sees more opportunities in adaptation to the knowledge society, employability, integration and VPL as a support to training. In the voluntary sector it is seen as a possible instrument for mobilising public-civil resources.

7 costs

As expected the opportunity of cost is best seen in the profit sector. Advantages are less absenteeism and higher productivity. In the non-profit sector success is seen as an opportunity for VPL.

Threats

1 attitude

Threats in attitude are different per sector. In the profit sector dangers are seen in the lack of self-responsibility and disability to reflect on one's own competencies. Furthermore, danger can lie in jealousy and the fear of increasing demands by the employer.
In the non-profit sector threats are seen more in unwillingness, employees becoming discouraged and resistance to change. Also, formalisation of VPL towards exclusively summative assessment is seen as a danger.
For the voluntary sector, the threat is that there is not enough paid work as a next step and so VPL makes no sense in that respect.

2 transparency

There are few threats seen in transparency. The only two threats mentioned are lack of understanding of VPL (profit) and lack of information about the certificate value and the concept in general.

3 HRD/HRM

Because VPL is seen by companies as strengthening the formal certification, this could have as a consequence that employees will have fear of failure when they are asked to use VPL.
In the non-profit sector threats are seen more in an overestimation of the capabilities and in a lack of guidance in the process of VPL. In the profit sector a threat is also seen in the risk of a solid control structure and a lack of flexibility.

4 image

Threats in the profit sector could be the unknown or fewer acceptances by other colleagues and that VPL is not seen as equivalent to education.
This fear of quality is also seen in the non-profit sector, but here proof of practice expertise is also seen as a threat.
In the voluntary sector the only threat mentioned is that too many people could get involved in VPL.

5 quality

In all the sectors a threat for quality improvement and accessibility is seen due to a lack of accuracy of assessment. In the profit sector the lack of theoretical background on the part of VPL candidates is seen as a thereat, while in the voluntary sector validity of evidence is seen as a threat

6 participation and connection

The profit sector sees competition between institutions, who deal with VPL issues, as a threat towards cooperation and connection. Also the inflexibility of educational institutes is seen as a threat.
In the non-profit sector the high expectation related to VPL is not matched by the labour market effects because a lack of work is seen as a threat.

7 labour market policy

Lack of transferability is seen as a threat in the profit and non-profit sectors.
In the non-profit sector the fear of loosing employees on the one hand and on the other hand the lack of vacancies on the labour market are seen as threats.
The voluntary sector sees the increased commercial competition as a threat.

8 costs

All sectors see high costs as a threat. In the profit sector, on top of that, bureaucracy is seen as an additional threat.
In the non-profit sector lack of money and falling subsidies are expected to become a threat.
In the voluntary sector it is expected that VPL will be very time consuming.

Conclusions

Based on the case-analysis we can formulate the following recommendations for a European VPL framework and for the implementation of VPL:

1 Quality

A European VPL format should pay attention to the following characteristics of VPL:
- The aims of VPL in terms of prospects for different actors: educational institutions, employers, labour market organisations and individuals.
- The availability of individualized learning pathways and tailor made educational programs.
- Professional VPL guidance and VPL assessors.
- A national qualification framework.
- Availability of a national VPL quality standard and a national system for quality development.
- Availability of a robust European quality framework with specified process and product indicators.
- Explicit and clear statements about legislation and regulations that are proven to be counter productive to the realisation of the aims of VPL.

2 Acceptance and utilization

Most countries face a dilemma in creating more acceptance and utilization of VPL procedures. This dilemma is created by a lack of trust on the one hand and a lack of familiarity on the other hand. To create more trust, familiarity has to increase. But to increase familiarity more trust by organisations and individuals is needed. This 'chicken or egg-dilemma' can be "solved" by:

a Using national sectoral vocational qualification standards.
b The availability of a national quality- or hall-mark for VPL focusing on quality development, self assessment and transparency of the results of quality development by institutes using and/or offering VPL procedures.
c Continuing cross-national comparative research based on the indicators from the European VPL framework.

3 Further study

The amount of empirical data offered by the VPL2 project is large and rich. It consists of 200 case descriptions from 11 different European countries. A continuation of data analysis on these data is extremely worthwhile, using more and other qualitative as well as quantitative research methods.

Discussion

We can say that the methods used can be characterized as "deliberate, systematic and careful decision making". It was also a "Herschafftsfrei" process of decision making based on consensus between experts. These experts studied cases in their own country from different sectors (profit, non, profit and voluntary sector). For the case studies they used a format that was developed by the same experts in a shared decision making process.
Their national scope might be an obstacle for inter-subjectivity. As the analysing formats were developed in a joint process, the participants developed a shared "interpretation culture". This led to more inter-subjectivity in meaning and we did not experience problems in this respect during the deliberations in the panels. The panels were able to interpret and conclude very easily about the keywords that were central to the descriptions of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In the panel discussions, it was not the meaning of a text or the pinpointing of keywords, that led to different conclusions, but the consequences that had to be drawn from it. This was however not the focus of the panels assignment, nor was it the goal of the cross-case analysis.
As a conclusion we might say that the results of the cross-case analysis by using expert panels have at least a big inter-expert validity. Follow-up research using the same case-descriptions should however confirm this conclusion.

As far as the results of the case studies are concerned, some interesting conclusions are to be drawn.
On a European level we may conclude that a lot of effort has to be invested in improving the quality of standards, procedures and assessor competencies to take VPL from its "trial and error" phase to a professionalized status. Using national standards (qualification frameworks) that are validated by social partners, for company based assessment within voluntary organisations as well as educational based VPL creates more acceptance on the labour market and increases more added value for individuals. On the other hand individuals not only use VPL for aims driven by labour market perspectives but also for personal valuation not leading to a formal qualification, certificate or diploma. The use of VPL procedures might stop after the first phase of reflection on and valuing one's personal experiences. This in itself can also add to personal growth, empowerment and well being.

References

Yin, R.K., (2003) *Case study research. Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

The case studies we used for the cross-case synthesis can be retrieved from the VPL website: www.VPL4.eu .

Appendix 1: VPL Aims in the profit, non-profit and voluntary sector from an individual as well as a system point of view

Profit system aims

In the case studies the following keywords are used to describe the aims of VPL procedures in the profit sector from a systems point of view:

Country 1
- establish a European minimum standard for computer knowledge
- make knowledge predictable, measurable and comparative
- qualification of personnel
- dealing with personal issues and with human resources
- validation in the branch
- finding best qualified personnel
- effectiveness: les education needs, less absence and leave
- less time for training
- knowing about best fitting roles for employees
- finding highly motivated and qualified employees willing to keep on learning
- financial support for reintegration on the labour market
- legibility of developed competencies in the organisation improves the image of the organisation.

Country 2
- accounting educational needs of the enterprise
- accounting human capital in the organisation
- increasing participation of employees in education
- more highly educated employees
- develop tailor-made training
- raising competence levels at lower costs
- more efficiently take care of the total competence
- better adjustment to needs among the personnel
- obtain a precise definition of the employees knowledge development

Country 3
- get each employee more active in his/her own competence development
- organisation will know their competence pool better (HC-accounting)
- basis for future planning of company policy
- tailored training of employees
- lowering costs of competence development
- saving costs at national level

Country 4
- lowering costs of training
- meeting industry needs
- avoid duplication
- flexibility of training
- develop manufacturing upskilling programme
- offer entrepreneurs an opportunity for obtaining the qualification
- international recognition
- more effective training
- conform to European legislation
- enable small traders to acquire qualification without completion of formal education
- verifying applicants competence
- qualification control in a profession
- meeting European quality certificates

Country 5
- recognition for the individual
- Student retention: make education more accessible and appealing for workers

Country 6
- Avoid redundancies
- Measuring competencies to new jobs

Profit individual aims

In the case studies the following keywords are used describing the aims of VPL procedures in the profit sector from the perspective of the individual:

Country 1
- developing confidence in own competence, more self-esteem
- gain official qualification
- broaden assignment possibilities, career development
- employability- assurance through self-employment
- being employed
- better earnings
- reintegration in the labour market
- joy in work as a result of a good match between individual competence and workplace demands
- my competencies valuated publicly

Country 2
- Getting qualified
- Formal recognition
- Better access as a consequence of co-ownership (employers and education) in educational opportunities

Country 3
- Visualising competencies and skills for career development
- Empowerment on the labour-market
- Shortening study periods
- Increasing salaries
- Keeping stock of human resources
- Allocation of human resources
- Increasing awareness of own competencies
- Getting qualified by work experience

Country 4
- Obtaining better qualifications
- Improving knowledge and skills
- Shorten educational routes
- Better earnings
- Cost reduction on training
- Transparency in time and costs for the individuals
- Obtaining European certificates
- Opportunity for the individual to continue studies
- More insight in the individuals own competencies
- Increasing individual value on the labour market

Country 5
- More time efficient course completion
- Enrolment in courses by "new" target groups
- Verify and validate professional knowledge
- Protecting legal professional titles

Country 6
- Remain employable

Non-Profit system aims

In the case studies the following keywords are used describing the aims of VPL procedures in the non-profit sector from the perspective of the system:

Country 1
- Guidance and counselling
- Placement networks
- Benefit from on the job training
- Competence analysis

Country 2
- Qualification for special functions
- Increasing involvement of universities in lifelong learning
- Reduction of teacher shortage
- Safeguarding valid qualifications

Country 3
- Social empowerment
- Reduction of shortages on the labour market
- Time saving educational route
- Attracting more students
- Improve quality
- Increase motivation of employees
- Saving money by planning tailor-made training
- Career development

Country 4
- Ensure professional quality
- Qualifying unskilled nurses

Country 5
- Increasing numbers of qualified employees
- Increasing transparency, comparability and transferability
- Extend adults educational opportunities
- Developing more appropriate ways of access to formal education
- Widening the independency and autonomy of schools
- Strengthen ties between education and organisations/companies
- Connecting theoretical educational forms with practical experiences
- Using more effective work based learning
- Standardising non-specific field aspects of assessment

Country 6
- Gain formal certification for learning that has already taken place
- Decreasing student drop out
- Make education more accessible
- Transfer informal learning into the formal setting enabling certification
- Have a greater number of qualified workers
- Facilitate greater participation in further education

Non-Profit individual aims

In the cases the following keywords are used describing the aims of VPL procedures from the perspective of the system:

Country 1
- Get civil recognition for experience in army

Country 2
- Getting qualified for special tasks (leadership) or job (teacher)
- Getting degree or exemption of part of study

Country 3
- Empowerment
- Getting a job
- (Higher) certification
- Formal recognition
- Learning is fun
- Increased motivation (by exemptions)
- Self-esteem

Country 4
- Self-confidence
- Getting qualified
- Higher salary, able to get mortgage
- Permanent job
- Higher status & responsibilities

Country 5
- Getting (partial) qualifications and diploma
- Find new job or maintain present one

- Entry into education at higher level
- Exemptions / shorter education
- Certification of competencies
- Insight into own competencies / strengths / weaknesses
- Increased value on labour market
- Stimulation of learning
- Individualised learning paths

Voluntary system aims

In the cases the following keywords are used describing the aims of VPL procedures in the voluntary sector from the perspective of the system:

Country 1
- Increase number of students for education
- Improve quality of volunteer (cultural – historical knowledge)
- Increase HRM quality
- New segment of volunteers
- Social & summative benefits
- Positive awareness of competencies
- Improve social learning

Country 2
- Importance of learning at work
- Marketing the learning arena
- Study circles
- Increase employability

Country 3
- Qualification through professional organisation
- Sectoral qualification system, independently from education and institutes

Country 4
- Development of volunteer sector
- New skilled employee

Country 5
- Improved skills as volunteer

Volunteer individual aims

In the cases the following keywords are used describing the aims of VPL procedures in the voluntary sector from the perspective of the individual:

Country 1
- Start training at higher level
- Get training and support of other members
- Recognition in organisation certificate
- Improve self-esteem
- Better employability
- Professionalisation of in-company training
- Social esteem of volunteers
- Implicit recruitment
- Get insight in competencies of youth
- More aware of background

Country 2
- Increased motivation and self-esteem
- Increased ability to describe own competencies
- Learning made-to-measure
- Ensure quality at all levels
- Unskilled workers learning and qualifying as assistants

Country 3
- Advantage on labour-market
- Time saving

Country 4
- Satisfaction
- New relationships
- Contact with business partners
- Involvement in social life
- Employability
- Increase value of handicapped, retired and seniors for society
- Career and personal development

Country 5
- Develop young people

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF) ON SYSTEMS FOR VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

3

JENS BJØRNÅVOLD

Introduction

This contribution discusses the potential impact of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) on policies and practises in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The main question asked is whether the EQF – and the emerging National Qualifications Frameworks – may facilitate the introduction of permanent, high quality approaches to the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in all European countries?
The proposal for the European Qualifications Framework was launched by the European Commission in September 2006 (Com (2006) 479). This recommendation outlines an overarching framework, defined through learning outcomes, to be set up in Europe to facilitate comparison of qualifications and qualifications levels in order to promote geographical and labour market mobility as well as lifelong learning. The EQF is thus not limited to cross-border, European comparison, but is explicitly aiming at the reduction of barriers between different education, training and learning systems, also when these barriers exist at national or sector level. If successfully adopted by the European Parliament and Council (expected November 2007), a process of implementation will start in 2008. Those countries deciding to go along with the EQF will be asked to do this in two stages; The first stage – referring national qualifications levels to the EQF – should be completed by 2010, the second – introducing a reference to the EQF in all new certificates – should be completed by 2012.

In its debate on the EQF the European Parliament (June 2007) made a particular reference to the link between the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Parliament underlines that the EQF should be seen as an instrument for building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning[1], for example by broadening the basis of qualifications and opening up towards the learning taking place outside formal institutions and systems. The emphasis of the European Parliament can thus be seen as indication of the increasing importance attributed to validation all over Europe (Bjørnåvold 2000, Colardyn and Bjørnåvold 2005). But it can also be seen as an indication that the EQF is seen as an instrument for promoting a more comprehensive approach to validation in Europe.

[1] Several references to validation is introduced to the EQF recommendation by the European Parliament. A new recital 5 is introduced, stating that 'The validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council Conclusions on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 28 May 2004. On a more general level, a new recital 10 states that 'This Recommendation should contribute to the modernisation of the education and training systems, to the linkage between education, training and employment and to the building of bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Whether the EQF actually will function as an instrument for promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning is still an open question. The strong momentum created around the EQF, based on a general acceptance of the relevance of the framework, may however be seen as an opportunity for pursuing a more systematic policy in this field. This article will address this opportunity through an elaboration of the following issues and themes:

- What caused the development of the EQF; which are the contextual factors requiring closer European co-operation in the field of qualifications?
- Which are the core elements of the EQF; which are the strengths and limitations?
- To which extent can the emergence (during the last decade) of national approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning be seen as complementary to the shift in direction proposed by the EQF?
- To which extent can the implementation of the EQF be used as a lever and an instrument for establishing permanent, high quality approaches to validation all over Europe?

Why a European Qualifications Framework?

Europe is characterised by a great diversity of education and training institutions and systems. This reflects a strong consensus that education and training must be able to respond to learning needs at local, regional and national level. One harmonised institutional and pedagogical approach would run contrary to the needs of individual citizens and the labour market. This richness and variety of European education and training can be seen as an important asset and something which makes it possible to react rapidly and efficiently to technological and economic change.

As recognised by the European Councils in Lisbon and Barcelona in 2000 and 2001, increased transparency of qualifications is a necessary precondition for turning this diversity into an asset. A situation where education and training systems and institutions operate in isolation from each other leads to fragmentation and hinder rather than enable citizens to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies.

Transparency of qualifications is defined (Cedefop 2005) as the degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the labour market, in education and training and in a wider social setting. Transparency is thus related to – but not the same as – formal recognition of qualifications. Transparency of qualifications may be seen as a condition for the formal recognition provided by appropriate authorities at national or sector level. Increased transparency is important for a number of reasons at different levels:

- Individual citizens must be able to make informed judgements on the relative value of one qualification compared to another – something which is not possible without a systematic approach to transparency of qualifications. This is accentuated by the fact that

the complexity of education and training systems and provisions is increasing rather than decreasing.
- Transparency may be seen as prerequisite and condition for transfer of qualifications from one setting to another. Pursuing lifelong and lifewide learning requires that individuals are able to combine qualifications acquired in different settings, systems and countries and use these to use these as building blocks in a learning career. Pursuing successful lifelong learning careers requires transparent systems making it possible to judge how qualifications and units of qualifications can be linked and/or combined.
- Increased transparency is important for employers as it improves their ability to judge the profile, content and relevance of a qualification. This is critical for the recruiting of new staff and for the management of existing human resources in a company. It is also important for judging the relevance of qualifications to labour market needs and as a basis for improving this relevance. Increased complexity of qualifications combined with a lack of transparency makes it more difficult to decide how to meet knowledge, skills and competence needs for individuals, enterprises and for society at large.
- Transparency is important for education and training providers as it makes it possible for them to compare the profile and content of their own offers to other providers, not least when reforming and developing new qualifications. Increased transparency of qualifications is furthermore an important part of quality assurance in education and training, as it is for the improvement of counselling and guidance.

This transparency has only to a limited extent been realised in Europe. As the complexity of qualifications systems grow, individuals as well as employers find it harder to judge the relevance and relative importance of various qualifications. While numerous initiatives have addressed these questions since the 1960s and onwards, lack of transparency is still a problem and a challenge. Common to almost all these initiatives is a strong reliance on the comparison of learning inputs. This is exemplified by the 2006 'simplified' Directive on recognition of professional qualifications (Directive 2005/36/EC). This Directive, brings together numerous previous directives (dating back to the 1970s) and introduces a five level structure based on the number of years spent in education or training. An increasing number of stakeholders have voiced scepticism towards this approach. It is argued that this approach is too simplistic and may fail to capture the differences in content and profile between different national qualifications.

The growing unease with existing approaches to transparency and recognition led to the proposal – in 2004 – of a European Qualifications Framework based on learning outcomes[2]. Shifting the focus from input to outcomes is seen as necessary for developing a common language allowing for a more realistic and informative comparison of the profile and content of qualifications. This shift towards a learning outcomes based approach at European level reflects long-term developments and experiences at sector and national level. Several countries have systematically and for several decades used a learning out-

[2] All documents related to the development of the EQF are available on http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

come or competence based approach, the UK and Finland exemplifying this. The EQF can thus not be seen as an isolated European level initiative – rather as a proposal taking into account important lessons learned at national and local level.

The core element of the EQF

The core element of the EQF is the eight level reference structure defined through learning outcomes[3]. The EQF recommendation defines learning outcomes as '...the statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process...' . Acting as a common and neutral reference point for education and training authorities at national and sector level, the eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education and training to the highest academic and professional qualifications. It is assumed that the introduction of this common reference point will make it easier for individual citizens, employers and education and training authorities/providers to navigate within and between complex qualifications systems. This will facilitate transfer of qualifications and eventually provide a better informed basis for legal decisions on the recognition of qualifications.

– In the EQF, learning outcomes are defined as a combination of knowledge[4], skills[5] and competence[6]. This is important as it draws attention to the fact that the content and profile of qualifications will vary according to the ultimate purpose, the distinction between academic and vocational qualifications illustrates this. The balance between knowledge, skills and competence will vary from qualification to qualification; the EQF reference levels provide an instrument to capture these variations.
– The EQF is a framework for cooperation and an instrument for strengthening mutual trust between stakeholders involved in education and training. If used on a systematic basis, the common reference levels can potentially, through the increased transparency achieved, facilitate comparison between and translation of qualifications. The future impact of the EQF requires, however, that national education and training authorities and stakeholders at sector level decide to commit to it on a voluntary basis. The EQF will thus only become a success if it is recognised to be relevant to the needs of sectors and Member States.
– While the long term aim of the EQF is to improve mutual trust between the different

[3] For information on the background for these 8 levels, see Coles and Oates, Cedefop 2004

[4] Knowledge is defined as 'the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practises that is related to a field of study or work. In the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.;

[5] Skills is defined as 'the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);

[6] Competence is defined as 'the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development. In the European Qualifications Framework, 'competence' is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

stakeholders involved in education and training, the cooperation must already from the start be based on procedures and criteria supporting this trust. Decisions to refer national or sector qualifications to the EQF must therefore be closely linked to transparent principles and procedures for quality assurance at all relevant levels.

In combination, these defining features of the EQF illustrate its relevance as a tool for increasing transparency of qualifications in Europe. The EQF is explicitly defined as a meta-framework allowing other frameworks at national or sector level to use it as a reference. This contrasts previous initiatives addressing only parts (sub-systems) of education and training and thus failing to focus on the permeability of education and training system as such; the bridges and connections necessary for realising lifelong and lifewide learning.

The strengths and limitation of the EQF[7]

The success of the EQF depends on a clear understanding, by all stakeholders of its purpose, its functions and – not least – its limitations. This is also important when we address the potential link between the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The following sections elaborate aspects which are particularly important for this relationship.

EQF is a qualifications framework, not a competence framework

The EQF is a qualifications[8] framework and not a competencies framework. The framework enables the classification of qualifications levels and systems; it is not intended for the classification of individual competencies. What is decisive is that the EQF is a learning-outcome orientated framework, in which the descriptors describe all forms of learning outcomes. The misunderstanding of the EQF as a competencies framework is due to the fact that learning outcomes are formulated as statements about what the learners can do and so provide a certain 'competence orientation'. More correctly, the EQF should be called a 'qualifications framework based on learning outcomes'. This clarification means that the EQF has a somewhat limited scope; it can not solve all problems related to the measurement and comparison of learning. The main strength is its orientation towards competencies, its effort to open up towards the learning taking place outside formal institutions.

The described competence orientation is critical for promoting validation of non-formal

[7] This part of the article builds on the EQF Guidance note currently being developed by the European Commission. The draft guidance note was written by Jorg Markowitz, Karin Messener and Sonja Langauer All 3S). The final version of the note is based on extensive comments by experts previously involved in the development of the EQF.

[8] The EQF Recommendation provides the following definition of qualification: 'qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcome to a given standard'.

and informal learning. The important principle established by the EQF is that all learning outcomes are relevant – and should be included in – the process leading to the award of a qualification. Attainment of a qualification should not be made dependent on particular learning processes (for example formal education or training). The award should refer to the entire scope of learning outcomes acquired by the individual and assess these outcomes against an agreed standard. This approach is well known to validation of non-formal and informal learning; the EQF establishes it as a general principle to be applied for all qualifications across Europe.

The EQF descriptors

The descriptors have, as already indicated, been written to cover the full range of learning outcomes. They cover learning outcomes acquired in work and study situations, academic as well as vocational settings, and initial as well as continuing education or training. In addition, the descriptors reflect both specialisations and generalisations. Thus, reaching a higher level does not necessarily imply that the required skills and knowledge will be more specialised, although this might be the case in many academic and research contexts. Moving from a lower to a higher level can also mean becoming more of a generalist. The descriptors have been written to sufficiently distinguish between descriptors the different levels and show distinct progress in dimensions of change. To achieve this combination of continuity and discreteness, key words have been used to characterize levels (e.g. 'factual and theoretical knowledge', in contrast to 'basic knowledge' on the lower levels or 'specialised knowledge' on the higher levels; or 'supervision' of the work/study activities of others which come in at level 4 and 5, but are not relevant at levels below). These key words can also be understood as indicators of threshold levels. Further criteria for formulating the descriptors were: to use only positive statements; to avoid jargon; to apply definite and concrete statements (e.g. avoiding terms like 'appropriate') and at the same time to be as simple and generic as possible. Thus, the descriptors of the present EQF table are deliberately more generic, e.g. in comparison to previous versions. The column titles were pragmatically chosen to use simple and comprehensible terms, instead of possibly more precise, technical terms used by a small group of experts.

Knowledge, skills and competence

There are many different possibilities for structuring and constituting the results of learning processes. In the EQF it was decided, following very comprehensive discussions involving experts from the 32 countries involved, to use the distinction between knowledge, skills and competence (KSC). This is one of the most established means of

differentiation and is also inspired by and connected to other, very similar, differentiations of learning outcomes. In France, for example, one generally distinguishes between savoir, savoir-faire and savoir-être; in the German-speaking countries, the common differentiation is between Fachkompetenz, Methodenkompetenz, Personalkompetenz and Sozialkompetenz; while in the English-speaking countries, the conventional categorisation is between 'cognitive competence', 'functional competence' und 'social competence'. The differentiation between knowledge, skills and competencies can therefore be seen as a pragmatic agreement between the various, widespread approaches. The KSC differentiation of learning outcomes helps to clearly construct descriptors and to more easily classify the levels of qualifications. These three categories (KSC) should not be read as separate and isolated entities but rather as related and complementary elements adding up to a whole.

The EQF as a catalyst for European co-operation and national reform[9]

The agreement on a neutral, learning outcome based reference framework, is a key to increased co-operation between stakeholders at national, sector and European level. The potential of this approach, even prior to its formal adoption, has already been demonstrated. During 2005 and 2006, the EQF proposal has acted as a catalyst for reform at national level. An increasing number of countries are currently implementing or considering the implementation of overarching National Qualifications Frameworks[10] responding to the EQF. By June 2007 the following countries have established or committed themselves to establish NQFs: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, UK (separate frameworks in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, Wales). The majority of remaining EU member states are currently considering the development of NQFs. While these frameworks take various forms it is reasonable to conclude that all have four generic aims:

- To establish national standards for learning outcomes (competencies);
- To act as a way of relating qualifications to each other; and
- To promote access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning.
- To promote through regulation the quality of education and training provision;

In some cases national frameworks serve policy purposes that go beyond these four aims. The development of an NQF can be used to provoke modernisation of parts of the edu-

[9] This section is based on Bjørnåvold and Coles (forthcoming; 2007): Governing education and training; the case of qualifications frameworks, European Journal on Vocational training. See also Coles (2006) and (2007).

[10] According to the definitions in the EQF recommendation 'a national qualifications framework' is an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. It aims at the integration and coordination of national qualifications subsystems and the improvement of transparency, access, progression and quality of qualification in relation to the labour market and civil society.

cation and training system, for example to change the regulation of the quality of qualification processes or to change the way public funds are used to support education and training. This focus on national reform seems to characteristic to the ongoing development of the German Qualifications Framework, illustrating the double objective of the EQF; promoting cross border transparency and enabling lifelong learning at national level.
Even where no explicit wider reform agenda is acknowledged we may assume there is a power within a simple classification of qualifications to transform aspects of education and qualifications. This arises through the codification of the complex arrangements for qualifications in a country into a relatively simple form. Codification, or modelling, creates a relationship and a language with which stakeholders can readily engage[11]. Without the codification of a framework the hierarchy of qualifications, the knowledge, skills and wider competencies they each testify and the horizontal equivalencies between qualifications are often subject to incomplete or tacit knowledge of the qualifications system. The latter reduces confidence in policies aimed at reform and makes innovation difficult.
Qualifications frameworks should be seen as a part of a qualifications system (OECD, 2006). The latter is an all-embracing term for all structures and processes[12] that lead to the award of a qualification. Some qualifications systems are so complex and fragmented that they hardly appear to be systematic. Nevertheless within these systems the public is aware of levels of qualification (such as basic schooling, completion of upper secondary education, apprenticeships, bachelors and masters degrees etc.). While these implicit levels of qualification come close to resembling a qualifications framework, they fail to embody some of the power of frameworks simply because the levels are implicit and therefore are subject to differences in interpretation. The relationship between gaining qualification and the requirements for progression from one qualification to another or to a job are often unclear and not reliable.
The development of the EQF has the potential to formalise some of these implicit levels and tacit appreciations. The EQF sets overarching descriptions of learning outcomes and associates these with levels of qualification. The level descriptors are in fact criteria for aligning national qualification levels to the EQF. The process for carrying out this task requires that each qualification level (including all the different types of qualifications at each level) be matched against the EQF level criteria for alignment. The transformation of these implicit levels requires involvement of and acceptance by all relevant stakeholders. Traditionally the description of these levels would have been focussed on duration and location of education and training, on entry requirements to learning or work and on work related licenses to practise. Following the EQF, however, the main ingredient to

[11] For the general case of codification of knowledge and tacit understandings see Cowan, R., David, P. and Foray, D., 1999, The Explicit Economics of Knowledge Codification and Tacitness, presentation to the 3rd TIPIK Workshop, University of Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg.

[12] The OECD publication Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning, OECD, Paris. 2006 refers to the substructures of a qualifications system as the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes,assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that linkeducation and training to the labour market and civil society.

be made explicit will have to be the knowledge, skills and wider competencies that this national qualification level testifies to learners and other users of qualifications.
A meta-framework such as the EQF has distinct characteristics to the NQFs that relate to it and enable relationships to be established between qualifications levels in different countries. The major differences between EQF levels and NQF levels are dependent on the functions of the frameworks, the method of their development, the influences on the form of the frameworks, the qualification levels they recognise, the quality assurance processes involved and the benchmarks used for establishing levels. Table 1 summarises these differences.

Table 1: Comparing national qualifications levels and levels in the EQF

Differences	**National Qualifications levels**	**EQF levels**
Main function:	to act as a benchmark for the level, volume and type of learning.	to act as a benchmark for the level of any learning recognised in a qualification or defined in an NQF
Developed by:	regional bodies, national agencies and sectoral bodies	Member States acting together collective priorities across countries
Sensitive to:	local, regional and national priorities (e.g. levels of literacy, labour market needs)	(e.g. globalisation of trade)
Recognises learning of individuals by:	assessment/evaluation, validation and certification.	Does not directly recognise learning of individuals
Currency depends on:	factors within national context	the level of trust between international users
Quality is guaranteed by:	the practices of national bodies and learning institutions	national practices and the robustness of the process linking national and EQF levels
Levels are defined by reference to:	national benchmarks which are embedded in different specific learning contexts, e.g. school education, work or higher education	general progression in learning across all contexts across all countries

If these distinctions are accepted, the form and function of national qualifications levels (or frameworks) will be different to those of a meta-framework such as the EQF (Tuck et.al., 2006). Such differences should create a clear space for NQFs to continue to develop in a distinctive way that reflects national social and cultural perspectives. In the EQF proposals the intention is to respect and encourage different national perspectives. However, even if the differences are accepted, the existence of the meta-framework will, at least indirectly, influence the definition of levels in national systems.

Preparing the ground for learning outcomes; Validation of non-formal and informal learning

It is possible to see the EQF-approach as preceded and motivated by the development of methods and systems for the validation of learning taking place outside formal education and training. This is particularly the case when we look at the development of summative[13] approaches to validation where the purpose is to certify learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education and training system. A common statement in the field of validation is that results (or outcomes) matters, less so the processes leading to these results (or outcomes).

Validation (identification, assessment and recognition) of non-formal and informal learning has been put on the political agenda of the majority of the countries taking part in the 'Education and training 2010' programme. While some countries remain at the level of debate and planning, an increasing number has introduced concrete measures allowing individuals to have their non- and informally acquired learning outcomes assessed and recognised. This does not mean, however, that validation of non-formal and informal learning has become a fully integrated part of mainstream education, training and learning systems in Europe. We can still observe considerable scepticism towards this opening up of qualifications; frequently referring to doubts as regards the quality of this alternative route. We can also observe that validation is introduced in a fragmented and piecemeal way; frequently failing to establish validation as an established and widely recognised alternative route to qualifications.

Validation as a centrepiece of lifelong learning strategies

The ongoing developments in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning can be characterised in the following way: Validation of non-formal and informal learning is seen as a centrepiece in strategies on lifelong learning. These strategies, formulated at national as well as at European level, recognises that learning takes place in a range of different institutional – formal, non-formal and informal – and that there is a need to reconcile the education and training in specialised institutions with the experience based learning from practical working as well as life situations. The development of validation methodologies is furthermore intrinsically linked to the concept of learning outcomes. The development of validation of non-formal and informal learning is generally seen as a way to increase flexibility of formal education and training institutions, making it possible to reach a formal qualification through various routes.
So far, development of validation has predominantly been linked to the formal vocational

[11] Summative is opposed to formative. A formative approach to assessment gives feed back to a learning process, the awarding of a certificate or qualification is not the purpose.

education and training qualifications awarded at (the proposed) EQF levels 2-4. This reflects the fact that vocational qualifications in many cases are based on a combination of theoretical and practical learning and thus are open to a variety of learning forms and modes. Validation is however increasingly being developed in Higher education, in particular allowing individuals with relevant practical work experience to enter formal education and training. Predominantly taking place in vocational/professional fields (engineering, nursing, social work) , this approach is still viewed with some reluctance by institutions.

According to the data collected for the European Inventory in validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission 2004 and 2005) countries can be categorised at three levels of development. These are:

- Experimental; These are countries that have accepted the need to pursue initiatives but where methods and approaches have been set up on an ad hoc basis to gain experiences and where a more permanent approach has still to be formulated and decided. Greece and Germany illustrates this.
- Emerging: These are countries where a decision on a national approach has been reached but where full implementation has yet to take place. Belgium and Denmark illustrate this stage, during recent years important legal and institutional initiatives have been taken and are being pursued.
- Established: These are countries where permanent systems have been established and are currently in use. France, Ireland, Finland, Portugal and Norway illustrate this category of countries.

The gradual development of methods and systems for validation during the last decade may thus be said to have paved the way for the learning outcomes approach fundamental to the EQF. The practical experiences gained through validation have played a key role in removing some of the scepticism towards non-formally and informally acquired competencies

Validation of non-formal and informal learning; an unfinished business

While we can observe a steady increase in the number of countries introducing methods and systems for validation, the following three factors may influence the extent to which these methods and systems become fully integrated parts of the different education, training and learning systems.

I. Validation; part of a comprehensive strategy reform of qualifications systems?

As indicated above, very few countries have introduced comprehensive national strategies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The best known exception to this is France where the 2002 Law on validation (VAE) opens up to the award of all qualifica-

tions (or part qualifications) on the basis of non-formally or informally acquired competencies. The same approach seems, at least in principle, to be applied by Ireland through the establishment of their National Qualifications Framework in 2003. This radical move, in effect introducing a certification system independent of the education and training providers, has yet to win general acceptance. Most countries have introduced validation systems linked to limited segments (or sub-systems) of their education and training systems. Norway exemplifies this last approach, currently operating validation systems linked to upper secondary and higher education respectively. This falls short of the original objective (for example in the 1999-2001 experimental program) of creating a comprehensive national approach to validation, linking up to all parts of the education, training an learning system in a transparent and comprehensive way. Most countries described above as being at an experimental or emerging level seem to tailor validation systems to the needs of particular groups; notably immigrants, individuals with disabilities, unemployed or low qualified. While there may be good reason for choosing this approach it also runs the risk of placing validation outside mainstream qualifications policies – reducing the overall impact on lifelong learning policies. A key question is thus whether validation is used as a tool addressing the overall permeability of the education and training system or whether it is applied in a more limited way; addressing particular needs and problems.

II. Validation; Referring to which standards and reference points?

A qualification is not possible without an explicit standard or reference point. (Summative) validation of non-formal and informal learning is likewise inconceivable without a clearly defined and agreed reference point. The credibility and impact of validation of non-formal and informal learning depends very much on this standard and how it is defined and interpreted. A too narrow standard may clash with the non-standardised but in many cases highly relevant learning taking place outside schools. While a lot of attention has been paid to the methodologies for validation, relatively less attention has been paid to the standards and how they influence the final results of the process. Standards express, in a codified way, the basic objectives pursued by users (individual citizens, employers) as well as providers (education and training institutions, certifying institutions) of qualifications (Fretwell et. al. 2001. Mansfield et. al. 2001). In general, qualifications – and validation of non-formal and informal learning – relate to two[14] main categories of standards; occupational and education-training standards. These two categories can also be described as employment and teaching/learning specifications respectively and operate according to different logics, reflecting different sets of priorities, motivations and purposes.

– Occupational standards are classifications and definitions of the main jobs that people do. Following the logic of employment, these standards will focus on what people need to do, how they will do it, and how well they do it. Occupational standards thus have

[14] In some countries, for example the UK, we can see that assessment standards are developed as a third, separate category of standards

to be written as competencies and formulated in terms of outcomes. They exist in all European countries but each nation has its own style of derivation and presentation of the standards. An important reason for defining standards is to enable national education and training to producing people skilled in the right areas for the labour market. However, standards serve other purposes; these include defining state of the art working practice so that companies can modernise more easily, shifting the focus of the national labour market into new areas (e.g. from manufacturing to new service areas), and for analysis of the labour market and in particular identifying skills gaps and skills shortages. Occupational standards form a bridge between the labour market and education because educational standards (syllabuses and pedagogies) can be developed from them.

– Education-training standards, following the logic of education and training, will focus on what people need to learn, how they will learn it, and how the quality and content of learning will be assessed. The main interest is thus formulated in terms of input (subject, syllabus, teaching methods, process and assessment). Educational standards are normally written as teaching specifications and qualification specifications. For example to be a skilled plumber you need to study these subjects at this type of institution for this many years and use this text book or manual. Now occupational standards, written as competencies are forcing a change in the way educational standards are to be written – as learning outcomes which are statements of what a person knows and can do in the work situation.

Most systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning relate to the second category of standards, those designed specifically for the education and training system. The critical question is to which extent these standards are defined through the specification of teaching input and to which extent an outcome or competence-orientation has been introduced. While the competence-based approach to a large extent seems to be used for vocational education and training (also due to the fact that the link to occupational standards normally will be stronger), the situation in other parts of the education and training system might be different. A particular question should be asked to validation practises developing in higher education; here institutions largely operate validation on an autonomous basis and in relation to their internal standards.

III. Validation: what is the link to quality assurance?

A traditional argument against validation is that it will result in 'A' and 'B' qualifications. This argument builds on the assumption that learning in formal education and training structured and quality assured, the learning outside schools is unstructured, haphazard and not subject to quality assurance. If not countered, this argument might seriously undermine the credibility of validation approaches. Even more than in formal education and training, validation approaches must be based on transparent and agreed quality assurance procedures. The common European principles on identification and validation of

non-formal and informal learning from 2004 summarises the main issues in the following way:

- Validation must be voluntary
- The privacy of individuals should be respected
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed
- Stakeholders should establish systems for validation.
- Systems should contain mechanism for guidance and counselling of individuals
- Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.
- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek a balanced participation.
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- The professional competencies of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

While these principles are important, they mainly refer to the delivery of validation, less to the link to the overall qualifications systems and the actual definition and formulation of validation standards. Avoiding 'A' and 'B' qualifications requires that validation of non-formal and informal learning becomes an integrated part of the assessment processes leading to qualifications, subject to the same rigid quality assurance requirements as any formal learning process.

The EQF: An instrument for promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning?

The shift to learning outcomes promoted by the EQF, and rapidly followed through the setting up of National Qualifications Frameworks all over Europe, may prove to be very important for the promotion of validation of non formal learning. This is first of all due to the general shift in emphasis introduced by the learning outcomes approach; the focus is firmly on the results and outcomes of a learning process, less on the particularities of the process itself. As we have stated repeatedly this may lead to more inclusive awarding process – referring to broader standards.

The potential link between the EQF and validation is well captured in what we have described as the main aims of the emerging NQFs: They aim at the establishment of national standards for learning outcomes (competencies); they act as a way of relating qualifications to each other; they promote access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning. and they promote through regulation the quality of education and training provision. Each of these four aims may be directly related to the further development of methods and systems for validation.

a) National standards for learning outcomes

Traditionally the description of national qualifications levels would have been focussed on duration and location of education and training, on entry requirements to learning or work and on work related licenses to practise. Following the EQF, however, the main ingredient to be made explicit will have to be the knowledge, skills and wider competencies that this national qualification level testifies to learners and other users of qualifications. Compared to traditional, input based education and training standards this will allow for the inclusion of a broader set of learning processes, contexts and outcomes. It is crucial, however, that the definition of these national standards for learning outcomes takes into account the particular requirements posed by validation of non-formal and informal learning.

b) Relating qualifications to each other; moving towards permeable systems

The objective of the EQF and the corresponding NQFs is to reduce barriers between education, training and learning institutions and systems and to promote access, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes. Methods and systems for validation can complement and contribute directly to this objective. If introduced on a systematic basis, as a part of the overall qualifications system, validation will open up qualifications to a broader set of users, for example by certifying work experience and voluntary work. The key to success, however, is the mainstreaming of validation and the establishment of non-formal and informal learning as a normal route to qualifications.

c) Access, transfer and progression

The objectives pursued by the EQF and corresponding NQFs are the same as those pursued by validation; individuals should be able to make progress in their learning careers on the basis of their actual learning outcomes and competencies; not on the basis of the duration and location of a particular learning process. The development of validation should therefore be directly linked to the ongoing developments of NQFs; emphasising this as an approach complementary to the NQF.

d) Promoting the quality of education and training provisions

The shift to learning outcomes does not mean that quality assurance of education and training provisions should stop. The process of learning is still a critical factor influencing the overall quality of qualifications. The movement to validate learning outside formal education and training may complement this internal quality assurance by establishing a stronger link to the outside world, in particular to the enterprises and organisations. In this sense a systematic approach to validation may be seen as providing feedback to the formal system, making it possible to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different routes to the same qualification.

Conclusion

The development of the EQF and corresponding NQFs can be seen as an effort to reform existing qualifications systems in Europe. The same can be said of the efforts to develop methods and systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. These reform efforts have been triggered by important external pressure. The immigration rates are increasing, technological change is speeding up, globalisation has become a reality, lifetime jobs is a thing of the past and everybody faces the challenge of lifelong learning. Combined, all these factors require more flexible, inclusive and open qualifications systems. Linking the development of the EQF – and corresponding NQFs – with the systematic introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning would greatly contribute to this necessary reform of qualifications and qualifications systems in Europe.

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DEVELOPING A COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH TO THE ASSESSMENT OF APEL PROFESSIONALS

4

JOHN KONRAD

This contribution discusses the ways in which the Common European Principles on the Identification and Validation of Non-formal Learning (2004)[15] and the Education and Training 2010 work programme has shaped a UK response to the draft occupational and training standards developed. The selected context is Initial Teacher[16] Education and Training for the Lifelong Learning Sector. There are a number of qualifications proposed as a means of delivering the statutory requirement for Teacher qualification from September 2007. This context will be described in more detail below. The context provided by the EuroguideVAL project is discussed and then the ways in which a pilot Unit was developed and submitted for approval to Lifelong Learning UK [the Sector Skills Council]. Finally, some possible implications are identified in the context of the European Union Lisbon Objectives.

The EuroguideVAL project

The Leonardo-project EuroguideVAL has developed occupational standards, training standards and training materials for professionals working in the field of APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning). APEL professionals are defined as those providing users of the APEL process with information, advice and guidance and as well as participating in the assessment and validation of informal and non-formal learning. The project partnership has undertaken extensive documentary and field research into professional practice in guidance and counselling, assessment and certification related to non-formal and informal learning in each country concerned. The results of these surveys form the basis of identifying the competencies, knowledge and methodology used by professionals working in these areas. The project aims at defining a common European framework of competencies for the initial and continuing training of these professionals.[17]

The project began with a survey of professional practice of counselling, orientation and guidance in Lifelong Learning in the partner countries in order to identify the competencies, knowledge and methodological approaches used by the professionals concerned. The results are the basis of the Professional Standards and will support the emergence, formulation and certification of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

[15] Commission of the European Communities (2004), Draft Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253, 18 May.

[16] The word teacher is used throughout this document as a generic term to represent teachers, tutors, trainers, facilitators, instructors, lecturers, and practitioners.

[17] For further details see the project web site http://www.euroguideval.org/

Particular attention has been paid to the approaches and professional practices used to support APEL users, especially those with low levels of formal qualifications and who are socially excluded and marginalised. The Training Standards[18] are derived from the Professional Standards, providing the framework for the development of qualifications recognised within national qualifications systems or frameworks as well as the European Qualifications Framework [EQF] and Reference Levels. The main outputs are modular courses within the Bologna First Cycle of Higher Education leading to a Bachelor's degree or Licence. Within a Lifelong Learning framework, these Units may also form part of other, non-higher education qualifications.[19]

Identification and validation are key instruments in enabling the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different formal and non-formal settings. Identification records and makes visible the outcomes of an individual's learning. Whilst such identification does not result in a formal certificate or diploma, it may provide the basis for such formal recognition. Validation involves the assessment of the individual against the learning outcomes of a specified qualification, usually against identified Units.

The *Common European Principles* provide a voluntary and non-prescriptive framework for the development of national systems by encouraging and guiding the development of high quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. They are designed to ensure the comparability and wide acceptance of different approaches and systems and also to enable the transfer and acceptance of learning outcomes across different settings of learning. They take particular account of the needs and entitlements of individuals.

1 Individual entitlements

The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.

2 Obligations of stakeholders

Stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competencies, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms.

[18] See http://www.euroguideval.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=33

[19] The question of qualification levels is one where there are significant differences between national systems. Higher Education is defined in the Framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (the Dublin Descriptors) of 2004 that specify generic descriptors based on learning outcomes and competencies, use credit ranges based on student workload. In the First Cycle the credit range is 180 to 240 European Credit Transfer System [ECTS] credits, where the normal workload of a full time student is 60 ECTS credits. Although at the time of writing it is not possible to define generic levels for other parts of the formal system, a number of countries are following the lead of Scotland and Ireland in certifying their National Qualification Frameworks for compliance with these generic descriptors.

Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

3 Confidence and trust

The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

4 Credibility and legitimacy

Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests that ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders. The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured [Commission of the European Communities 2004:5].

The latter two principles are the most relevant in defining training standards and qualifications (or Units that are a recognised part of such qualifications) in that they frame the relevant standards of professional practice. The ways in which this will be achieved will depend on the nature of national the rights, responsibilities and competencies of the Member States and stakeholders.

The case of the new Teacher Qualification Framework for the Lifelong Learning Sector in England

Since the early 1990s the national systems of the UK have implemented qualifications based on common principles. As national qualifications have developed, and systems of funding lifelong learning become more complex, the English Department of Education and Skills [DfES] has decided that from September 2007, all new entrants to teaching in the sector will be required to complete a new award which will prepare them to teach. This is a small introductory course that will give a threshold status to teach. It will be mandatory for any new teacher who teaches in publicly funded provision. Where teaching/ tutoring/ training is a major role of an individual's employment, they will be required to progress to a further qualification appropriate to role. Three new qualifications have been developed based on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) model i.e. credit based with core and optional units at different levels,[20] so that qualifications can be built flexibly and in a way that can meet the range of needs in the sector.

[20] The Levels used are those of the National Qualification Framework for England, Wales and Ireland, which are compatible with EQF. Levels 4 to 6 are those of the Bachelor's degree [UK levels HE1 to 3] and Level 7 of the Master's degree [UK level M].

The practice of teaching is underpinned by a set of professional values that should be observed by all teachers in all settings. This domain sets the standards for these values and their associated commitments.

Teachers in the lifelong learning sector value:
- All learners, their progress and development, their learning goals and aspirations and the experience they bring to their learning;
- Learning, its potential to benefit people emotionally, intellectually, socially and economically, and its contribution to community sustainability;
- Equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to learners, the workforce, and the community;
- Reflection and evaluation of their own practice and their continuing professional development as teachers;
- Collaboration with other individuals, groups and/or organisations with a legitimate interest in the progress and development of learners.

They are committed to:
- The application of agreed codes of practice and the maintenance of a safe environment;
- Improving the quality of their practice.

The teaching qualifications that have been developed are:
1 Level Three / Four Award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector – 6 credits [3 ECTS], has been tested and trialled since September 2006 in England. This award has been designed to provide either pre-service or in service (induction) training, with a minimum of 30 hours of guided learning and an additional 30 of self directed study. Further tests and trials began in March 2007, of both the level three and level four award.
2 Level Three / Level Four Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector – minimum 24 credits [12 ECTS] is a new qualification to represent the *associate teacher role*, that is a teaching role with fewer responsibilities, as described in the interim guidance for awarding institutions. This qualification has been tested and trialled from March 2007, both as a general qualification and contextualised e.g. for Centrex police training.
3 Level Five / Six / Seven Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector – 120 credits [60 ECTS] is the equivalent qualification to the Certificate of Education/ Professional or Post Graduate Certificate of Education. The qualification representing *the full teacher role* gained at level five and above, will lead to QTLS status – Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills. To gain QTLS status, new teachers will provide evidence of effective professional practice, and maintain 'good standing' through recorded continuing professional development (CPD).

The EuroguideVAL project partner Konrad Associates International had previously undertaken a review of the implications of European APEL developments for the DfES in July 2005.[21] During 2006 consultations were held with the UK APEL community and other National systems, especially France, Ireland, and Switzerland. A pilot Unit was submitted for accreditation by Lifelong Learning United Kingdom [LLUK], the sector skills council, in June 2007.
After consultation, the pilot Unit was written at Level 3 in order to demonstrate the approaches involved. If successful, this approach can be used at other Levels in the Teacher Qualification Framework. The Scottish experience has been used to provide the underpinning for this development.[22]
The Unit incorporates the Values of the Teacher Qualification Framework described above and the Level 3 generic descriptors of the National Qualification Framework for England, Wales and Ireland.

Level 3 Generic Descriptors

Achievement at Level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.

Knowledge and Understanding:
- Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that while well defined may be complex and non-routine.
- Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas.
- Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work.
- Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.

Application and Action:
- Address problems that while well defined, may be complex and non-routine.
- Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures.
- Use appropriate investigation to inform actions.
- Review how effective methods and actions have been.

[21] Konrad J and Hyde J (2005), An Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL] Framework for Teacher and Trainer Development as part of the Learning and Skills Council Skills for Life Quality Initiative.
[22] Development of Scottish Standards for the Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL] codified in the SCQF Handbook Volume 2 (2007) http://www.scqfcolleges.org.uk/downloads.asp#D123

Autonomy and Accountability:
- Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others.
- Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters.

This Unit is designed on the assumption that the Principles and Practice of Assessment Mandatory Unit has already been successfully completed. The proposal submitted is set out below.

Section C

Unit title	Assessment and support for the Recognition of Prior Learning through the Accreditation of Learning Outcomes
Level	3
Credit value	3

Learning outcomes **The learner will:**	**Assessment criteria** **The learner can:**
1. Demonstrate the ability to work with a generalised knowledge of models of Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning	1.1. Apply the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the Level 3 Mandatory Unit Principles and Practice of Assessment to the process of the Recognition and Assessment of Prior Learning. 1.2 Propose appropriate procedures for the professional support to be provided for learners and for members of the assessment team and relevant other stakeholders.
2. Apply this ability to the assessment and support of learners, using appropriate norms and principles of practice.	2.1. Provide support for the work of learners in choosing target qualifications, identification of required evidence to meet relevant learning outcomes, anticipating assessment and verification requirements. 2.2 Demonstrate familiarity with the evidence requirements that meet the relevant assessment criteria for the target Unit(s).
3. Obtain, organise and use factual and theoretical information in solving problems to assure reliable and valid assessment and the provision of professional support for learners who are considering or have chosen this route to credit.	3.1 Identify the relevant processes, procedures and criteria that ensure that Recognition is accepted by the stakeholders (individuals, employers, trades unions, colleges and other training providers) as being equivalent to other forms of assessment. 3.2 Engage a learner in the process of Recognition in line with professional ethics (including trust, fairness and impartiality) and taking account of the candidate's special requirements.

4. Demonstrate effective formative guidance of learners and engage in reflective learning with learners and other members of the assessment team.	4.1 Recognise that high quality formative guidance and support is essential to ensure that individuals have ownership of the process of Recognition and, where appropriate, Accreditation, as an entitlement or right. 4.2 Carry out an appropriate programme of professional support for learners, seek feedback and reflect on experiences, and keep records in an agreed format for the processes of assessment and verification.
5. Contribute to the work of the assessment team and provide leadership in the area of guidance and support for learners	5.1 Judge reliably and validly the authenticity, currency, relevance, and sufficiency of the variety of types of evidence presented by a candidate to meet the Learning Outcomes of the target Unit(s) using a consistent approach. 5.2 Give clear and constructive feedback to candidates who have not satisfied the Learning Outcomes of the chosen Unit s) so that they know what additional evidence will be necessary to meet these Outcomes

The outcomes of this pilot development will be evaluated as part of the final project evaluation in order to review the implications for common standards across EU Member States.

Conclusions

This contribution has reviewed a pilot project funded by the European Commission Leonardo da Vinci programme. The Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL] is an important part of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme that supports the EU Lisbon Objectives designed to make the EU the most competitive knowledge-based economy.

In 2004, the Interim evaluation of the Lisbon programme observed that "to equip Europe with the highly educated, creative and mobile workforce it needs, education and training systems must be improved so that enough young people are graduating with the appropriate skills to obtain jobs in dynamic, high-value and niche sectors. Member States must devise ambitious policies to raise educational levels, notably by halving the number of early school leavers in Europe, and to make lifelong learning schemes available to all — and all must be encouraged to take part in them. The potentially devastating consequences of the ageing population mean that boosting participation of older workers in the labour market is of fundamental importance. Therefore, lifelong learning is not a luxury, it is a

necessity — for if older people are to be able to remain active, they need to be equipped with skills that match the requirements of the knowledge society."[23]
In order to use RPL as an effective and efficient policy tool to engage and re-engage older workers in Lifelong Learning, it is necessary to ensure that individuals feel that their non-formal learning is valued. This requires the use of flexible and responsive modes of assessment, supported by high quality guidance and professional support as an integral element of the process of assessment of learning outcomes[24] and verification. The experience of this writer in both the English and French systems of post-compulsory education and training, including Higher Education, is that RPL will only deliver the anticipated and required benefits if it is fully integrated into a National lifelong learning system. This may well require the modernisation of some National systems of initial Vocational Education and Training [VET] to ensure that they are fit for a broad range of purposes including the integration of the socially disadvantaged. As the quotation from the 2004 High Level Group indicates, the need to raise standards and reduce labour market failure in the face of the challenge of globalisation is becoming increasingly urgent. This is not simply an external challenge resulting from the outsourcing of the production of goods and services to low-wage areas, but also to make the best use of internal mobility between the labour markets of the EU. The last three years has seen a major movement of young, adaptable and often highly qualified workers from Eastern Europe, especially from Poland. Apart from the political impact of these movements, a major challenge is presented to national qualification systems to ensure that the qualifications and competencies of such migrants can be easily recognised.

In the English context, a shift towards greater use of RPL will primarily require the modification of funding systems for the Learning and Skills sector so that they facilitate and encourage this approach to lifelong learning. It will also require a fuller and more systematic consideration of the value of non-formal approaches such as situated and collaborative learning.

[23] High Level Group (2004), Facing the challenge: The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment, November, page 33. http://europa.eu.int/comm/lisbon_strategy/index_en.html
[24] Cedefop/OECD Glossary (2007) definitions: "The process of appraising knowledge, skills and/or competencies of an individual against predefined criteria specifying learning methods and expectations. Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification." « Le processus consistant à apprécier les savoirs, aptitudes et/ou compétences d'un individu à l'aune de critères prédéfinis précisant les méthodes d'apprentissage et les résultats attendus. L'évaluation débouche habituellement sur la validation et la certification

PRIOR LEARNING: ITS RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION 5

The Irish experience*

DERMOT COUGHLAN & GREG SCANLON

Introduction & overview

Writing on the issue of the Validation of Prior Learning one must always be aware that it is a phrase that it not universally used and its meaning can vary from country to country. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL), Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A), Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC), Learning Outside Formal Teaching (LOFT) are but a few of the terms used by different individuals to describe what they feel is the recognition of prior learning.

You will have noted that we have chosen to use the words "recognition" and "validation" in our title but for the purpose of clarity, to avoid confusion and to comply with the term most widely used in Ireland we will use the term Recognition of Prior Learning throughout the course of the rest of this article save when making specific reference to the work of other authors.

Writing in 2004 outlining the findings of the VALEX Project[25] Murphy[26] concluded that in Ireland the application of APEL related in the main to existing course provision across a relatively small range of fields of learning. She noted that only four institutions had organisation wide policies in place and that these were in the main driven by external forces rather than an active desire on behalf of the institutions to have such policies. Not surprising therefore that the number of individuals employed within educational institutions whose sole function was APEL related was miniscule with the number with responsibility for APEL as part of a wider brief was not much higher and they were to be found in areas associated with the development of access initiatives. Having highlighted a number of other interesting points she concluded:

> *Perhaps the strongest outcome from the VaLEx (Valuing Learning from Experience) interim findings about AP(E)L in higher education in Ireland then, is that there are conceptual, political and procedural issues which are equally worthy of attention. Academics can readily identify, and respond to, the procedural problems and the necessary policy changes. However, the conceptual and philosophical challenges remain, particularly around how knowledge and learning are differently valued in*

[25] Further Information on this project is available at http://www.valex-apel.com

[26] Murphy, A. (2004) AP(E)L in Irish Higher Education – Preliminary findings from a Socrates-Grundtvig Research Project. In SCUTREA 34th Proceedings (pp.8-9). Leeds: Education-Line.

different contexts, and around how and why mechanisms such as ECTS, AP(E)L, and EUROPASS should be radically theorised and appropriately developed for the university context.

In 2006 Coughlan[27] stated that the issue of the accreditation of prior learning was the subject of major debate across all sectors of the Irish educational system. In this article he concluded that while much had changed from 2004 his conclusions were not all that different from those of Murphy but concluded that he had a lot of hope that APEL would become a central element of the development of Lifelong Learning in Ireland. The primary basis for this sense of hope was based in the work of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)[28] and its commitment to ensure that the aspirational statement being made by the various sectors within the educational system became a reality.

None the less commencing the journey in search of the required number and sectoral spread of case studies was initiated with a sense of hope rather than certainty. Following a number of months the atmosphere within the team slipped from hope to despondency as the search for the case studies continued to draw a blank. Persistency was eventually rewarded when following a number of further trips down blind allies the first concrete one emerged and this was quickly followed by a number of others. In the final analysis we had to restrict the number of case studies which we could examine in detail as the timeframe and indeed financial resources were not readily available to pursue all of the avenues that opened to create the expanding vista which will now be expanded upon through the outlining of the case studies which we choose to explore in detail.

Fáilte Ireland

The student in this case study is female.
The student left school at age 14 without sitting a state examination and without gaining any formal qualification. In January 2006 the student contacted Fáilte Ireland to investigate what training courses were available that might be of benefit to her. At that time, Fáilte Ireland, through their Professional Development Advisor were in the process of expanding their existing Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) programme and the student was invited to complete a written application form to determine her suitability for the scheme.

As the student was deemed to be eligible to participate in the FETAC Level 6 Certificate in Professional Cookery due to her extensive experience as a professional cook, she was

[27] Coughlan, D. (2006) APEL: An Irish Perspective. In C. Corradi, N. Evans & A. Valk (Eds.) Recognising Experiential Learning – Practices in European Universities (pp 159 –168) Tartu: Tartu University Press.
[27] Further information on the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is available at www.nqai.ie

registered to join the scheme and a mentor was appointed to guide and help her through the process. The steps involved in this process are:
- Applicant checks own expertise against the Skills Audit Checklist, which sets out the Fáilte Ireland standard that must be met.
- Applicant must brush up knowledge where gaps are found to exist.
- Finally, applicant takes a practical skills and oral knowledge test through Fáilte Ireland.
- If the standard is met, applicant will be awarded a National Certificate.

Completing the Skills Audit Checklist is a rigorous requirement involving 630 individual skills and covering many diverse areas including but not confined to Oven Cooking and Braising, Roasting and Pot Roasting, Deep-Frying, Baking and Sweet/Dessert Dishes, Development of Cookery Skills, Basic Kitchen Preparations, Cost and Quality Control, Gastronomy, Nutrition, Food Safety, General Health and Safety at Work, Kitchen Organisation, Food Service Systems in the Industry, Catering Technology. The checklist and supporting appendices are available to each candidate as a document containing a comprehensive 12,582 words.

The student was one of 22 candidates who successfully completed the Fáilte Ireland accreditation process in September 2006 and as a result of gaining this qualification she is determined to progress further educationally. She is full of praise for the VPL process citing her increased confidence and the enjoyment of learning as two unexpected positive outcomes of the process. The student was also very impressed with the level of help and support that she received from the course co-ordinator.

Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, is mandated to guide and promote tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. That mandate includes the provision of training for personnel in the hospitality sector. The concept of APL has existed in Fáilte Ireland since the early 1990s but has acquired a new lease of life under the stewardship of a Professional Development Advisor with the organisation. The Fáilte Ireland APL scheme allows individuals with substantial work experience to acquire formal qualifications directly related to that work experience at FETAC level 5 (craft) in Accommodation skills, Bar skills, Restaurant skills and level 6 (advanced) accreditation in Accommodation Supervisor, Bar Supervisor, Restaurant Supervisor and Professional Cookery.

The process of applying for and possibly gaining accreditation at craft level (FETAC level 5) in Accommodation skills, Bar skills, Restaurant skills and level 6 (advanced) accreditation in Professional Cookery is as detailed previously in the case of the student. The process for the advanced accreditation in Accommodation Supervisor, Bar Supervisor and Restaurant Supervisor is as follows:
- Application sent to Fáilte Ireland.

– If eligible, applicant will be registered to join the scheme and a mentor will be appointed to guide and help.
– Applicant prepares a Portfolio of Evidence based on the Fáilte Ireland syllabus, which sets out the standards that must be met.
– Applicant submits a Portfolio of Evidence.
– Applicant attends an interview with the Fáilte Ireland APL Committee.
– If the standard is met, applicant will be awarded a National Certificate.

For the advanced award – FETAC level 6 – the criteria are the same as those that apply to the craft award as well as supervisory experience in the relevant area and could include:
– Typical work carried out in the job.
– Job description and company organisation chart.
– Product photographs, work samples.
– Newspaper cuttings relating to work or achievements.
– References from employers, supervisors or managers.
– Copies of certificates or other awards (all courses followed could be relevant).
– Overseas experience.
– Details of special achievements or awards during employment or in training.
– Membership of organisations and societies.
– Endorsements from company magazines or customers.
– Syllabus or written evidence of coursework from colleges that may have been attended.

The Portfolio of Evidence is assessed against the learning objectives of the advanced level course syllabus. The applicant is then invited to present the case in person to the Accreditation of Prior Learning Committee of Fáilte Ireland. This interview forms an important part of the assessment.
The most recent initiative was run in conjunction with a Further Education Training and Awards Council (FETAC) pilot project and resulted in 22 individuals participating in the scheme during 2006. As a result of this participation, 19 candidates were approved for awards at National Certificate Level in August 2006 and a further three being awarded National Advanced Level Certificates in November 2006.

Fáilte Ireland is conscious of the need for a greater dissemination of the availability of this alternative method of gaining a formal qualification for those with appropriate work experience and emphasises that continued success depends on a greater level of awareness and understanding of the process by prospective candidates.

Carlow/Kilkenny Training Network

The Carlow/Kilkenny Training Network was established in January 1999 by a number of Senior Managers in organisations in the Carlow/Kilkenny area. Initial discussions showed that the organisations shared common training problems and that by working together, these organisations have developed new, low cost, customised, and locally based solutions for their management and staff.

In early 2006, the Project Manager with Carlow/Kilkenny Skillnet initiated a process in association with County Carlow Chamber of Commerce to upskill existing trainers to become RPL mentors. This resulted in a mentors training programme run in conjunction with Waterford Institute of Technology between May and December 2006.
A group of eight existing trainers drawn from the member-companies of the Skillnet, including the Project Manager with Carlow/Kilkenny Skillnet, participated in the process which involved the preparation of a portfolio of existing training skills by each participant. The elements of learning that were evaluated in the preparation of the portfolios included knowledge, skills, ambitions, attitude, generic & specific competencies, know-how, performance and experience. The preparation of the portfolios was regarded as formative learning and was completed under the guidance of mentors while each participant underwent an oral interview by an independent examiner based on the content of the presented portfolio. All eight participants achieved the required level to be accredited with the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) level 7 award.

the Project Manager with Carlow/Kilkenny Skillnet is concerned that there is a reluctance amongst member companies to engage with the VPL process and from the experience of her own participation she is also concerned that there is a danger that if the process proves to be too time-consuming, it will put future participants off.

Eirí Corca Baiscinn

A tutor with West Clare Early Years Education in Kilrush, County Clare initiated an RPL process in Childcare on behalf of Eirí Corca Baiscinn a community partnership based in Kilrush, County Clare, working for social inclusion an equality, as part of the FETAC pilot project in 2005.

The project targeted vocational childcare workers, playgroup leaders, after-school support workers and crèche workers living and working on the West Clare peninsula who might benefit from increased earning potential and career advancement by gaining a formal qualification. Six participants (all female), from a wide variety of backgrounds in childcare,

were guided by the project tutor in the compilation of portfolios that indicated a sufficiently high level of experience to substantiate the awarding of FETAC level component certificates in Childcare in November 2006. Each participant was visited in her workplace by the project tutor who found that the amount of work that was required for the completion of the portfolios was very time-consuming but believes that the work done in the pilot will make completion of future portfolios less time-consuming.

Scouting Ireland

Scouting Ireland is a voluntary organisation with 40,000 members of which 5,000 are adult leaders. Scouting Ireland is a youth organisation and a member of the World Scout Organisation with 40 million members worldwide. Scouting concentrates on character development in young people and as a voluntary organisation depends to a very large extent on training youth leaders from within its own ranks. This training process has existed within Scouting Ireland since its inception and it is part of the rules that all potential leaders undertake training to become leaders in the organisation. This training is delivered locally by trained trainers and although it is regarded by outside agencies and other organisations as informal it is referred to in Scouting Ireland as Formal Training. This is a progressive development programme running from Welcome to Scouting to Formal Woodbadge Assessment. The Woodbadge award is recognised in World Scouting as the primary leader training and development award initiated by Baden-Powell in 1910 as a formal method in scouting of recognising the commitment of the leader to personal growth and development in a voluntary organisation. The programme has changed many times over the years to reflect current thinking in youth development.

Achievement of the Woodbadge award is far from a simple process and although it is not currently recognised as a youth-leader qualification, outside of scouting, the process of gaining formal recognition (from FETAC) is at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that the process of recognition will be completed before the end of 2007. In order to achieve the Woodbadge award a potential youth leader must complete the following programmes:

- *Welcome to Scouting* a six week orientation programme.
- *Child Protection and Code of Practice* is a 4 hour module.
- *Fundamental Training* is a day-long course and introduces the leader to the concepts of scouting.
- *Essential Training* is in the area of planning and offering programme options to the membership.
- *Skills Training* provides basic practical scout skills and is completed over a 2 year period.
- *Leadership Training* provides leadership training and is a weekend programme

- *First Aid* is a three day course.
- Woodbadge Project comes as the final step after which the Woodbadge is granted or refused.
- In addition, all participants must submit to Garda Vetting as a measure to enhance child-safety

This training can be seen to have many benefits including the development of young people physically, mentally, spiritually emotionally and intellectually using the Scout Method. These transportable life-skills engender competence in scouting leadership and greater self-esteem driven by exposure to development and learning in character development. The recognition of the value of this training by outside agencies is seen by the current leadership within Scouting Ireland as being instrumental in retaining leaders and to recognise formally the role of the voluntary sector in education. It is anticipated that this recognition will take the form of a National Diploma perhaps in the area of Community Leadership.

The driving force for this recognition of existing training is personified in the Training Commissioner for Scouting Ireland who contends that there is a strong possibility that the concept of VPL is not readily understood within the wider community and in particular within third level education.

Cork Institute of Technology

The Dept of Education Development, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) began implementing VPL in 1996 as the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). The process was renamed Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) subsequently and this nomenclature continues to be used rather than the more recent VPL. The Institute recognised that student retention, making education more accessible and appealing to those who may have significant and appropriate work based and informal learning, which could be transferred into the formal setting, enabling formal certification and award to take place, was of high importance. This recognition of transferring the learning that has taken place outside the academic setting into the learning outcomes of the relevant module to gain recognition in the formal education setting for prior work based and informal learning.

The process begins with the student having a discussion with the department course co-ordinator on admission to the programme. Initial go ahead by the course co-ordinator / subject lecturer leads to a meeting with the RPL co-ordinator who ensures that the student is mentored in the application requirements. When the student has completed the application process, the application form is returned to the RPL mentor who coordinates

the response from the relevant department and advises the student of the outcome. The outcome can be:
– To formally complete the subject through traditional examination process.
– To develop gaps in learning.
– To complete an assignment to cover the gaps in the portfolio.
– Award the credits and either exemption or grade for portfolio.

Benefits for students have been determined to be:
– Individuals who had not considered the possibility of engaging with higher education are now doing so
– Individuals who have received exemptions have more time to concentrate on non-exempted modules

Benefits for CIT have been determined to be:
– Providing access to a wider cross-section of students
– Allows RPL students more time to study non-RPL modules
– VPL has allowed the Institute to target a greater number of potential students

CIT has declared itself to be satisfied that the procedure is working very well particularly with bringing a greater number of mature students into the education system.

Engineers Ireland

With over 22,000 members, Engineers Ireland is Ireland's largest professional body whose primary role is to be the representative voice of the engineering profession in Ireland and is the operating name of The Institution of Engineers of Ireland, which was founded on the 6th August 1835.
Within Engineers Ireland the Experiential Learning Procedure has been formulated for those who do not have formal academic qualifications at the required level but who, over an extensive number of years (minimum 15) may have developed the competencies of a Chartered Engineer. Engineers Ireland recognises that the development of engineering competencies can take place in a wide range of settings. Individuals with a personal interest in and enthusiasm for engineering may study engineering and attend various training courses throughout their career. Such individuals may be functioning as professional engineers in the workplace.

The procedure, which is internal to Engineers Ireland, has been in existence for many years and was formalised in 2002. The procedure, which is administered internally, was formulated in recognition of those working in the industry who do not have at least

a primary degree in an engineering discipline and want to be recognised as Chartered Engineers. By providing a means of quantifying experiential learning and assessing suitability through a combination of portfolio and interview, Engineers Ireland is providing a valuable service for its members. A measure of this value can be determined from the fact that, on average, the procedure is used by 15 people per year.

The process is initiated by the applicant by completing an "Alternative Routes to Assessment Form" and successful candidates will be invited to produce a portfolio describing past learning and achievements to date. The portfolio consists of three sections:
- Report on Experiential Learning (Section 8)
- Report on an Engineering Project (Section 9)
- Two Essays (Section 10)

The Membership and Qualifications Board determine suitability based on the candidates experience in relation to "*the competencies of a chartered engineer*" a 1419 word document available to all candidates and a mentor is allocated to each candidate. The relationship with the mentor is paramount however the role of the mentor is confined to assisting the candidate in understanding the meaning of the competencies described in "*the competencies of a chartered engineer*" and accurately identifying and describing his/her skills and knowledge insofar as these relate to the competencies. The mentor's role does not in any way extend to enhancing the quality of the candidate's skills and knowledge beyond assisting the candidate as described above. The mentor has no role or influence in the examination of the candidate and cannot be held responsible in any way for the outcome of the examination.

On successful completion of the portfolio the applicant submits to an oral examination with an examination board made up of engineers at least one of whom is an expert in the candidate's discipline.
Engineers Ireland has determined that its Experiential Learning Procedure helps to stimulate lifelong learning amongst engineers in Ireland, in line with best international practice.

Killester College of Further Education

Killester College of Further Education is a constituent college of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). In the beginning of the 2005 / 2006 academic year the college began using RPL as an access tool for intending students who had not completed second level education to encourage greater participation in Further Education (FE) programmes especially having regard to the City of Dublin VEC Policy on Inclusive Learning.

The RPL process, initiated as part of the FETAC pilot project in 2005, is based on an informal evaluation interview between the candidate and a subject-specialist in the area in which the candidate has expressed an interest. Initially this was accomplished using a five-point Likert scale of ability / suitability by the course tutor but as this proved to be unwieldy it has been replaced by a three-point "degree of relevance" and this is currently under review. An unexpected benefit of this access mechanism is a greater highlighting of actual ability and prior knowledge, ensuring enrolment not only on the most appropriate course but also at an appropriate level.

Individuals who had never even considered the possibility of engaging with further education are now doing so while VPL is allowing the college to target a greater number of potential students thereby providing greater access to learning and making learning more attractive to the individual.

Construction Industry Federation

The Construction Industry Federation (CIF) is the representative body of the construction industry in Ireland. In October 2003 the CIF initiated the Performance Recognition & Enhancement Project (PREP) with 50 member companies located within the BMW (Border Midlands Western Region) to support the future development of training for Small to Medium sized enterprises. This project was developed as part of the FETAC pilot project in 2005 and resulted in six individuals from five companies participating in a company-specific training needs appraisal.

This project highlighted the fact that a facilitator was critical to the success of the project and that the role of the facilitator should be:

- To provide a structure within which appropriate modules could be identified – In this instance it was proposed and agreed to use existing NCVA modules at Level 5
- To identify the various learning outcomes to participants
- To identify the format for collecting appropriate evidence of learning
- To support the participants throughout
- To ensure that the evidence of learning was entirely the actual work of the individual participant
- To present the evidence to the Assessor
- To arrange for the evidence, once assessed, to be viewed by the External Verifier prior to being recommended for an award

All six participants successfully achieved awards in multiples of modules at Level 5 and one participant received a full certificate award.

The outcomes of this project were analysed in terms of:

- The benefits of RPL in Industry
  Provides a process to enable candidates to achieve recognition of their work-based learning through the achievement of appropriate awards
  - Through the use of RPL, companies can develop a realistic career structure for all employees and enhance the company profile by being seen to encourage individual advancement
  - Promotes the continuation of work-based learning and the efficiencies of this method of recognising learning
- The issues for individual learners
  - Understanding the process and its anticipated/expected outcomes
  - Work/personal commitments
  - Expectations
- The issues for facilitators
  - Understanding the company and its needs
  - Understanding the individual and their needs
  - Understanding the National Framework of Qualifications and what it offers
  - Mentoring versus coaching
  - Effectiveness
- The issues for Industry
  - RPL offers a potential value to informal/in-company learning
  - RPL can provide a measure of the knowledge, skill and competence in the company/sector
  - Can provide a measurable Return On Investment
  - RPL needs support and acceptance

The level of enjoyment gained from the process of RPL (even though it involved a large commitment of time) was commented on by all of the participants. Equally, the development of self-confidence was common to all participants a fact that was appreciated by the employers as it was seen to enhance productivity.

Summary & conclusions

The VPL2 Project had set itself some very specific goals and the decisions taken regarding which case studies to include in the Irish National Report were taken to ensure that these goals were attained. From a starting point of wondering would we identify sufficient case studies to be in a position to state that the review was a "national" one we arrived at the position where we had to take some hard decisions regarding which ones we would eventually include in the report. All of the case studies are different and all of the participants

came to the process in differing ways and for varied reasons. The overall finding however is that the recognition and validation of prior learning is very much part of the national educational agenda. Through the work of the NQAI, FETAC[29] and HETAC[30] it is clear that there is a commitment from the national bodies to not just support the practice of RPL but to put systems and regulations in place to ensure that all educational establishments have policies and procedures in place to facilitate this development.

Through the support of the VPL2 project the efforts of these bodies have been supported in a number of ways but the primary one was the organisation of a national dissemination event[31] at the University of Limerick at which these organisations coupled with other institutions and individuals giving an overview of their experiences and perspectives has resulted in the issue being brought in from the margins of the educational agenda to being a central tenet for the future.

This advancement is very worthwhile from the perspective of those of us working in the area of Lifelong Learning and all its facets. The real achievement however is not at the institutional level but at the level of the individual learner. For the many individuals who for one reason or another saw the door to the continuum of educational advancement firmly closed in their faces, the recognition and validation of prior learning whether the prior learning has been acquired by formal, non-formal or informal routes, has opened individual pathways for all learners to achieve their educational goals. As we fast approach the end of the first decade of the 21st century, social exclusion and economic disadvantage still exists across Europe and while the various social projects being put in place at national and European level are to be commended they are not a replacement for a fuller commitment at all levels to education for each individual citizen of Europe irrespective of the personal circumstances of that person. The recognition and validation of prior learning is a way to achieve this. More importantly however because of the uniqueness of each individuals own experience, the use of this tool will assist in ensuring that the massification of education retains an element of the individual. We conclude this national report by once again thanking all of the individuals who have in their own way contributed to its production and leave you with a quote from Carl Rogers:

> *If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction and for self-initiated learning.*

[29] Further information available at www.fetac.ie
[30] Further information available at www.hetac.ie
[31] Details of the National Seminar are available at http://www.ul.ie/dllo/courses/natlsemVPL.html

For the authors RPL & VPL can play an important role in attaining this uniqueness while at the same time ensuring greater access by many more individuals to what is after all a basic human right. The right to education at whatever level the individual aspires to.

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As well as all of those individuals who allowed their RPL stories to be told.

6

FRUITS FOR THE TAKING

***Dutch perspectives on professional training, VPL and personal development*[32]**

RUUD DUVEKOT

Throughout history, people have always prepared thoroughly for the practice of a profession; this has been true from the Middle Ages right through the industrial age. And this is no different in today's knowledge society. But systems of professional training do require continuous adjustment and even innovation, because they are part of a changing socio-economic and socio-cultural landscape. Where once upon a time, simply completing an educational programme was enough to hold onto your place in the labour market, in more and more fields that is no longer the case. Now, flexible and more adaptive professional education is required to keep the learning individual viable in today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individual, labour organization, directly involved knowledge infrastructure (professional education and schooling) and legislative and regulatory bodies.

This contribution focuses on the changing nature of professional training, from the guild system to today's knowledge economy. In it, I address three questions:

1 Why and how has the process of professional training changed?
2 How can the rise of the system of Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) be reconciled with this process?
3 What can VPL mean for professional training/higher professional education?

The first question covers the development process of professional training from the Middle Ages through today's knowledge economy. The answers provide building blocks for the analysis of the rise of the VPL system some ten years ago. Knowing where VPL is going requires insight into the change process that has brought us where we are now. The answers to the questions of what exactly VPL comprises and what it has in store for us will be particularly useful.
The underlying premise of VPL is, of course, the principle of *valuing learning*, or an understanding that most learning takes place both independently of educational programme and on an ongoing basis. VPL is inextricably linked to **empowerment**, or activation of lifelong learning for the purposes of **employability** (the ability to get and keep work; EZ, 1997). The developmental process of professional training and the analysis of the developing VPL system can shed light on the changing relationships between actors in current professional training, and may even offer a few glimpses of developments in:

– Learning, the transition to lifelong learning strategies;
– Working, the transition to employability;
– Civic activation/re-activation, the transition to individual empowerment.

[32] This article is based on the Public Lecture, given by the author at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam on November, 15, 2006.

The contribution begins by defining some of the most important terms within VPL, and follows with an outline of the development in The Netherlands of professional training from the Middle Ages to the present. Thereafter, I elaborate on today's perspectives on professional training, with a central focus on presenting a general VPL process model.

Terms

Everyone learns, everywhere and all the time: at school, on the job, through independent study or hobbies, for recreation and at home. VPL demonstrates the scope and quality of the competencies of an individual (regardless where or how those competencies were acquired) and gives insight into the individual's development. VPL focuses on the learning individual, and as such, with its broad vision of learning and knowledge development, it is a promising tool for the knowledge society. VPL means a more meaningful way of learning, both for individuals and society as a whole.
Employability is something individuals want to have and something organizations look for in individuals, and both are aware of the diversity on the labour market. VPL helps people to effectively deal with individual differences in learning background and learning style, and can be used to serve a variety of ends, from recruitment & selection to creating training/in-service programmes to integrate with work and knowledge or competency maintenance to disability prevention or outplacement. In short, VPL can be used to provide solutions for a wide range of issues in personnel policy, training, mediation, etc. Returns lie in the area of job and career training and appreciation and valuation of the quality of people. VPL is, as it were, the bridge to a lifetime of learning. Note that VPL itself should be seen primarily as a tool, to be used alongside a vision of personal development, and not an end in itself (Duvekot & Klarus, 2002).
VPL can be described in a nutshell as the methodology for identifying, valuing and validating what an individual has learned, both in formal learning environments, such as school, and non-formal/informal learning environments, such as home or the workplace (Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2004). There are two forms of VPL. The *summative* approach to VPL concentrates on a list of competencies, on validation and valuation. This is also referred to as the "retrospective" approach to VPL. Its goal is to "cash in" on the validated competencies in the form of certification/sub-certification or attaining a diploma. The form of VPL that is also used to stimulate the actual learning or knowledge development is known as the *formative* approach to VPL. This broader approach is prospective, instead of retrospective, and focused on personal and career development.

A VPL procedure consists of a maximum of five phases:
1 Preparatory phase focusing on engagement and consciousness of the value of competencies;

2 Identification of competencies;
3 Validation and valuation of competencies;
4 Advising on further development of competencies;
5 Systematic incorporation of competency-based development process in a personal or organization-driven method.

Together, these five phases make up the integral VPL process, which utilizes both the summative and formative approaches. Steps 1, 2 and 3 can also be carried out independently; in that case, VPL is limited to strictly summative objectives (Duvekot & Brouwer, 2004).
A further point of discussion is the definition of competencies. A 2002 study by the Education Council (*Onderwijsraad*, 2002) makes clear that competencies are a cluster of skills, knowledge, attitudes, characteristics, ambitions and insights. In many cases, one competency is a prerequisite for another. Also, competencies always develop in a certain context. That specific context is of critical relevance as competencies change over time. In other words, competencies are continually in development. This is why it has been said that: "a competency is knowing how to act in a certain way. Whether a person is competent is made clear by the action." (Lyotard, 1988; Klarus, 1998).

The utilization of VPL is based on the principle of *valuing learning*. Professional training is all about the person, with the individual's learning process taking centre stage. Important issues in this area, independently of societal circumstances, are:
– How to utilize and support individual learning processes;
– How to identify and measure individual competencies;
– How to make observations explicit and document them;
– How to validate and valuate this information and make it transparent.

One complicating factor is that formal education and assessment procedures are geared towards only a limited cross-section of the individual learning capacity. Until recently, competencies gained in non-formal or informal settings were ignored, while those competencies can be essential for optimal performance of certain tasks. This complexity, and the opportunities here for the knowledge society, were identified as early as 1995 in a European Commission white paper (White Paper, 1995). The goal of the white paper was to utilize the VPL system to tap into non-formal and informal learning experiences, the perspective essentially being that the knowledge infrastructure must support learning individuals in structuring their (lifelong) learning process. An individualized approach (custom work) must be offered to first valuate what the individual has already learned. Only then can a personal learning plan be drawn up. Form and content of the custom work required depend on the personal learning style and the answers to the following questions: "what do I already know, what can I already do, what knowledge and skills do I need

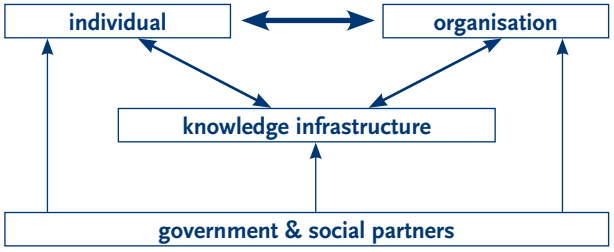
right now and what knowledge and skills will I need later?" The evaluation methodology required is based on organizations and knowledge infrastructure *valuing the learning* that people obtain in a programme-independent and continuous process. But the converse, that is, the *valuation of this learning by the individual*, is also a requirement. The notion that everyone is actually continuously involved in a learning process, or "lifelong learning", and that all we have to do is to reveal that learning, is the connection between the perspectives of the individual, organization and knowledge infrastructure on *valuing learning*.
The crux of the matter is to assume the benefits from the learning already achieved, and to base the desired benefits on these (learning output). This type of approach goes against the current input orientation of learning programmes based on predetermined frameworks for form and content of education, and which leave little to no room for personal contribution.
For the individual, *valuing learning* means that describing and documenting learning experiences on a flexible labour market creates, or improves, clarity concerning career opportunities. Organizations must be able to state the competencies they need in a given position. Next, the educational or professional training programme or school environment must formulate a curriculum that precisely addresses the needs of that organization, so that the employees, with their already acquired competencies as a starting point, can get individualized attention (custom work) to their further development. Here, avoiding unnecessary education or training is a prime factor; of course, the main issue is not where, when and how one learns, but much more that one is learning. The next important factor in *valuing learning* is that each individual can choose the learning style that best suits him/her. Finally, it is important that they are valuated based on their longer-term implicit or explicit learning track-independent development. A crucial factor is, therefore, that the knowledge infrastructure is able to support them with individualized solutions (custom work). Efficiently linking the personal output with the desired output of, say, an educational standard, is the central focus.
Suppose, for example, that someone's portfolio claims management experience at the Bachelor level, with, as evidence, years of experience managing the local football club; specific duties and results, including professional products such as annual plans and reports, are clearly described and included. Next, the assessment looks for, and finds, confirmation of the value of these learning experiences, and the candidate is given advised on a programme of 'individualised learning', linked to a view to career opportunities at the desired management level. Here we see two dynamics within the *valuing learning* process: 1. the subject learns to value his or her own learning; and 2. organizations and knowledge infrastructure learn to value and support it. Both forms of *valuing learning* break through the existing wall between summative and formative assessment, and deal with the difference between 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning' (Dochy & Nickmans 2005). And, as a result, empowerment, employability and lifelong learning strategies meet, ideally through *valuing learning*.

The glass is half full (VPL Working Group, 2000) already indicated that VPL features four actors: the *individual*, the organization, the knowledge infrastructure (professional education and training) and the macro-level (governmental authorities and social partners). While VPL primarily relates to the tools for the required professional training, the *VPL era* shows the way in which these actors work together to organize this professional training and the key focus areas to be selected. The interaction between actors happens based on the identification, valuation, validation and activation/re-activation of an individual's employability. This has actually been the case since as far back as the Middle Ages, although in that period and the periods that followed there was little if anything by way of an articulated VPL system. This is the reason that I identify three 'pre-VPL' eras in the period up to the nineteen-eighties, and two VPL eras from the nineteen-eighties on. All these eras are important, because collectively they show the actual long-term development of professional education, what Braudel calls the *medium-long term* development in history (Braudel, 1975). If we were to limit ourselves to the past twenty years to obtain a view to where we need to go with VPL, we would miss a number of important considerations. To be absolutely clear: at present we are in the first VPL era.
Depending on the historical period, the specified actors are always active or dominant to varying degrees, the interaction is focused on learning professional skills and the focus is on objectives with a summative and/or formative tint. As such, the march of time has revealed a development process that both explains the current perspectives on the relationships between actors and provides insight into impending developments within this era. Each successive era can be seen as an explanatory model for the rise and development of VPL. Determinate for the typology of the *VPL era* are the mutual relationships between the actors as expressed in the authority relationships. These relationships relate to the roles of the actors in determining the content and structure of the professional training. Additionally, the intentions, ranging from pure initial professional training to lifelong learning strategies, are also determinate elements. In any given era, we may see a shift of emphasis between summative and formative aspects. Finally, target group and their mobility (none, intra-sector or inter-sector) are relevant.

The ideal balance between the actors in the *VPL era* is a situation in which:
- The individual realizes that he/she will be engaging in lifelong learning no matter what, and documents these learning experiences;
- Organizations know what they need and can express it, and can make clear their changing needs for competencies;
- The knowledge infrastructure supports individual and organization through custom work;
- At the macro-level, the legislative and regulatory situation creates conditions beneficial to VPL.

Figure 1 shows this balance in the ideal typical model of the VPL era, or 'lifelong learning model'. The organization of professional training exhibits relationships between actors on equal footing in terms of authority. Lifelong learning strategies using the maximum possible summative and formative aspects are the central focus. The target group comprises everyone who can use any learning experiences, can provide proof for the determination of such strategies; the mobility of the target group is inter-sector, because competencies are also recognized across sectors and professional training is no longer about one career under one boss.
The black arrow shows the primary process, in which communication on the content and form of the required professional training takes place. The grey arrows show the secondary process or the support of the primary process; in this case via custom work from the educational side/professional education and school environment. The white arrows reflect the role of the underlying conditions required to get the whole process active and keep it moving. This lifelong learning model assumes professional training based on coordination between individual learning biographies (portfolio with documented learning experiences) and the competency needs of organizations (transparent formulation of demand), supported by custom work. Issues such as financing, rights and obligations, quality assurance, accessibility and the effect (civil or otherwise) are arranged at the macro-level.

Figure 1: 2nd VLP age: lifelong learning model



This ideal situation has not (yet) been attained. Professional training has gradually developed itself within successive *eras* from the three pre-VPL eras to the newly-minted first '*knowledge economy VPL era*' (see figure 5).

From master-apprentice to the mammoth-law on education

Since time immemorial, learning has consisted of 'learning by falling and getting up again.' But as a distribution of labour arose, so too arose the need to institutionalize learning and working in a system of professional training, because increasing job and profession differentiation required learning specific skills to be able to function in a given profession.
A good example of an approach that is both structured and based on a single professional "column" (the series of positions on the mobility track in the profession) is the guild system of the Middle Ages, in which employers dominated with a view to labour market regulation and protection. The subsequent trades system brought little change, although an early form of knowledge infrastructure was built up via social-charitable *leerwerkscholen* (work-study schools). With national legislation in 1919, the industrial society developed the knowledge infrastructure into a system with a great deal of responsibility on the part of the government and social partners. Increasingly, the system was the central focus, with certification within the professional column as the goal. The Secondary Education Act actually took the first steps towards the VPL-era knowledge economy; from that time on, 'continued learning' had a general perspective, and was no longer dictated by purely economic interests.

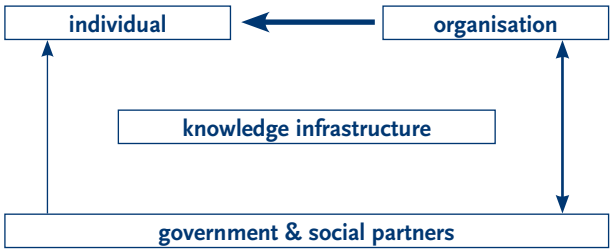
The guild system

In the Middle Ages, there was no system of national education. The economy was characterised by feudal relationships and traditional production. Training in a craft was organised under the guild system. This system dominated the urban economy until deep into the eighteenth century. Education was a private initiative involving cooperation with local authorities (Israel, 1997). It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the guilds were abolished, to make way for a more open economic system with freedom of establishment and without impediments to professional practice.
A wide range of professions, including merchants, craftsmen, shopkeepers, professions and cartwrights, were organized into guilds. The guilds in a city were organised by professional groups. Along with practicing the profession and certain civil obligations, they conducted their own educational practice, focused on knowledge transfer and, more importantly, the regulation of the labour market for the guild's specific profession. Teaching the required professional skills was a part of maintaining the guild's monopoly. This monopoly was forcibly maintained, including in the recruitment of apprentices. Only after obtaining the permission of the guild could a craftsman take on an apprentice. The apprentices, or the parents, usually "bought themselves in," by payment of an apprenticeship fee, with a member of the guild, so long as the guild granted its permission to do so. The amount of the apprenticeship fee included the calculation of the use that the master expected to have from the apprentice during the period of apprenticeship (Griffiths, 1981). Regulation of the tempo in which an apprentice can develop into a master via practical

tests in a period of approximately four years guaranteed the exclusive character of the guild. In addition to the objective of professional training, 'guild learning' was also about development and innovation in the field.
The guild maintained its monopoly via a strict patronage system, quality control at the behest of the city fathers, a regulated local labour market, social politics and, above all, the individual, strict knowledge infrastructure. Access could be had only through family or money (Prak, 2002).

The guild system was characterised by a one-sided, dominant role of the 'masters' and the 'open ear' of the local authorities. The learning system focused on initial formative learning and was augmented via practical learning within the professional column. Learning in guilds could be classified as input-oriented experience-based learning, that is, learning based on a predetermined educational programme followed from start to finish regardless of any already acquired competencies. The main focus was the summative effect.
The apprentice had no authority over the form and content of the practical instruction. Mobility was not an objective of professional training; your profession was your profession, once and for all. Any learning experiences that apprentices might have obtained outside of the practical programme were not used. This pre-VPL era can be diagrammed as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Pre-VPL era 1: guild model



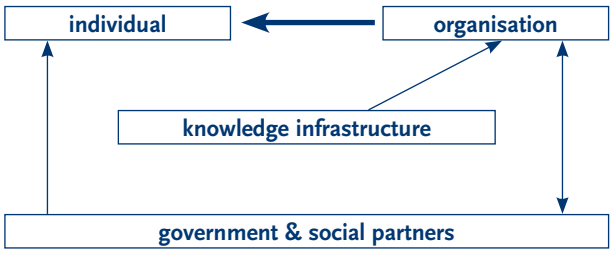
Abolishment of the guilds at the end of the eighteenth century broke the strictly regulated system of learning wide open. From then on, anyone was free to practice the professions formerly protected by the guilds.

The trades society

After the fall of guild education, private initiatives took over professional training. The *Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen* (Society for the Promotion of the General Good), founded in 1784, saw the improvement of public education as the basis for civil education of the citizenry, and as such, for the betterment of society. One of this society's activities was setting up the model schools (Reulen & Rosmalen, 2003). The *Maatschappij* saw the dawn of later educational legislation regulating public responsibility for general basic education, and, still later, professional training as well. Professionally-oriented education, however, received little if any attention until the end of the nineteenth century. While there were fleeting initiatives for work schools, where, for example, older orphans were 'placed' with artisans and craftsmen (Lis et al., 1985), these did not fit into the dominant image of general basic education followed by the teachings of a master. The hole that had been left by the disappearance of the guild educations was never filled. Even as late as 1872, the government did not consider it its job to organize education: "*...state professional education is unjustified and ill-advised. Unjustified, because in the treatment of the Act the States-General agreed that the practical education would be left to the workshops.*" (Goudswaard, 1981)

Professional training in the traditional society was dominated and driven by employers and practice-based learning, and happened largely within the professional column. Although charitable institutions and organizations did provide for an early form of institutionalised professional education, the most powerful relationship of authority was and remained that of employer and employee. Object and target group were primarily limited to young people being worked into the professional group; a certain initial and input-dominated education with a summative effect was sufficient. Employee mobility was irrelevant. Access to basic education was dominated by economic factors. This "trades" era can be diagrammed as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Pre-VPL era 2: trades model



Professional training in the industrial society

From 1850 on, the industrialization process in the Netherlands continued, but only towards the end of the nineteenth century did the transition to industrial production definitively take hold. Developments in professional training follow this same timeline. It was only in 1891 that existing private professional education received state funding for the first time. Participants continued to express an overwhelming preference for full-time education. The first intermediate-level technical schools were set up around 1900, although this form of professional education did not catch on until later. Only in the early part of the twentieth century, when the trade schools increased in number, did the state's need for more authority arise (Knippenberg, 1986).
The year 1919 is the milestone in the development of institutionalised professional training, when the state's role was definitively regulated in the *Nijverheidsonderwijswet* (Industrial, Technical and Domestic Science Training Act), a compromise between state involvement and free development of technical education. The act acknowledged that professional education was something that the government should be involved in, but granted school boards a large amount of freedom in determining content. The objectives were to create some order in the forms of professional education and to provide some integration of professional and general education (Boekholt & De Booy, 1987). The act allowed for the apprenticeship system as an alternative for full-time professional education, thereby for the first time giving the Netherlands an education system in which all forms of education were regulated by law and subsidised, while the performance of the education was provided both by government schools and private institutions. The underlying premise remained that the government had to restrict itself to subsidization. In practice, the government bore some 70% of the costs of industrial education.

Recovery and reconstruction

After World War II, as part of the policy geared towards 'recovery and reconstruction' the government made a definitive shift towards support of professional education. Modern production processes demanded increasingly high knowledge and insight on the part of working people. Professional education primarily served to provide educated personnel with technical qualifications. For personnel with low education or no education, the emphasis was on 'socializing,' or adapting mentality to modern labour relationships (Liagre Böhl, 1981). Consequently, in the First Industrialization Memorandum (*Eerste Industrialisatienota*, 1949), expansion and improvement of industrial education was the key focus:

"In addition to the problem that a large number of young people pursue no further education after elementary school, there is the fact that of those who do, a relatively small number of them seek out training for a profession in industry."

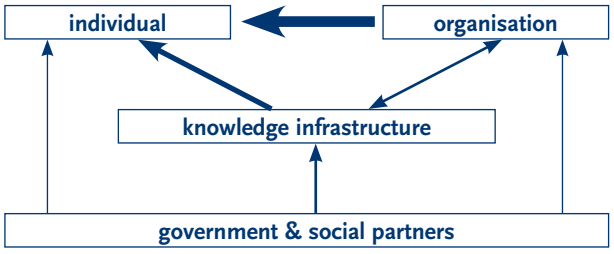
Beginning in 1945, growth in professional education picked up rapidly, this primarily in

technical full-time education and the apprenticeship system. At the same time, the compulsory school attendance period increased, from seven years (ages 6-13) in 1921, to eight years in 1950, nine years (ages 6-15) in 1971, and finally ten years in 1975 (*Techniek in Nederland*, 2003). The apprenticeship system also expanded. It was organised by sector or professional category in a single national body with a tripartite structure. In this body, the employer and employee organizations of each industrial sector worked together closely under government supervision. They were responsible for the practical programmes and the examination & testing. In 1954, the national bodies united into a centralized body of national industrial training associations, the *Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het bedrijfsleven* (Bakker, 2001).

As the reconstruction drew to a close, the time was right to give the education a broader significance than a basic educational programme based on discipline and industrial production. The Secondary Education Act of 1968 (colloquially known as the "Mammoth Act") provided this (Karstanje, 1987). General and professional education complemented each other and offered options for vertical and horizontal mobility. The "Mammoth Act" also included intermediate professional education, or MBO (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*). But general basic education was a higher priority, and the connection with professionally-oriented vocational education still left much to be desired. This became known as "the hole in the Mammoth Act," and was only filled in the nineteen-eighties by the shift from socio-cultural to socio-economic educational objectives.

The industrial era saw the rise of the knowledge infrastructure. Educational legislation reaffirmed the dominant relationship between employers and knowledge infrastructure. The individual gained the prospect of a disciplined learning function based on economic necessity. Professional training was input-oriented based on officially earned, initial qualifications within one professional column. Continuing education increased in importance. Mobility of employees was not stimulated. Summative effect via continuing education within the professional column was a central focus. This industrial pre-VPL era can be diagrammed as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Pre-VPL era 3: industrial model



From Wagner to Wijnen[33]

By the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, the discussion of the structure of professional training was fully focused on connecting with the needs of the labour market, and the work of the successive commissions in the nineteen-eighties and nineties must be seen in that light. These commissions paved the way for VPL, particularly in terms of the focus on the learning individual and the concept of competencies.

Wagner Commission

At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, the vision of the societal role of education was being re-evaluated. For decades, the emphasis had been on participation in general basic education. But a large percentage of the working population did not have vocational diplomas. Moreover, labour organizations found the qualifications of professional training outdated. This, in combination with the economic decline of the early eighties, was sufficient reason to re-evaluate the place and function of education and the connection with the labour market (Luiten van Zanden, 1997). This re-evaluation was initiated in 1981 by two advisory commissions chaired by G.A. Wagner. Their mission was to envision a cure for the looming breakdown process of industry in those years (Dellen, 1984).
The issue of connection with the labour market concentrated on the search by organizations for workers trained to deal with modern technology. One way that it was hoped this could be achieved was by generating an intake of young school-leavers. Industry looked to the educational sector with high hopes, only to find that it had withdrawn into its own world of *the pedagogical province* (Knippenberg & Van der Ham, 1993). Additionally, it was clear that anyone who was seriously interested in working on knowledge innovation would also have to invest in the education of the existing work force, but there were not enough offerings of continuing education or in-service trainings to meet the demand.
To solve these problems, the Commission set itself a number of basic goals. General secondary education should no longer be a final educational level, and a period of practical learning had to be a condition for obtaining a professional qualification. Additionally, the lack of facilities for on-the-job learning by employees and other adults had to be remedied. The Commission considered the two-track structure of the apprenticeship system as an ideal model to achieve these goals. Pedagogically, this was based on the combination of working and learning. The intention was to create this dual model by introducing a dual final phase in MBO (intermediate professional education) and HBO (higher professional education). The model was also set up to give the social partners a considerable degree of authority in matters such as content, performance and examination standards at these educational levels.

[33] Much gratitude goes to Toine Lenssen for this section.

The new standard became a (starting) professional qualification at the primary apprenticeship level or comparable level. But despite this, the plans of Wagner and his commission were put on ice for several years. The Commission met with a great deal of resistance from the educational sector, in which the belief prevailed that full-time education as it was already offered enough support for the confrontation with work in practice.

Rauwenhoff Commission

But things were not quiet on the dual track front for long. The need for on-the-job schooling for employees grew explosively, and as it did, it was primarily private initiatives that responded to the demand. An advisory commission for education and the labour market (*Adviescommissie Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt*) was set up to address how the public education sector could take part in on-the-job training and schooling, and the adjustments that would have to be made in the infrastructure to provide it. The commission was also to make proposals for implementing authority of the social partners in professional training (Rauwenhoff Commission, 1990).
While economically there was some impetus for innovation, the efforts were devoted to improving existing production processes (Uitterhoeve, 1990). Intensification of knowledge was largely thanks to the rise of computing. The economic growth was primarily generated through increased deployment of cheap labour. Falling wages and a mass influx of women into part-time jobs were major factors (Report, 1993). Work became more demanding, and in response, efforts in education intensified. But many of the new requirements could only be learned independently on the job, and this informal learning was still not taken seriously. Only organised education was considered an appropriate instrument. With this in mind, the Rauwenhoff Commission proposed a three-pronged remedy. Social partners, government and the educational sector would have to encourage all the "under-educated" and assist them in obtaining a starting qualification. Secondly, professional training and higher education would be given a dual end phase, for a fluid transition from school to work. Finally, schools and companies would have to compile educational content via 'co-makership.' A school had to offer both initial education and follow-up education. But the commission did not address the educational value of practical learning, leaving this as a matter for a subsequent commission.

Dualization Commission

When the Dualization Commission was convened in 1992, under the chairmanship of Christiaan van Veen, the social partners and educational parties had already signed covenants on the dualization and strengthening of the practical component in educational programmes. The Commission's task was to implement the proposed option for MBO

and higher education to, in the future, allow the educational programme to be completed with a dual track (Dualization Commission, 1993).
The Commission concluded that the mismatch observed by Wagner and Rauwenhoff between labour market and education no longer existed; the imbalances (too many students with a general education and too few with professional training) had largely disappeared. Professional education had become more market-oriented, and the social partners, via the *Landelijke Organen Beroepsonderwijs* (National Vocational Education Bodies), had been given an influence on the setting of the final attainment levels in MBO.

The Commission considered professional training, in practical terms, equivalent to practical learning: "Professional training is learning by practice up to a level of mastery of practical and cognitive skills, internalizing the standards and values of a particular profession or job cluster and learning to work reflexively." Additionally, the Commission stated that employees must have the capacity and the will to continue learning. In this perspective, lifelong learning had everything to do with a labour system that allowed room for the needs of the individual. With this, the Commission was far ahead of its time in terms of developments in professional education. Great strides were made with the Commission, among them that the learner was identified as an actor, practice was recognized as a learning environment and professional training had to go hand in hand with lifelong learning.

Wijnen Commission

Before the ink was even dry on the Van Veen report, the next commission was ready in waiting. In 1993, the Commission on *Erkenning Verworven Kwalificaties* ("Valuation of Acquired Qualifications") launched under the chairmanship of Prof. Wynand Wijnen. There was a will on the part of the political sector to make education more accessible to adults. Results of educational programmes, schooling or other forms of qualification were too obscure, and as a result, there was a need to know how an individual's non-formal qualifications could be valuated. The Wijnen Commission was given questions relating to better utilization of learning processes both in and out of school, and on strengthening the impact of on-the-job learning on the labour market.
The most significant conclusion of the report *Kwaliteiten erkennen* ("Recognizing qualities") (1994) was that a system recognizing individual non-formal and/or non-fixed qualifications was feasible and needed. And so, "EVK" was born: the *erkenning van elders verworven kwalificaties* (EVK), or validation of qualifications earned elsewhere, the premise being the official qualification or certification of educational tracks participated in previously (whether or not completed).
The cabinet greeted this report with enthusiasm. EVK could make a useful contribution to the operation of the labour market and education market. EVK would improve the transparency of the "education market" and the connection of the educational sector with the

current competency level on the labour market. Another important aspect was that EVK would offer people with a low educational level, or no educational level, a realistic opportunity to have their "hands-on learning" recognized. Implementation had to be a good fit with existing structures, and the interested parties would have to pay the implementation costs. The government would provide instruments for EVK, including development funding. Schools, job centres, companies and other parties picked up EVK and ran with it. But there was a lack of adequate support, and the initial enthusiasm ebbed.

From EVK to EVC (VPL)

After a brief lull, the government kicked things back into gear in 1998 with the national action programme *Een leven lang leren* (A lifetime of learning): "The workplace needs to be used more as a place of learning. The experiences gained must be made visible as independently acquired competencies. The cabinet wishes to promote this by setting up a system by which knowledge acquired elsewhere (that is, outside of the educational system) can be tested and accredited.' (Action Programme, 1998) This was an important step towards expanding on the EVK concept to the valuation of learning experiences acquired outside of the formal educational system. Thse experiences gained in the workplace would be revealed, and then tested and accredited; with this, the K became a C (*competenties*, or competencies) and since then, the system has been referred to as *erkenning van verworven competencies* (EVC in Dutch, or APL accreditation of prior learning or VPL in English). The social partners also made an important contribution to this shift towards competency-based professional training, by differentiating between a number of employability segments within which VPL could be functional:

– For job-seekers and employed persons without a basic qualification, VPL could remove the hurdle to that basic level by accrediting what these persons already had in terms of competencies or those they had acquired by other means;
– For job-seekers and employed persons with a basic qualification, VPL could provide directed reinforcement or retention of the desired qualifications and career opportunities (STAR, 1998).

In the meantime, the 1995 Adult and Vocational Education Act had fulfilled an important requirement for more openness and flexibility in professional training (WEB, 1996). Adult education and professional education were brought together in ROCs (*Regionale Opleidingencentra*, or Regional Training Centres) with a single standard, the national qualification structure. In this situation, learning and working would go together under the term "enjoyability,"[34] or all opportunities to invest in yourself in relation to the organization within which you function.
The time had come for the implementation of all those wonderful plans.

[34] The term "enjoyability' was introduced by Professor D.J. Wolfson during the Euroskills Symposium in Groningen, the Netherlands (28 October 1998).

The Glass is Half Full

With the publication of *De Fles is Half Vol!* ("The glass is half full!") in 2000, a first step towards lifelong learning using VPL was taken. A national VPL working group formulated a broad vision on VPL and the implementation process. VPL had to bridge the gap between the education supply and the demand on the labour market side. The challenge was to connect these two worlds via the learner, on the one hand by converting learning experiences into certificates or diplomas, and on the other by allowing for the development of competencies in a career context.
To support this application of VPL and to learn from the existing practice, the government established the Knowledge Centre APL (*Kenniscentrum EVC*) in 2001. The Knowledge Centre's goal is to, on the basis of collecting practical examples, promote the use of VPL in the labour market and to take VPL to a higher qualitative level. It became clear that there were many situations in which VPL could be used, but did not automatically lead to the desired effects (Verhaar, 2002; Van den Dungen, et al., 2003). Factors and circumstances that could have a negative impact include more restrictive legislation or regulations, fear of change, system failures, general conservatism or a too short-sighted view of the return on investment. On the other hand, the positive effects of VPL were seen mainly at the sector level.
Thanks to VPL, in sectors such as the care sector and education sector, recruitment and selection of personnel is increasingly happening among target groups without the formal requirements. VPL is also functional in areas such as retention of personnel and attrition and disability prevention. Employees in the construction sector are being offered new career opportunities based on competency recognition and comparison with adjacent sectors. The next step is to promote mobility and upgrading of personnel. In particular, providing sitting personnel with "refresher courses" can be structured efficiently around a good picture of existing competencies. Outflow and outplacement of personnel also benefit. The military, for example, has a high proportion of employees with fixed-term appointments. To be more successful at replacing these employees on the labour market, VPL can offer both development and qualification. Likewise, in mergers and reorganizations, VPL offers development and qualifications to find the right place for personnel, whether internally or externally.
The financial return of VPL is seen not so much in the costs of education and training, but in the lowering of costs of delay. In VPL projects in companies such as Rockwool, Corus and Friesland Coberco Dairy Foods, considerable savings were achieved, ranging from EUR 3000 to EUR 16,000 per employee, due to lower costs of delay (EVC Magazine, 2005).

The analysis of this data from the field (Duvekot, et al. 2003) showed that depending on the intended effect or return (certification or career-making) and the frame of reference

used (nationally applicable MBO[35a] standard or standards of universities of applied science, sectors or companies), there are four working forms of VPL. Two emphasise the summative aspects, particularly at the MBO level:

1 VPL as a bridge between education and labour market, focused on cooperation between the professional and adult education sector on the one hand and the branches and sectors in the labour market on the other;
2 VPL as structurer of innovation processes in education and labour mediation, focused on acquisition of starting qualifications for people with low education or no education.

Two other working forms are based on formative aspects:

3 VPL as jump start for individual career. Employability at individual or organizational level is key;
4 VPL as instrument for human resource management at organizational level, with driver being the professionalization of personnel *at the workplace*.

The most significant problem areas for optimal use of VPL in these working forms are:

– How to obtain the *civil effect* of the results of competency assessment?
– How to guarantee the *accessibility* of VPL?
– How to ensure the quality of assessment procedures?

To answer these questions, a great deal of attention was given to the further analysis of the use of VPL, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Quantitatively, there is no exact figure available for the number of VPL procedures conducted in the Netherlands. For 2002, the national APL monitor still indicated a minimum of 6000 procedures in some 500 organizations. In addition, it is confirmed that many organizations studied the potential of VPL in their own organizations (Hövels & Romijn, 2003). In nearly 40% of these VPL procedures, the goal was granting someone a nationally accredited diploma. In some 30% of the procedures, concrete follow-up steps had already been taken, focusing on the learning and the development of individuals. The rest were oriented towards promotion options, personnel selection or a rearrangement of duties. Almost all of the initiatives took place within one professional column.
Since then, the number of VPL procedures has been steadily rising. In 2005, along with running VPL initiatives, 6500 declarations of intent were signed for new VPL procedures at the MBO level (Annual Report, 2005). This number is expected to go up fast as the VPL ambitions of the universities of applied sciences become reality. As just one example, the *Hogeschool van Amsterdam* has set a target figure of a minimum of 3000 VPL procedures for the period of 2006-2008 (Plan 3000, 2006).
Starting 2007, more reliable figures on the nature and number of VPL procedures will be available. As from then, the WVA[35b] will allow a write-off scheme for the costs of VPL

[35a] MBO is the Dutch upper secondary vocational level. HBO is the bachelor level in higher vocational education.
[35b] Wet Vermindering Afdracht loonbelasting en premie voor volksverzekeringen (Salaries Tax and National Insurance Contributions (Reduced Remittances) Act).

for employers and employees. Registration of the procedures conducted will make the use of VPL quantifiable. At this moment, however, it is primarily the criterion "having access to a VPL procedure offered within one of the four working forms' that is providing a good insight into the level at which VPL is taking off. A number of examples show how large these groups can be and how different in objective and context.

Examples of VPL today

The construction sector offers a good example of a broad VPL function geared for both summative and formative effects. Since July 2006, the Construction Industry Collective Labour Agreement (*CAO Bouwnijverheid*) has provided a career track for employers and employees. The participants are some 130,000 construction site personnel and 65,000 office positions. In the Construction & Infra career track, these employees are informed of their career opportunities within the sector. The most important goal is getting the right employee into the right place, and in so doing, to keep ambitious employees in the sector, prevent attrition due to disability and promote reintegration. Each track is individual, custom work, and requires effort on the part of all parties involved. A collective determination is made of what focus on other work is required, what tests are called for and what education/training is the most appropriate. A consensus is also obtained on the arrangements on the time commitment and financing of the process (Construction career track, 2006).

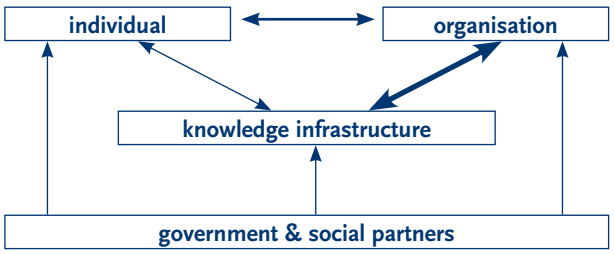
The Ministry of Defence's *Verkennen van Competenties* project (2005) is intended to reach integral, systematic and cross-sector use of VPL procedures, including quality assurance, in a work environment. This system can be used by a variety of actors: 1. the individual can update and supplement his/her own competency portfolio; 2. the employer has a list of competencies in the organization that can be deployed in various departments; 3. external organizations can search to fill vacancies; 4. the career counsellor can use it to organise the personal development track. The innovative character lies in the competency-based approach to level the playing field in the valuation of various learning tracks, mainly those between military and civilian learning experiences, the systematic use of EVK and VPL and the cross-sector approach. The target group consists of some 15,000 people leaving or continuing in the military and some 5000 new recruits.

A final example of the size of target groups for which VPL is within reach is the group executive members of ABVA/KABO/FNV. This group of trade union volunteers is some 13,000 members strong. Alongside their regular work, they volunteer in a range of competency profiles for the trade union, in positions such as trade union consultant, career counsellor, participation council member, trade union school instructor, and the

like. These volunteer positions are set out in competency profiles that can be derived into MBO/HBO diplomas. The derivation process can be readily evaluated with a VPL procedure. The degree to which a VPL recommendation then leads to a certification or a career track is a matter to be worked out between the individual and the organization for which that individual works (Burgt, 2005).

These three examples show that large groups can use VPL facilities for a range of purposes. The problem is less with the knowledge infrastructure or organizations, and more with the individual's unfamiliarity with VPL. This means that at present, of the three transitions collectively representing the transition to the second VPL era, it is primarily the transition to individual empowerment that is lagging behind the other two transition areas, the focus on employability and the lifelong learning strategies. Additionally, the examples show that the reason for this does not by definition lie in the authority relationships. The individual is given adequate leeway to arrange a personal track with the individual learning biography, even if that lies outside the individual's own professional column. In the recommendations on new learning (2002), the Socio-Economic Council confirms the need for a more open role on a more equal footing for the individual. It calls for a reinforcement of the position and responsibility of the individual on the post-initial education market as an important solution track for giving lifelong learning a more structural position in the knowledge infrastructure. This way, the individual creates a new balance, as animator of lifelong learning between the actors in the VPL era knowledge economy. Actual utilization of the opportunities is the central focus. It underscores the development of authoritative relationships on a more equal footing between the actors, including initiatives for career training across different professional columns. For the time being, individual empowerment is limited to policy premises on paper.

Figure 5: 1st VLP age: knowledge economy model



Despite that the relationship between knowledge infrastructure and the organizational level is still dominant, there are, in theory, options for the individual to strive for his or her own summative or formative effects. In this case, lifelong learning strategies set the tone and can be pursued via the portfolio of a candidate who, in theory, can obtain individualized work. Nonetheless, for the time being, the focus on input limits the wide application of this custom work. The individual is not yet 'empowered' enough to fully valuate his or her own learning or, in the formulation of lifelong learning, to start by assuming a specific desired output. Note that mobility is no longer limited to the professional column itself, but is now being seen as an intra-sector phenomenon in some cases. Today, we are in the first VPL era, because *valuing learning* of non-formally and informally acquired competencies is starting to become a component of learning strategies. It is, however, still too soon to be referring to a second VPL era, because the correct balance within the triangle (individual-organization-knowledge infrastructure) has not yet been achieved: mainly, input-dominated learning is still too much of a stumbling block for output-oriented custom work.

From guild learning to lifelong learning

In this section we provide an overview of the most significant changes relating to the organization of professional training through history. Table 1 shows that there are shifts within the objectives, the composition of the target group, within the authority relationships and in relation to the use of summative and/or formative aspects. Since the days of the guild system, professional training has come a long way. At this point we have arrived at a point at which both tripartite implementation and tripartite responsibility is a reality. Within this development, there are signs of a shift from the dominance of the knowledge infrastructure in organising the professional training to the level of the profession itself: the workplace, where individual and organization come together. We have now almost come full-circle; in the guild system there was, of course, also close cooperation in this area. The fundamental differences, however, are that the objective of the process has continued to develop, from a focus on initial training to a lifelong learning strategy (or preparations for a lifelong learning strategy). The target group has been expanded from young, starting employees to anyone who wants to be or has to become employable. Additionally, individual and organization collaborate on the details of the process. Employee mobility is no longer limited to a single workplace, but is increasingly seen as an inter-sector phenomenon. Finally, the focus has slowly shifted from a summative to a formative approach to professional training, and *valuing learning* offers an opening to make the transition from input-based to output-based learning strategies; a logical step, considering the changing objective of professional training and the opportunities for inter-sector mobility.

Table 1: From guild learning to lifelong learning: the development process of professional training

	Objective*	Target group	Authority	Mobility	Summative/ formative	Learning characteristic
Guild pre-VPL	Initial professional training	New employees in professional column	Organization	None	Summative	Input, learning by doing
Trades pre-VPL	Initial professional training	New employees in professional column	Organization	None	Summative	Input, learning by doing
Industrial pre-VPL	Initial professional training & lifelong learning	New employees in professional column & retrainees	**Organization** & Knowledge infrastructure	None	Summative	**Input**, learning by doing & formal learning
Knowledge economy 1st VPL era	Initial professional training & lifelong learning	starting employees/ career changers in professional columns/ retrainees	Organization & **Knowledge infrastructure** & individual	Intra-sector	**Summative** & formative	**Input/** output, Formal and non-formal learning
(coming) Lifelong learning 2nd VPL era	lifelong learning	Everyone	**Individual** & **organization** & **knowledge infrastructure**	Inter-sector	Summative & **formative**	**Output**, valuing learning

* *where two or more functions/roles are given, entries in **bold** indicate the dominant function/role*

In the following section, I will elaborate on current views of professional training from the perspective of the knowledge economy era. The central focus will be the presentation of the VPL process model that enables the use of VPL in accordance with relationships on more equal footing and driven from a focus on lifelong learning strategies. The table shows the possibilities of the '2nd VPL era lifelong learning' as presented at the beginning of this chapter. Many of the preconditions for *valuing learning* have at this point been met. The 'long term' from the professional training of guild learning to that of lifelong learning is beginning to reveal itself. The place that VPL as an organized principle promised to take on has already been partially achieved, because of the three required societal transitions, two (lifelong learning strategies and employability) are nearly complete; now

it is a matter of waiting, primarily for the third transition, to individual empowerment. When that happens, it will create the correct balance with the various actors. The things that require elaboration are, on the one hand, the age-old questions of accessibility, civil effect and quality assurance, and on the other, the questions surrounding form and content of lifelong learning, which individual empowerment and organizational employability demand. In other words, is the knowledge infrastructure ready for the new culture of learning? VPL-Total offers the answers to almost all of these questions.

VPL-Total

The VPL process as a whole, or 'VPL-Total,' consists of five phases: the preparatory phase, focused on engagement and awareness of the value of a person's competencies; recognition of personal competencies; accreditation and valuation of these competencies; development of personal competencies (and advising on that development); and, finally, systematic incorporation of this development process in policy driven by the individual or the organization.

Phase 1: preparation

This phase comprises two steps: creating awareness and setting objectives for VPL within the organizational context and at the individual level. These are the critical success factors for the use of VPL, because if an organization or an individual does not see it necessary to think about the personal goals and the need to invest in the personnel (in the case of the organization) or one's self (in the case of the individual), the VPL process will run aground immediately. Generally speaking, this phase will take as much time as the other four combined!

Phase 2: identification

The identification or listing of competencies is done using a portfolio, sometimes referred to as the 'learning biography.' Along with an account of work experience and diplomas, the portfolio is supplemented with other documentary material: testimonials from employers, documents or photos that incontrovertibly demonstrate the presence of certain competencies, professional products, and the like. In some cases, the documentary material may be focused on the profession or the function for which the VPL procedure has been developed. In others, it may be an 'open' portfolio. Documentary material may be focused on valuation in some cases and personal profiling in others. The participant will compile the portfolio personally, with or without help. This phase consists of a preparatory step and a retrospective step. The preparation relates to the indication of the current competency needs, either in the organization or with the individual. The retrospection is a look back at the individual learning experiences and documenting them.

Phase 3: accreditation and valuation

After phase 2, the content of the portfolio is evaluated or assessed. With employees, this usually happens via observation on the job or by means of a criteria-based interview. The assessors compare the competencies of an individual against the standard (or yardstick) used in the procedure. This method evaluates the qualities of the participant. The precise details of the assessment process itself are not important; only the results count. This step results in recommendations on the potential accreditation at the organization, sector or national level, depending on the yardstick used, in the form of certificates, diplomas or a valuation in the form of recommendations on career potential. The recommendations are based on the output or the learning returns to be accredited as contributed by the individual in the assessment. This output is the starting point for the recommendations on utilizing the returns, and any follow-up steps.

This phase requires three steps:

– Establishment of the standard. This may, in theory, be any standard that meets the needs of organization or individual, such as a national or sector-based professional standard, to name two examples. These standards are focused on certification. Formative or organizational questions focused on being able to determine the placement potential of people in certain positions in the organization can be linked to these standards. Apart from on the desired standard and any formative questions, a choice can be made on the way in which the assessment will happen;
– The assessment of the portfolio and the advising on accreditation and valuation of the portfolio in accordance with the set standard and intended goals;
– The accreditation of the documented learning within the given standard, leading to accreditation (certification) and/or valuation (generating career steps or advice).

After this phase, the retrospective part of the VPL process is complete. The following phases are focused on the prospective function of VPL.

Phase 4: development

This phase is focused on the conversion of the advising received into an action plan. Based on the accredited competencies, and in the event that any competencies are lacking, a personal development plan is created. This plan comprises the learning activities required for the desired diploma qualification and which are offered via custom work. Additionally, the action plan states the steps required to initiate the potential career steps via arrangements on job rotation, promotion, mentoring, etc.
Custom work in learning means the performance of learning assignments independently of the desired form, time and environment, and learning independently or with supervision within a bandwidth of 0 to 100%.
This development phase comprises two steps: First, a personal development plan (POP)

is created and coordinated with the objectives of the organization. Usually, the coordination will be determined by making the POP an official part of the broader organization plan. Secondly, a start is made on compliance with the arrangements made from the POP. In this last step, the potential of custom work from the knowledge infrastructure side is tapped for support.

Phase 5: implementation
The last phase of the VPL process is focused on the systematic implementation of VLP in the education and personnel policy of an organization and maintaining the portfolio by the individual. Accordingly, an organization must be capable of systematically using VPL for its own, possibly changing, goals. The individual is aware of the use and necessity of maintaining a portfolio with a view to potential new developments.
This phase comprises only one step: the conversion of the organization's personnel policy into a lifelong learning policy based on competencies, in which VPL and custom learning are cornerstones, via POP.

VPL-Total chart

To recap, the five phases (and their subdivision into ten steps) can be seen in the table presented in Table 2. Each phase also identifies the steps specified and the corresponding services from the knowledge infrastructure.

Table 2: VPL-Total in 5 phases and 10 steps

VPL phase	VPL step + demand	Action individual/organization	Contribution from knowledge infrastructure
I. Preparation	1. awareness what is the need for investing in human capital or in yourself?	formulation of the mission of the organization inventory of personal problem areas VPL pilot decision	VPL information materials workplace visit employability scan advising on approach
	2. determine learning objectives what learning objectives are relevant for individual and/or organization?	establish ambitions and learning objectives strength/weakness analysis individual/organization	model for strength/weakness analysis

II. Identification	3. determination of organizational or personal profile how do you determine the need for competencies of an individual or	draft job profiles emulate profiles determine portfolio model	format for job or competency profiles portfolio model
	4. retrospection how to describe and document acquired competencies	completion of portfolio by candidates portfolio counselling	portfolio counselling training
III. Accreditation & valuation	5. standard setting what is the desired assessment standard?	establish standard self-assessment overview of career opportu-	advising tools/online tools general career advice
	6. valuation how to valuate the	portfolio assessment internal assessors	training of assessors assessment, incl. drafting
	7. accreditation how to accredit?	cashing in on certification opportunities	counselling to certifying institution
V. Development	8. prospection How to put personal development plan (POP)	building on career opportunity advice in POP arrangements on custom	follow-up advice offer for custom work
	9. working on POPs custom-made development/learning	POP into action	delivery of custom work
V. Implementation	10. structural implementation evaluation of pilot; how VPL can be systematically incorporated into the organization policy or a personal approach?	evaluation of VPL pilot embed VPL in HRM, including financing promulgate (new) organizational policy individual administers portfolio	accreditation of assessors (internal/external) VPL quality control procedure

Table 2 shows that the portfolio is the recurring theme. From the establishment of the need for investment in 'human capital' up to and including the anchoring of a VPL-based approach built on *valuing learning*, the portfolio is there. The objective in relation to the context is established for each phase in succession; the portfolio is filled with learning

experiences related to the objective; the portfolio as such is evaluated and recommendations are made; via custom work, the portfolio is augmented, and finally, the portfolio is taken as a starting point for new learning issues from a VPL-embedded situation. The entire VPL process, then, begins and ends with the portfolio; at the same time, each one is the start of a new VPL process. This is known as the 'portfolio loop.'

Looking at more of the table, we see that in each phase, concrete services from the knowledge infrastructure are available to support employability and empowerment issues. These services range from portfolio guidance and providing trainings to assessment and recommendations at the workspace. Filling in potential learning tracks is oriented towards offering custom work in terms of desired content, form and environment. In addition, the following matters must be arranged: the quality assurance for the VPL procedure; the accrediting of assessors, the development of the 'portfolio loop' and the development of self-assessment instruments with which the candidate can determine for himself or herself whether a certain, desired level is available and the training that fits with the personal profile. All this, of course, must be available online.

This has left some of the key questions surrounding quality assurance, access and effect not yet entirely dealt with:

- Assessment is primarily summative in nature. There is still too little being drawn from *valuing learning* to achieve more than a broad indication of career opportunities.
- Assessment is usually carried out by two assessors, one internal and one external, who jointly arrive at correct recommendations; but this still does not answer the question of how the quality of VPL in the general sense can be guaranteed. The quality is now fully dependent on the assessors themselves. The candidate has no view of how those assessors have been trained or prepared for the assessment. And often, the options for second opinion or a complaint system are unclear.
- At the moment, accessibility is primarily open to organizations. The individual has little access to cost coverage, contribution to determining the goal of the VPL procedure or the opportunity to refer to the content of the yardstick, because competency descriptions are written in fairly inaccessible language.
- The pursuit of a certificate or diploma makes for a weak connection between the competency needs of an organization and the content of the certificates/diplomas to be earned. Organization and diploma-issuing institution usually do not speak the same competency language. The result is inefficient advising on the custom work that is needed and that is feasible.
- Finally, and this goes for all key questions, the lack of "mass" utilization of VPL, that is, the lack of quantitative use, prevents urgency in solving these problem areas quickly.

The implementation issues relate to form and content of lifetime learning.

The individual is not yet used to documenting learning experiences in a structured way. People only evaluate where they stand when their jobs are threatened. This can sometimes lead to projects in which people can use VPL to help them move from job to job. As one example, Nedcar is attempting to use this method to place some 2500 people in jobs elsewhere, in cooperation with governments, the CWI, the UWV and Kenteq (*NRC*, 12 August 2006). But there are other examples of preventive investment in one's portfolio in anticipation of potential changes in the labour market. The career approach in the construction sector is one such example. And other companies, such as Heinz, Corus, Rockwool and Bakker Wilting, as well as sectors such as the fruit & vegetable sector and the furniture industry, and volunteer organisations such as Scouting and sports clubs, are all introducing their people to portfolio-making. It has yet to become a generally accepted approach in personnel policy or HRM, however.
Similarly, making real custom work is also uncharted territory with many uncertainties:

- How to deal with inter-sector accreditation of generic competencies; in particular, employers' apprehension about investing in the quality of their people via VPL, only to see those people poached by the competition, or investing in a potential wage explosion, is holding back broad acceptance and mobility.
- How to give recommendations that, in addition to summative objectives, also focus on formative goals concerning career issues such as recruitment and mobility of personnel. These issues are generally independent of certification questions.
- Many professional education programmes are not capable of providing custom work because they do not have the 'critical mass'; that is, not enough pupils/students to reach an affordable teacher/student ratio and to be able to gear the custom work to workplace-specific learning assignments ('action learning'), professional tutorships on the work floor or distance learning in work time and leisure time.
- How to reverse the decline in the number of part-time students in HBO (higher professional education). In the past five years, the number of part-time students has declined each year while the total number of students has increased. Part-time studies are the potential base for custom work, because of the target group of people with work and life experience. Demographically, this target group has to become the driving force behind getting the number of HBO knowledge workers up to the right level and keeping it there.
- How to avoid a distinction arising between diplomas obtained in the standard manner and those obtained via VPL. Flanders (Belgium) has opted for two different types of diplomas, but this dichotomy is seen as undesired in the Netherlands. Making any distinction violates the principle of *valuing learning*, the very point of which is that all learning experiences are considered equal. How to create a lifelong learning culture based on an underlying principle of keeping up competencies on an ongoing basis and VPL. The most significant problem area is the individual's access to the knowledge infrastructure. Potential solutions lie with the government, which can shift the mission

of professional education towards squaring with lifelong vocational training and support. The social partners can strengthen their contribution via promoting inter-sector competency comparisons and valuation with the object of creating "healthy" mobility of employees. Financially, VPL can be supported by means of structural tax schemes for individual and organization, and via arrangements at the collective labour agreement-level on the utilization of training funds.

Independently of these implementation issues, there are a number of other fundamental issues at work in the transition to the 2nd VPL era, and for some of them we can find good examples by looking abroad. For instance, nationwide coverage of VPL advising is a desired goal. As soon as anyone, at any given place, can be advised on MBO or HBO exemptions, and can pursue a follow-up programme anywhere in the country, then lifelong learning has achieved the first key issue of VPL: summative utilization. In France, they are already there. But in The Netherlands, the transfer of VPL advising between organizations that can offer custom work still suffers from unnecessary time wastage, or worse still, in some cases leads to the entire procedure being performed all over again. For this reason, the *Hogeschool van Amsterdam* recently began organizing nationwide coverage of issued VPL advising with a number of other universities of applied science.
Another accessibility aspect is working with portfolio-driven learning tracks starting in primary or secondary education, so as to teach a portfolio-driven learning culture early on. The individual can take this portfolio and continue to update it throughout his or her entire career. Norway goes one step further, granting the citizen the right to a portfolio valuation. Twice per year, the individual can submit his or her portfolio to a regional portfolio databank and get answers on the accreditation that can be obtained at the regional or national level, and also receives development counselling (Nilsen Mohn, in: Duvekot et al., 2005). It is then up to the citizen to take on the challenges offered (accreditation and development), individually or in consultation with an employer. Here, a layered approach to 'recognizing' a person's competencies is important; that is, the individual can take an interest test that produces the output of an education and sector indication for certain career steps, and then performs a broad self-assessment offering insight into the options within educational level and job groups.
Quality assurance is in effect about organising confidence. In this context, it was suggested even in *De Fles is Half Vol* that a professional register or association for assessors be set up, including standard setting for assessors and their training. This suggestion is worth exploring, for the lifelong learning of the assessors themselves. Another option is certification of the trainer of the assessors, so as to make known that the assessors trained there meet expectations of reliability, independence and transparency. For that matter, summative VPL can be left to existing examination committees, as it is in France; the advantage here is that *valuing learning* is directly embedded in the existing assessment system without requiring the setup of a new 'quality assurance bureaucracy'.

In the area of civil effect, extending a body of rulings on exemptions within one educational programme to cross-programme and cross-sector domains is important. The French example is a striking one. A national advisory committee has already been working for some years on a project incorporating every summative effect offered into an electronic database, with the goal of being able to show a VPL candidate the yardstick to which a VPL report can be connected with and, where possible, capitalized on. This both expands the scope of potential formative steps towards career-making, and makes it more individual-driven (Charraud, in: Duvekot et al., 2005).

Final word

We still have a long way to go before *valuing learning* becomes the basis of a programme-independent, reciprocal and indicative assessment system. *Valuing learning* can be an important contributing factor to activating lifelong learning. The developments surrounding vocational training and linking it to the VPL system offer a solid basis to build on. Clearly, personal development takes center stage. This benefits not only the individual, but the organization in which the individual is active, and so, indirectly, society as a whole as well. The role of assessment within *valuing learning* is, therefore, no longer limited to a final exam, but in fact becomes a jumping-off point for new development and growth. This development can lead to horizontal, vertical, inter-sector and intra-sector mobility. The output of VPL is primarily career-oriented, relying on the education or training functions fulfilled by the knowledge infrastructure. And this is just what the utilization of competencies in an increasingly dynamic labour market needs.
Valuing learning therefore increases the role that the individual plays in building lifelong learning strategies. It reveals the benefits in terms of profit (status, financial rewards), efficiency (time, custom work) and enjoyability (learning is fun). The learning-independent nature of assessment reinforces these effects of *valuing learning*, building up the portfolio-loop and heralding the dawn of the second VPL era. Considering the pace at which VPL has developed in the space of ten years and contributed to the modernisation of professional training, the transition in the social, economic and educational areas towards customer-oriented and demand-steered lifelong learning made-to-measure can be expected very soon. And the challenges are ahead – certainly for the *Hogeschool van Amsterdam* and its partners.

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7 THE FRENCH APPROACH OF VPL

An historical approach and the state of art in 2007

ANNE-MARIE CHARRAUD

The French approach to the subject of "VPL" is based on two main principles, which it is necessary to articulate for comprehensive understanding:

– It is undoubted that any individual can learn in many different places (such as the work place, in a volunteer activity as well as in a training centre).
– The recognition of "learning outcomes" can be measured against any referential target such as a qualification usually delivered by a training institution. Such awards are recognised by firms and permit the taking of further educational training. Specific awards built to attest that an individual is qualified, will never be recognised by economic or social actors.

The progression of the application of such principles began in the year 1934 (Law of 10th of July 1934) when a specific procedure[36] was set up to permit some "engineers" working in the staff of a firm without having the diploma of "engineer" which is compulsory to get the status and the wages relevant to such function. Fifty years were necessary to spread such ideas to the universities and seventy years (with the 2002 law) to get a complete revolution concerning all kinds of vocational qualifications.

This article will give an overview of the historical evolution covering the main steps provided by the different laws structuring it. Then, in the second part, the innovations produced by the new concept of "validation des acquis d'expérience or VAE" since 2002 will be explained.

1. A progressive evolution in five steps

The historical process in four main steps till 2002

From 1934, it is necessary to wait until the nineteen-fifty's to observe the first step of evolution especially in the field of social care and health qualification. It concerned the exemption of pre-requisites with the idea that experience can be used to complete an award corresponding to a lower level than the level normally required to pass some courses to enter some training. This opportunity is still in use and permits many workers to access a promotion process in their vocational context without completing a curriculum that they could never obtain without access to finance or the time to do it.

A second step happened in the seventies with the development of continuing education. It appeared at this time that it would be more economic (in time as well as in financing or energy) to set up curriculum according to the needs of the target groups concerned taking

[36] This procedure is set up at a national level. The candidates must have worked more than 5 years in the functions of "engineer" and receive an award called "titre d'ingénieur diplômé par l'Etat or DPE"

account of their prior learning. A new pedagogical approach moved issues towards modularisation of training and suggested the principles of an exemption of some parts of the curriculum or parts of courses. This practice was called "positioning" by some actors and some others (especially in the context of the ministry of labour continuing training) called it ECAP (evaluation des competencies et aptitudes professionnelles – or professional skills and competencies evaluation). After such recognition of their knowledge or competencies the candidates can follow courses that they are not exempted from and pass the final examination usually taken at the end of the curriculum with all the other trainees who follow it completely. This second step permits many workers to valorise the "learning outcomes" they got through their experience in a work situation or through short length continuing training developed by their firms at different times of their working lives. This presumed that the content of the jobs concerned was close to the content of the training the candidates wanted to follow.

At the beginning of the 80's a national policy trend proposed to increase the number of people entering into higher education. The same idea of exemption of pre-requisites was open with a third step in the process introducing a new concept called "validation des acquis professionnels"[37]. This innovation combined the first two steps: any individual, more than 20 years old and having a proven two years of work experience can be received into a specific procedure permitting an evaluation and validation of his / her prior occupational learning against the pre-requisites usually required to enter into a higher education cycle of which there are different degrees (the first one in France is the "Baccalauréat) or an equivalent qualification. The procedure set up to apply the decree provides the settlement of a specific tool named "dossier" where the candidates have to describe their own stories. Each University could establish its own documents and proposed pedagogical commissions according to the speciality of the cycle being sought.

A fourth step was added in 1992 with a new Law n° 92-678 of the 20th of July 1992 promoted by the Ministry of labour followed by a decree n° 93-538 of the 27th of March 1993 about "Validation des acquis Professionnels or VAP" for accreditation of part of the diploma delivered by the higher and secondary education ministry and the ministry in charge of agriculture. Furthermore, in 1999 the same Law was extended to the qualifications delivered by the youth and sport ministry.

This new step was very important in the French landscape because it stresses the French political choice about the goal of such an approach on two levels:

1 The Law defines the aims of the procedure as a new way to obtain a "qualification" which may have the same value and the same credibility as assessment made after train-

[37] Decree n° 85-906 of the 23rd of August 1985 concerning the conditions of the validation of studies, professional experiences or personal learning outcomes to access to the different levels of Higher education and applying the Law n°84-52 of the 26th of January 1984

ing. The same qualification and so the same "frame of reference" will be used to achieve the reality of VAP. In the French context, if specific qualifications were developed for VAP, it will not be recognised by firms or by training centres in the case where an individual wants them to pursue further training. This choice was based on the French approach organised for the building of qualifications "frames of referenceframes of reference" or "référentiels". They are discussed and validated in committees with representatives of the training world and of the world of work. This structure permits social and economic recognition and it is mentioned in a Law n° 71-577 of the 6th of July 1971 that all qualifications developed in such a way can be achieved through initial training as well as continuing education and the Law of 1984 added that it is also possible through VAP.

2 Till this date, the focus was on exemption of training and finally the advice or the decision given through the validation involved the assessors in the assessment and the awarding of the qualification. Its value concerns the content of the qualification and this approach was so difficult that the legal text defines the issue of VAP as an exemption of part of the examinations generally organised to get the qualification. All those examinations can be exempted except one. After the VAP procedure, the candidate has to pass the last examination by himself.

Finally, the gap to apply the law was so hard that the first experiences of VAP only really began after 1995. It was necessary to develop a specific procedure, which will be different to the traditional examination used to verify all the learning outcomes achieved after training but also it must be credible and reliable enough to permit an equivalent value. A feature of the procedure follows the nature of the outcomes achieved. Knowledge and the ability to combine it in different work or personal situations are at the heart of them. So the supports of the proof of such ability and knowledge were defined through writing evidence and a description of actions allowing them to be seen.
In fact, at the beginning this approach did not receive a real welcome from teachers who were given the responsibility to develop VAP. A strong opposition developed against this initiative because it was feared that it would decrease the value of the qualifications delivered and even now such fear still exists. Many people think that only formal learning in a training centre can produce valid learning outcomes for individuals.

But little by little experience showed that most of the adults involved in VAP demonstrated real knowledge and ability to use it. Trust emerges out of the capability of individuals to learn outside school and to give structure to their informal and non-formal learning outcomes.

A last step with the introduction of the VAE concept in 2002

The great number of job-seekers increasing during the ninety's stimulated national policy and ten years after the first Law, the Ministry of Labour enacted new legislation on the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) which places more emphasis than the previous legislation on VAP.

The last step concerns the Law n° 2002-73 on the 17TH of January 2002 setting a new paradigm named "Validation des acquis d'expérience" or VAE. VAE can be used as a basis to award full qualifications, rather than just units or "parts" of a full diploma and so can be equivalent to a complete assessment leading to an award of formal qualifications. Since 2002 all types of nationally-recognised qualification awards are eligible, not only the three ministries involved in VAP. For higher education all kinds of experience can be accepted and for other awards, working life experiences (self-employment, paid and voluntary) are used. While for VAP five years of experience were necessary to enter in the process, with VAE at least three years of work experience are enough. A repository of those awards available with VAE is created and documented by the newly-created National Vocational Certification Commission *(Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle)*.

The decrees following the Law in April 2002 gave the main lines of the procedure, which can be listed in five main steps:

1 Information about the process of VAE;
2 Decision of the validity of the application (in terms of duration of experience related to the content of the qualification);
3 Development of a portfolio or "dossier" by the candidate describing his or her experience. It may include observation of the candidate in his/her work situation or in a simulated situation and other evidence. The candidates may be mentored and financing can be available at this stage of the process;
4 Interview/dialogue with a 'jury' – at the request of the jury or the candidate;
5 Deliberation and decision from the jury based on the documents produced and their own observations.

The legislation has brought new practices in assessment: there is no certification without a future plan; future plans may be those of an individual or the individual with his/her company or organisation; and the jury's role has changed from one of sanction to a more positive role of giving value to the candidate's experience and help for candidates to develop further. This is particularly pertinent when only part of the qualification has been awarded, the jury has to propose ways in which the candidate can obtain the whole qualification and this may be a mixture or further experience, courses, seminars, projects etc[38].
The decree concerning the procedure indicates that the jury must be constituted and chaired in accordance with the general regulations and those for each type of qualification

[38] Rapport Transfine France (2005) - www.transfine.net

but one quarter of the membership must be qualified representatives of the occupational sector and half of these must be from the employers and half from the employees. It must have equal representation of men and women. Staff of the company where the candidate is employed may not be part of the jury. Advisors who have helped the candidate put together his/her portfolio cannot be a member of the jury (except in higher education). The jury's decision can be an award related to a whole qualification or a part of a qualification, in this case, the jury must indicate which knowledge and skills will be assessed later in order to award the full diploma/certificate.
The arrangements also imply new competencies for the actors: fewer trainers and more "designers"; more tutors; more guidance: for access, for producing the portfolio, and for completing the qualifications.

So if we try to synthesis the use made though VPL in France in 2007, many opportunities of valorisation of "prior" learning are available. Each kind of opportunity was identified by a specific word according to the purpose pursued. This aspect is important because each procedure concerns specific actors and quality control though they are all made to help individuals to get a qualification. In this table was introduced the procedure "bilan de competencies" which can be classified in VPL but in an alternate way because it concerns guidance procedure or counselling moments where an individual can reflect about his or her projects outside of any link with an award or training curriculum though it could be one of the conclusion of this assessment.

The practices of VPL coexisting in France

Purposes	**Designation of the procedure**
1 Entry in a training course without the pre-requisites	Exemption of pre-requisite(dispense de pré-requis)
2 Exemption from part of a training programme but not from assessment	'Positioning' (positionnement parfois evaluation des capacities et aptitudes professionnelles)
3 Access to specific qualification	
- After alternative training	Confirmation of the qualification from employer after a "professionalisation" contract
- Without training	First Competence certificate
4 Access to a qualification or certification which used to be obtained after formal training	
- After alternative training	Possible after apprenticeship and qualification
- Exemption of some assessment	VAP till 2002
- Delivery of part or whole units of a certificate, diploma	VAE after 2002 for all diplomas, titles or certificates
- Guidance	Assessment (Bilan de competencies)

Two pathways were stressed in this table and can explain the approaches used in practice:
1. Facilitation to follow a training curriculum targeting a qualification;
2. Exemption from training and specific assessment facilitating the access to a qualification.
It is easier to modify the principles of recognition of prior learning when the goal concerns an exemption from training. The candidates who did not succeed in the examinations at the end of the course obtain no diploma or title and so the value of the certification delivered can stay stable because all people who get it follow the same process of assessment. It is completely different when the validation of the learning outcomes is made before entering a course or a curriculum and the advice of the learning outcomes recognition is given through the usual process after training. That means that the content of the outcomes must be really well defined and formalized and the criteria of the assessment also clearly precisely expressed to permit a mutual trust between the different modes of valuation. This corresponds to the main challenge of VPL and especially the VAE law, which is at the centre of many innovative actions.

2. The state of the art on VPL since 2002

The innovative outcomes of VAE

The introduction of VAE in the French system of qualification had, and continues to have, important cultural and pedagogical changes especially on three aspects:

1 – *The organization of local networks to accompany the candidates and the actors involved in the process*

Such evolution is part of an organization where new stakeholders are involved. With the VAP approach only the services of the three ministries concerned were in charge of the process from the reception of the candidates, to the organization of the jury and normally the support after VAP to complete the assessment of the unit(s) missing towards full qualification. Since the decentralization reform, the regions in France are responsible for many aspects of the financial and practical management of adult education provision and upper secondary education. Since 2002, many regions have been very active in assisting both candidates and professionals working in the area and have facilitated the implementation of the management of VAE. A specific service is implemented for the coordination and information of a network of information points *(Points-Relais-Conseil)* within existing establishments usually in charge of training or professional counselling. They also participate in the financing of a part of the process.

This approach must be distinguished from another one developed in the mid-1980s, under the “bilan de competencies” set up to help individuals in guidance or counselling about their personal or professional projects. On the basis of an analysis of their skills, individuals can identify the opportunities open to them and define a personal training or occupational plan or a VAE process to get a qualification.

2 – *A new way to describe qualifications and elaborate on frames of reference or "référentiels"*

Till 2002, most of the frames of reference used to assess and deliver awards concerned curriculum or formal learning programs. As the same "norm" is used to assess whatever learning was realized, it was necessary to produce a precise description of the outcomes expected and which could be obtained after different types of learning. This aim suggests a new formulation of such outcomes and most of the time, it is necessary to reflect about the reasons why they are present and their use after assessment. Finally, awards are not an indication of the end of training with a specific duration but an indication of a set of learning outcomes combined together with a real sense of the world of training or / and the world of work. In France this discovery drove towards a new way to write "frames of reference" or "référentiels" with three steps: first the description of the professional, or vocational or academic goals, second the description of learning outcomes assessed and the ways they are assessed, and third the curriculum or training process.

This approach is often called "competencies approach" because it is supposed to enter into the heart of the qualification through the components necessary to make their outcomes work and be seen to work. This new approach is reflected in the National Repository and connected to the Europass supports. It concerns the basis of the French NQF (National Qualifications Framework), which will be used for the EQF (European Qualifications Framework).

3 – *Innovation about assessment principles*

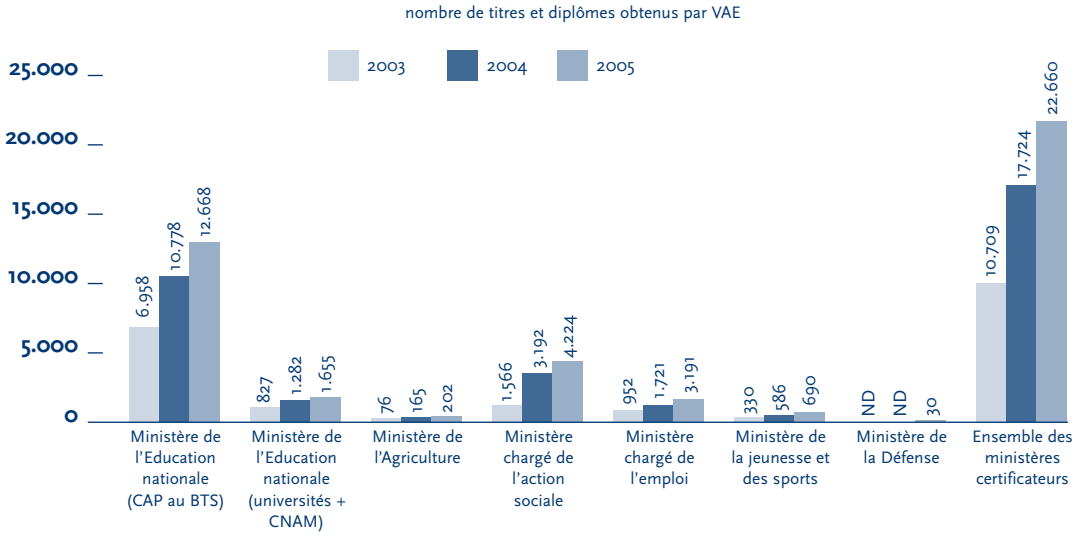
Two other consequences accompany this approach about assessment methodology and a jury's attitude towards assessment:

a Regarding assessment methodology, different approaches were sometime presented to explain some of VAE's practices. It is the case that for the ministry of Labour its objectives are clearly aimed towards operational competence and performance. Cutting qualifications in "Certificats de Competencies Professionnelles" according to job skills and organizations, assessments are achieved through real or simulated working situations for employed people in collaboration with their employers or for unemployed people. Another example can be noted with the "Certificats de competencies d'entreprises" developed by Chambers of Commerce, inspired by the British NVQs – a system for the accreditation of competencies inside companies, with occupational and job standards for competencies, piloted by an approved assessor. This approach can be seen as more credible because it is more in keeping with the nature of the outcomes achieved but recently these outcomes are being challenged. Their cost is high but frequently they are perceived as insufficient to claim a social or economic qualification, which may be used in several job situations. This last characteristic, often called "transferability" is one of the most representative of the French qualifications.

b Regarding a jury's attitude two approaches to practice can be observed[39]:
- A 'weighing' principle: experience and modules are weighed up against each other – this is a recording and documenting approach, a sort of balance sheet or set of scales in which the non-formal and informal learning is weighed/measured against the formal learning that is expected for a diploma;
- A 'development' principle: progress is assessed and situated on a professional and personal career path, and future plans are developed. This is a dynamic approach, offering the candidates the opportunity to be aware of what they have learnt from their experience and to help them to progress, to develop themselves. It is concerned less with accurate measurement and more with the candidate's holistic approach to lifelong learning.

4 – *Some quantitative results*

The more recent data actually available indicate that more than 56,000 individuals demands were agreed to enter in a process of VAE organised by a ministry; among them around 40,000 candidates had compiled a "dossier" examined by a jury in 2005. Half of these were received by the jury organised by the ministry of education. This situation changed in 2006 with the number increasing especially for the ministry in charge of social affairs with the development of the lack of qualified workers to take care of old people. Less than 23,000 individuals obtained a complete qualification (diplomas or titles) in the same year.



Sources: Ministères certificateurs. Les données des ministères chargés de l'indusatrie, de l'Equipment ne sont pas encore disponibles. Ces ministéres réalisent un faible nombre de VAE

[39] Rapport Transfine France. (2005) - www.transfine.net

The more recent data describing the profile of the candidates relates only to the year 2004 when statistics were not available for some ministries such as youth and sports, army, social affairs, which really became involved in the process only in 2005 and more in 2006. Nevertheless a first glance at the known profile claims that 2/3 of the candidates are female and most of them are between 30 and 49 years old. It means that the duration of their experience is around 10 years and more. Three quarters of the candidates are employed but it is noted that most of the candidates involved in a process of VAE under the control of the ministry of labour are job seekers. Specific efforts were undertaken by this ministry to develop such initiatives focused on this category of individuals. 43% of the VAE completed were aimed at qualification relevant to level V (corresponding to the level III by comparison with the EQF levels), 21% relevant to level IV (EQF level 4) and 25% relevant to level III (EQF level 5).

Profile of the candidates involved in a VAE process in 2004

		Ministries in charge of				
		Agriculture	**Labour**	**Universities**	**Education**	**Together**
Sex	Men	69	12	60	41	32
	Women	31	88	40	59	68
	Together	100	100	100	100	100
Age	Less than 30	8	12	10	14	13
	30 to 39	47	30	65	68	unknown
	40 to49	37	41			
	50 and +	8	17	25	18	
	Together	100	100	100	100	
Status	Job seekers	15	72	19	25	31
	salaried	85	28	80	74	68
	Non active	0	0	1	1	1
	Together	100	100	100	100	100
Levels of qualif	V	30	81	0	24	43
	IV	33	17	0	34	21
	III	37	2	17	42	45
	II	0	0	59	0	8
	I	0	0	24	0	3
	Together	100	100	100	100	100

Source DARES – Ministry of Labour – March 2007

So, as outlined in the previous sections, France has put in place a detailed legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, implemented mechanisms to oversee the process of "certification" and developed guidance networks as well as assessment

and validation centres throughout the country. At the time of writing, many aspects of the implementation of *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) are still being developed or refined and it will be important to monitor how this progresses.

In February 2006, the ministry of labour was assigned to be the promoter of the development. The prime minister put the VAE process in a central position to fight unemployment. He gave an order to multiply by three the number of individuals getting a certification by a VAE process. A specific committee was set up under the umbrella of the ministry of labour and working groups were organized with main ministries involved in this process. They produced some recommendations in October 2006 to optimally apply the State policy and legislation. A web site (www.vae.gouv.fr) specifically dedicated to VAE was created in March 2007 with the contribution of all the ministries and the usual information institutions in charge of the dissemination of the reality about lifelong learning for individuals. Some proposals are now being discussed to develop a common document to be completed when a candidate wants to enter a VAE process organized by a ministry. The national Agency in charge of job seekers has also developed tools to increase the interest of individuals in getting certification by the VAE process. The ROME (National repository of the skills description) will be linked to the National repository of qualifications (RNCP) in 2008 to permit better guidance. Now important efforts are being made to communicate with enterprises and develop information to improve the system for workers and their job possibilities.

In conclusion

So in France, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning concerns a large range of opportunities and it is important to note that this is a distinct process developed according to specific purposes. In France different procedures of recognition coexist according to the needs of individuals. We can observe a process of identification of competencies to achieve guidance and assessment of competencies for recruitment. But we must be convinced that most of the practices and purposes are linked to a training process. It can be a selection permitting entry to a cycle or course or it can be integrated within it or be an alternative route to shorten it. Referring to all the processes of delivery of certification a small number of certifications are actually delivered with VAE (more than 1,500,000 certifications are delivered each year against less than 300,000 through continuing education and around 30,000 with VAE).

Validation methodologies represent a real challenge and there is a great lack of appropriation for all the stakeholders in charge of the adoption of the process. Two main methods are used to assess skills gained through experience in the context of VAE: examinations

and the assessment of portfolios. In the latter case, assessment panels are called upon to attribute "value" to an individual's experience, which may vary considerably in nature, depending on the context in which it was gained, and is difficult to formalize and assess against specific standards. Moreover, assessors are generally more used to formal examination procedures, and in many cases have not received detailed training on how to implement such assessment methodologies. This is another area where future developments will be of crucial importance. This means that it is necessary to explore innovations and it presumes that assessors know well what they have to identify and valuate. Most of the "frames of reference" or "référentiels" concerning certification are made to verify the achievement of training. The jury generally has a training program as the benchmark instead of the objectives of the training and the use of its outcomes in real life.

If we make a link with what is an actual reflection at the European level with the European Qualification Framework, different practices of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are highly valorised. It is clear that they help to develop lifelong learning and guidance. But to avoid confusion and help in the development of such practices, it is necessary to enter more deeply in those practices and to research the vocabulary used to design each practice. This is important especially when they are linked to the European Qualification Framework and the ECVET approach. The accreditation of prior learning practice is not really the same concept as the VAE and the deliverance of credits will not concern the same objectives and objects when it is permitted to capitalise on the duration of training or part of a certification generally obtained after an assessment set up after training.

One of the major challenges facing the system is to gain credibility in a country where particularly high importance has traditionally been attached to qualifications gained in formal education, often at the expense of skills acquired through professional experience. A culture shift may be required to allow greater value to be attached to vocational skills and to bring the formal education system and non-formal learning closer together. It is the reason why in France a quarter of a century was necessary to achieve the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes with the same value as formal learning outcomes. In comparison with the practices used in other European countries, the validation of non-formal and informal learning are rarely developed. When it is the case, it is a specific process set up for specific qualifications and never used as a substitute for a process valuation after training. So the French position or approach is generally considered as very original and difficult to understand.

8

VPL IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

TORILD NILSEN MOHN

In the Nordic societies three dimensions seems to be significant characteristics of adult education and training; the first refers to participation in wider society and relates to the concept of democracy, civil society and citizenship. The second is that adult education and training are called upon to help improve the match between educational qualifications and skills, on the one hand, and broad participation in the labour market, on the other. The third refers to the shared wish to create an inclusive learning society in which participation is truly for all (Nord 2001).
Non-formal and informal learning has always been highly valued in the Nordic countries where popular learning influenced by the ideas of Grundtvig provides the public with more than courses for developing knowledge and practical skills: The participants also learn abstract skills such as concept development, collaboration skills, taking care of our own health and much, much more.
When talking about valuation and validation of prior learning there is convergence as well as divergence in the Nordic approaches. The main convergence is that there is an interest in valuing informal and non-formal learning outcomes, all the countries are interested in recognising competencies and skills attained outside the formal educational sector. It has been acknowledged that vast amounts of human resources exist in society – and that society would benefit from making them visible. However, to a large extent there is also divergence in terminology, legalisation, target group and the approaches to valuation and validation in working life and third sector (TemaNord 2003).

Better linking of formal, non-formal and informal learning has been a goal of many Nordic initiatives and projects both on national and local levels. Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is believed to open up for more flexible pathways between formal education and training and workplace and institutional learning.
Most effort has been done in relation to establishing formal procedures in the education system where the curricula of the formal education system have been the main standard on which basis an individual's non-formal and informal learning is assessed and recognised. But in the Nordic countries there is an ongoing discussion about the risk of marginalising or ignoring competencies that have value for employers and the labour market.
In all of the Nordic countries the tripartite cooperation between government, the social partners and other stakeholders has formed a shared responsibility and may make it easier to develop unified systems of valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Nordic cooperation and innovation

Nordic cooperation has a widespread form of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and three autonomous areas: the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. With concrete traditions in politics, the economy, and culture it creates a strong Nordic community in Europe.
Co-operation was formalised in 1952 when the Nordic Council was set up as a forum for parliamentarians and governments. The Helsinki Treaty of 1962 has formed the framework for Nordic partnership ever since. The Nordic Council of Ministers was set up in 1971 as the formal forum for co-operation between the governments of the Nordic countries.
There is a strong political commitment, widely shared among Nordic citizens, to creating conditions of equal opportunities and outcomes in many spheres of life.
When looking at World Competitiveness Index 2004 & Networked Readiness Index, 2005, it is clear that the Nordic countries have developed social systems and business models that have proved competitive. It may appear contradictory that small countries with high taxation, large public sectors and wide-ranging welfare systems can achieve Europe's highest growth rates and come on top in so many competitive league tables. Working in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, House of Monday Morning has identified a number of key Nordic leaders from the business community, culture and research, and asked them in the course of in-depth interviews to assess the potential of the Nordic countries in the global economy, including whether there are particular Nordic values, the extent to which Nordic business strengths and skills can be attributed to them, and how the governments of the Nordic countries can promote and use them if the need arises. (Lindholm, Prehn , Højgaard Jønson 2005)
The interviewed Nordic leaders point to eight values that the Nordic countries have in common in the global economy: equality, trust, and proximity to power, inclusion, flexibility, and respect for nature, the protestant work ethic and aesthetics. These values are connected with our social system and contribute to many fundamental institutional similarities between the countries, with the balance between the community and the individual being of central importance.

Welfare and education

The Nordic leaders interviewed were asked to give input to the discussion on how the Nordic Council of Ministers can enhance the competitiveness of the region. One of the input was "The Nordic Region must have the world's best education system. Our most important raw material in the Nordic Region takes the form of our people, and our strength in breadth – which can be attributed to the Nordic value of inclusion – must continue to be ensured for everyone."

The Nordic economies tend to demonstrate above average performance on input measures as investment in education (Eurostat 2003), education participation (Eurostat 2004) and lifelong learning participation (Eurostat 2005). But there is a common agreement that we need to be far better at cultivating and developing our talents and unique skills. In keeping with the principle of lifelong learning, Nordic co-operation on adult education and training works to promote adult knowledge and skills as the basis for personal development, and also to further development of working life and civic society through increased goal setting, business development, value creation and democratic participation. This co-operation stimulates Nordic fellowship in adult education and training.
There are two Nordic programmes for adult learning which complement each other and support the co-operation. These are *Nordplus Adult Learning*, which funds co-operation projects, network and mobility programmes initiated by interest groups, and Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), a strategic Nordic network which aims at co-operation in diverse adult learning arenas.
NVL has set up a Nordic expert validation network. The purpose of the network is to be advisory to the steering group for adult learning (the Nordic Council of Ministers) and to the NVL, to formulate and/or carry out report work, to plan and organise conferences and other meeting places and highlight good examples of validation from the Nordic countries.

Validation and valuation initiatives at national levels

There has been an increased focus on the value of learning gain outside the formal education system in all the Nordic countries for some years now. Better linking of formal, non-formal and informal learning has been a goal of many initiatives and projects both at national and local levels. Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is believed to open up for more flexible pathways between formal education and training and workplace and institutional learning. Most effort has been done in relation to establishing formal procedures in the education system for validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Denmark

In Denmark the validation reform aimed at an approach to validation that meets the needs both of the individual and enterprises. In the policy paper "Recognition of prior learning within the education system" (Danish Ministry of Education 2005) the four ministers responsible for education promise to take the initiative to strengthen the recognition of prior learning within the education system in the coming years. This applies specifically to adult education and vocational training, but also to qualifying mainstream and tertiary education. Increased recognition of prior learning is also seen as an essential aspect of the

Government's initiatives to further develop a user-friendly, flexible and well-functioning education system where quality is the absolute main priority. It also supports the Government initiatives 'More people in work' and 'Faster through the education system' as well as the Government's integration efforts. The paper also contains a set of principles for enhanced assessment and recognition of prior learning. One of the principles is that the individual citizen should be able to request an assessment of his or her prior learning based on the framework and regulations applicable within the individual areas of education. Another principle is that the assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question should be documented by issuing a certificate. It is also said that the individual has a responsibility for contributing to the documentation of his/her prior learning. (Hauch, Seyfried, Otero 2006)

Sweden

The responsibility for validation in Sweden is divided between the education system and the social partners. In 2003 the Swedish government set up a special commission, The Swedish National Commission on Validation, in order to develop processes of quality and methods for validation. Validation is here defined as a precise assessment, valuing, documentation and recognition of knowledge and competencies that an individual has gained, irrespective of how and where they have been acquired. Since its establishment, the Commission has analysed and explored validation efforts carried out in Sweden, devoted to the development of methods and models for the general, exploratory phase and to the design of tools for occupational assessment in a number of industry-specific fields and devoted to the further development, establishment and implementation of the validation support tools developed as well as to the follow-up of regional developments.
An important task ever since the Commission began its work has been to establish the issue of validation on the agenda and gain the support of future end-users in the labour market and in the field of education. At present there are a number of ongoing collaboration projects involving the Commission, central industry associations and existing validation providers. These projects have achieved nationwide coverage, which improves the chances that equivalence and equality before the law will obtain in the performance of validation. (Valideringsdelegasjonen 2006)

Iceland

In Iceland validation has been practiced, e.g. with assessment of work experience within the skilled trades since the late 1920's as well as the recognition of vocational education and training that has been acquired abroad. However, the systematic and organised approach towards the recognition of adults' skills and the apprehension of the importance of being able to validate prior learning for re-entry into the formal school system is a relatively recent notion. The main initiatives taken regarding validation of non-formal

and informal learning on a national stage comes from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Ministry's goals are laid out in a service agreement with the Education and Training Service Centre from 2003, which gives the latter responsibility for the initial development of a means of validating non-formal and informal learning along with an advisory role on how such a system will be implemented in Iceland The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has established itself as a pivotal actor in the development of methods and procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. The strong ties to both sides of industry as well as the service agreement with the Ministry of Education and close contact with the educational system (both formal and non-formal) will ensure that the procedures developed will be widely acknowledged. In 2006 ETSC presented a proposal for a national structure for validation. The main target group is employed with low formal education. Most of the validation happens in relation to the criteria set in the educational system, but valuation projects in the working life and third sector has also been carried out. (Education and Training Service Centre 2006)

Finland

In Finland validation is mostly connected to the well established competence-based qualification system, by which adults have been able to gain a certificate for vocational skills obtained at work.

The competence-based qualifications system came into force in 1994, and competence tests have been arranged since then. The system has been developed in close cooperation between teachers and representatives of working life. The system aims to maintain and enhance the vocational skills of the adult population, to equip adults to engage in an occupation as self-employed people, to develop working life, to promote employment and to support lifelong learning. Adults may demonstrate their vocational skills in competence tests regardless of how and where they have acquired the skills. Although taking part in competence tests does not require formal preparation, many participants participate in preparatory training to rectify gaps in vocational skills learnt at work and to enhance vocational skills. The students participating in preparatory training are provided with individual learning programs. (Source: the NVL web page www.nordvux.net)

Norway

Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has been on the Norwegian adult learning policy agenda since 1999 as a part of the national life long learning strategy. The first step in building up a system for validation was to establish the national Validation Project. The aims of this project were to develop methods and tools for documentation and validation of competencies and skills from all learning arenas. The target group was all adults, both employed and unemployed.

During the three years 50 local development projects were funded. Different methods and tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning were developed in three sectors;

educational, working life and third sector. Based on qualitative and quantitative data from these development projects and other surveys a new legalisation framework related to the individual rights for validation and accreditation in respect to upper secondary and higher education was set. (Vox 2006)

Validation in the educational sector - establishing systems in respect of individuals

Developing systems

In all the Nordic countries there has been developed different systems for giving individuals the possibility to get their learning outcomes validated and recognised in relation to criteria set in national curricula. The extension of the legal right for individuals differs in the different countries and some of the countries are either developing or rewrite laws and regulations related to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Common for all the Nordic countries is that the validation and recognition of prior learning is seen as a part of a process (a formative approach) and in the educational sector this is connected to access to learning, tailored training and shortening of a study period. It is also opportunities for individuals to get their learning outcomes documented (a summative approach) as a documentation of competencies/qualifications in relation to part of an education programme or recognition in relation to a full education programme.

Different methods for assessment have been developed, mostly on local level. To include the assessors in the development and try-out of these methods has been an important step to lessen the scepticism to recognising and assessing learning attained outside the education system. As in the rest of Europe the Nordic countries are using declarative methods, methods based on observation, simulations, evidence (physical or intellectual samples) of work (or other) practices. (Bjørnåvold, Collardyn, 2005)

Both manual and computerised tools have been developed and tested in vocational and general subjects. The tools are used in different ways and the different methods dependent on the needs of the individual. Sometimes the assessor supplements the existing tools with locally developed tools.

Beneficial for the individual

For the individual the recognition of non-formal and informal learning can function as a transitional or multi-directional pathway by being an incentive to further studies, getting a shortening of a study period or being more employable.

Some surveys have been done relating the benefits for the individual. One example is the qualitative project “Effects of Validation in the Health and Social Sector” (Haugøy, Fossan-Waage, Aune Servan 2006) which seeks to map some of the effects of validating in health and care sector. Seven employees and their managers in four different nursing

homes in Norway were interviewed. The employees managed to achieve authorization as skilled nursing assistants via validation and training. The project group interviewed them about their experiences during this process, and mapped the consequences of the process on their work performance and working conditions. The employees participate in a validation process and achieve authorization because they seek more knowledge about their field of work, and because they want more stable working conditions. They are satisfied with their employers' efforts in adapting their working conditions to their special needs as students. The respondents report a greater self-confidence and control in their work performance, as well as an awareness of a higher level of reflection. One main effect of this transfer process is the possibility of changing jobs and achieving a permanent position with an increased number of working hours.
Another example is a validation process done in Sweden, a case study described in the VPL2 project. This case study was about unskilled but experienced women within industrial kitchens and large-scale households. The candidates have been working for a long time and they have acquired a lot of knowledge and skills within the field of work. They wanted to have their non-formal and informal learning outcome validated and recognised in relation to relevant courses within upper secondary level. The municipal adult education has a framework agreement with the upper secondary schools of the municipality, and they paid for the validation. The outcome of the process was that the women got better self-awareness and self-confidence when they got an official documentation of their competencies and skills. They will also have a possibility to take further education within the field.

Valuation and validation for the profit sector - working life

Working life as a learning arena

Actual and anticipated labour market developments have had enormous influence in shaping current thinking in the Nordic countries about lifelong learning. The working life is increasingly seen as a key arena for learning. Employers acknowledge the value of training their employees and stimulating them to enhance their competence. Employees and organisations that represent them acknowledge the importance of learning for advancement, career mobility, and achieving a fulfilling life in and out of the workplace.
No common Nordic approach has been developed to validation and valuation of learning outcomes from working life. Many of the occupations in the Nordic countries are regulated and there is a demand for a diploma or a craftsman certificate from the formal education sector to get a job as professional skilled employee. As seen in Finland the validation of learning outcomes are related to the criteria set in the national qualification system.

In Sweden there have been developed methods and criteria for broad work sectors and some occupations in cooperation with and funded by the secretariat of the Swedish National Commission on Validation. The competence schemes are based on ten general skills described at the web site of the commission. The schemes can be used as a basis for charting and assessment of professional skills and knowledge. The commissions propose a three level step for validation of learning outcomes from working life: a local/internal level, a regional level and a national level.
In Iceland two pilot projects has been funded, one in the bank sector and one in health and care sector. In both projects the candidates skills and competencies has been evaluated in relation to relevant specific professional criteria. The next step in the national approach to validation and valuation in Iceland has not been set.
In Denmark and Norway there have been developed tools for valuation of knowledge and skills in the workplace on a national level. These tools are quite general and not linked to a specific profession or curricula criteria. The documents are meant to get a civil recognition and internal company recognition. Recognition by education system or external companies depends on the content of the documentation in each case.
In Norway the trade union LO and its counterpart in the private sector – the Norwegian Confederation of Business and Industry (NHO) – agreed to add a separate chapter in the 1994 Basic Agreement and in 2006 on competence development. Basic Agreements are negotiated at the national level, and constitute the common part of numerous collective agreements at the industry or sector level. They cover the most general rules for the interaction between employers and employees, such as rights of shop stewards, working hours, information, consultation, participation etc. The 2006 chapter § 16-4 contains "Documentation of learning: the companies are requested to establish a system for documenting the individuals skills, courses and experiences related to the working tasks".

A case description

An example of valuing learning in working life can be given as a case description from a Norwegian company, Lunner Produkter, LUPRO. This is a company that provides workplace training for people with different grades of work disabilities. This company wanted to document the staff's competence in order to strengthen its competitiveness. LUPRO engages two types of employers; the skilled workers that are directly engaged by LUPRO, in this case they are called the staff, and the workers employed for a shorter or longer period as a part of workplace training, in this case they are called the clients.
The company wanted to use the charting and documentation as a basis for future planning of company policy and tailored training of employees.
Each employee made their own competence portfolio with documents describing both formal, non formal and informal competence. The employees found it interesting to describe competence that they usually are not aware of, such as ability to communicate with troubled persons in certain contexts.

For the individual the charting and the documentation can be used internally in competence development; it can be used for job-seeking and towards further education. Each person will also benefit from the increased awareness of own competence.

Valuation in the third sector

The third sector is a generic term and applies to both participation in voluntary work and in various types of courses, and the learning which takes place by taking part in society and family life.

The third sector is complex. Distance learning institutions are the intermediaries and distributors of formal education via the Internet, e-mail, correspondence courses or in other ways. Study associations for adult education offer their participants everything from formal education to courses related to hobbies and leisure. Folk high schools are in some countries a part of the formal education system in others not. They implement their education without curricula set centrally or educational targets. The voluntary organisations carry out various types of voluntary work where individuals help out by providing labour. The documentation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the third sector has to be adapted to suit the various needs of the many parties in the sector.

If any documentation from organisations has been provided until recently it has been a documentation of the content and duration of the course. In our knowledge society there is a need for visualisation of life wide learning, this has also challenged the third sector to be able to document the learning outcomes developed in voluntary work and non-formal learning courses. This challenge is said to take place in an environment in which many participants and organisations are afraid of losing their individuality and also do not want to become part of a bureaucratic red tape.
In all the Nordic countries both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal and informal learning in the third sector are based on individuals' own efforts. Different electronic tools have been developed. The idea is that individual organisations will provide information to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are responsible for delivering guidance to people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own CV and identify and describe their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a self-assessment of the skills identified and described.

National tools in Denmark and Norway

In Denmark a national tool for documentation of knowledge and skills has been developed. It is a part of the portfolio "*Min kompetencemappe*" where documentation from

working life and education sector is included. The tool is based on seven key skills: professional skills, learning ability skills, self management skills, democratic skills, health skills, creativity and innovation skills and communication skills. The tool is available on www.kompetenceprofilen.dk. The content of this tool is one of the results of a national project on human resources, *Det Nationale Kompetenceregnskab* (Undervisningsministeriet 2005).

In Norway an instrument called Personal Competence Document (PCD) is developed by The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL) in cooperation with member study organisations, Aust Agder Youth Council and The Norwegian Youth Council as a result of the national Validation Project. The PCD is a "universally valid self-declaration for voluntary work". The main objective of the PCD system is to stimulate users to map, describe and document the activities they are or have been involved in and the competencies they have developed. Non-formal learning activities and voluntary activities are in focus. The secondary objective is to raise awareness of the multitude of competencies developed in the voluntary sector so that these can be taken into account in the education system and in work life. The PCD system helps the user to document the "totality" of her/his competencies as well as the competencies related to a single activity. The main PCD form will be signed only by the user. The forms for single activities can be signed also by another person responsible for the activities. In the first part of the main PCD form competencies are described indirectly by focusing on activities. In the second part competencies developed in these activities are described directly. Documentation such as diplomas, certificates, attestations etc. and physical products such as art work, CD etc. are to be listed in order to support the description of competencies. The user decides if and how much of the PCD system to use. It can be used to get an overview of one's own competencies, in relation to a validation process to enter the formal education system or when applying for a job or preparing for a job interview etc. The PCD is available online: http://193.212.214.18/pkd/
This instrument contains:
1) An introduction in which the methodology for completion is described,
2) An example of a completed form,
3) A form ready for completion, and
4) The option of creating one's own reference.

A glossary has also been developed. In this glossary various voluntary organisations describe their specific activities and their skill profiles.

Emerging issues

Even though there is no common approach to validation and valuation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the Nordic countries the challenges and issues are more or less common.

Costs - benefits

In all the countries the cost-benefit issue is arising at different levels and in all sectors.
In the educational sector some of the training providers get financial support related to the hours of training provided, then validation and shortening of courses isn't seen as a good incentive.
In the working life the time and effort involved in documenting employees' skills and knowledge on a regular basis may outweigh the visible benefits of doing so.
In a Norwegian study two main characteristics of county administrations' work related to validation and training were found. One group of country administrations were focusing on finding flexible solutions for the individuals, and by this promoting an increase in the competency level of the region, as well as regional development. The other group of administrations was more oriented towards laws and regulations and applied the regulations to prioritise between applicants and to restrict access. It was reported that the focus of these administrations was not primarily on regional development. There was a mismatch between positive attitudes in general and their actual practice. (Haugerud, Røstad, Stubbe 2004)

In Sweden an important task ever since the Commission on validation began its work has been to establish the issue of validation on the agenda and gain the support of future end-users in the labour market and in the field of education. As a consequence, the Commission has assumed a neutral position as regards individual validation providers so as not to 'monopolise' validation operations. (Valideringsdelegasjonen 2006)
A Norwegian case study showed that the counties have different approaches of how to relate the training provided to the results of the validation procedure. (Vox 2007) One of the challenges is how to develop tailored training within the economical and organisational frames. In 2007 Vox coordinates a project where four counties have got funding for develop models for individually adapted training based on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Additional aims of the project is to get a common understanding of the benefits of validation, to get a better cooperation between the different authorities responsible for adult education and to get a picture of the costs related to the validation and training process for the county council.

None of the Nordic countries have a good answer on the question related to who should pay for the validation process. This is closely related to the question of who is responsible; the state, the organisation, a neutral validation firm or the individual.

A holistic view – building bridges

Different methods and tools for mapping, assessing and documenting competencies and skills have been developed in the educational sector, the working life sector and the third. Effort has been made to build bridges between the different learning arenas, and to promote a better understanding of the concept of "equivalent competence". Despite this effort there is still a challenge to find documentation methods that has credibility and legitimacy both in the workplace and the education system.

One of the main reasons for the difficulties with "equivalent competence" is that the different learning arenas have different criteria. As a result of recent reforms the standards in some of the Nordic countries stated in national curricula and study plans are learning outcome oriented. The shift of focus from learning input to learning outcomes is believed to make it less complicated to assess learning gained outside the formal education system as "equivalent" to the requirements stipulated in the formal education system.

Even though non-formal and informal learning are highly valued in the Northern society there is not much awareness of working life and voluntary sector as learning arenas. There is a need for training of all involved in the validation procedure so the life wide learning perspective will be included in the process. In addition these aspects need to be involved in the work of career guidance for helping individuals to be aware of the value of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

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VOLUNTEERING IN THE VPL-PERSPECTIVE

9

BÉNÉDICTE HALBA

Managing European diversity in lifelong learning (Valuing Prior Learning, VPL2) aims at strengthening the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning for both summative and formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the validation principles by individuals and organisations, supported by a more demand-led and customer-oriented learning system. Three sectoral levels have been chosen: profit sector (metal), non-profit sector (health) and voluntary sector (unpaid work). This contribution is focused on the way the VPL2 project has contributed to enhance volunteering as a key issue in Valuing Prior Learning and how far volunteering can bring an added-value to the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship, in the society of competence.

VPL2 in the context of the Copenhagen process

VPL2 is a Leonardo da Vinci-pilot project, a European programme meant to enhance lifelong learning, integrating all the dimensions of human beings in the education process: school, family, volunteering or any social activity performed.
With the Copenhagen process, the Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) programme has acquired a clearer political background and has indeed been mentioned as a tool for proceeding towards the goals set in 2002, by the Education Ministers of 31 countries and the European Commission who adopted the "Copenhagen Declaration" meant to enhance cooperation in European vocational education and training. The goals of the Copenhagen process are, by means of increasing cooperation, to improve the quality of vocational education, to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and to improve the mobility of those in and graduated from vocational education. One of the eight points emphasized by the Copenhagen Declaration was "recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning".
These two notions seem to be very close. The European Centre for Development of Vocational training issues (Cedefop) gave precious definitions for those two notions. "Informal learning" results from "{...} *daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional or non-intentional (or incidental/random)* {...}." This last characteristic is the main difference with "non-formal learning" which is "{...} *embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element (something described as semi-structured learning). It is intentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning does not lead to certification* {...}" (1)*.

* The numbers refer to the references at the end of this chapter

In this perspective, volunteering belongs to both non-formal and informal learning. Voluntary experience has already been recognised as a main key issue in the Copenhagen process. In Helsinki, in December 2006, the Finnish presidency organised an informal Ministerial Meeting as a follow-up of the process started in 2002 during the Danish presidency. This meeting evaluated the implementation and reviewed the priorities and strategies for European cooperation in Vocational and Education Training (VET).
A former Leonardo da Vinci project (2000-2006) initiated by the Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (Iriv, France) was rewarded on this occasion as one of the ten best European pilot projects among 157 from 27 countries for its contribution to the Copenhagen process for recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The main goal of the French project was to propose a portfolio and a guide to assess voluntary experience (AVE) in a professional perspective (2).

The main perspective both for VPL2 and AVE projects are to enhance Vocational and Education Training (VET) practices and to strengthen European trans-national co-operation in order to implement the "Education and Training 2010" programme and contribute to the achievement of the goals stated by the European Council held in Lisbon in 2000 according to which "{...} *the Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion* {...}" (3).

Volunteering, a key issue in the lifelong learning process

Cedefop has given a precise definition for lifelong learning: "{...} *all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective* {...}" (1).
A very important issue in the lifelong learning process is the acquisition of competencies. In a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of December 2006, on key competencies for lifelong learning, it is stated that "{...} *key competencies in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation* {...}" (4).
Because they should be acquired by everyone, the recommendation proposes a reference tool for the Member States to ensure that these key competencies are fully integrated into their strategies and infrastructures, particularly in the context of lifelong learning. The acquisition of key competencies "{...} *fits in with the principles of equality and access for all. This reference framework also applies in particular to disadvantaged groups whose educational potential requires support. Examples of such groups include people with low basic*

skills, early school leavers, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities or migrants, etc. {...}" (4).

Both projects VPL2 and AVE have contributed to propose a method (analysis grid for VPL, portfolio for AVE) to value or assess a voluntary experience and enhance this specific way of acquiring key competencies.
VPL stands for Valuation of Prior Learning. It aims at recognition, accreditation/validation and further development of what an individual has learned in every possible learning environment: formal environments such as school and non-formal or informal environments such as the workplace, at home or in associations. AVE means Assessing Voluntary Experience in a professional perspective. It aims at identifying, evaluating and assessing skills and competencies acquired through volunteering as informal learning for a professional purpose.

The VPL2 project is broader in its perspectives as all the fields of individuals' activities are included (personal, professional, social) as are all the economic sectors (public, private, non profit). The AVE project is focussed on the skills and competencies acquired in the voluntary sector (non profit sector) in the framework of the individuals' social activities. Lifelong learning is both a personal and institutional process. Without the help of official bodies, skills and competencies acquired in non classical areas wouldn't be valued on the labour market. VPL2 should "{...} *enforce the empowerment of individuals and organisations in Europe's knowledge-society as well as making the learning system itself more demand-driven and customer-oriented* {...}". In the AVE project, professionals from voluntary associations, public authorities and a national agency for employment have experimented with variations to the portfolio.

The institutional context is an important issue. In France, a law was adopted in January 2002, called the "social modernisation act". It is a pionneering piece of legislation in the context of assessing formal and informal learning. It states that part or the totality of a diploma or certification could be obtained through "valuing prior learning". It clearly mentions "paid staff activity", "non-paid activity", and "voluntary activity". The main condition is to justify any claim for certification by three years of activity linked to the field of the diploma or certification asked for. This is an active and quite demanding process but it has opened doors to many people without a diploma to value their professional experience.
As focussed by Anne-Marie Charraud in the first VPL project "{...}*The law of January 2002 has had significant impact on the world of vocational training. Best known for its amendment of the VAE tool called Validation des acquis professionnels (Validation of Vocational Achievement) in 1992, it has allowed genuine progress in the principle of "lifelong learning". By focussing on "certification" and no longer on training, the emphasis is*

now for young people and adults to demonstrate their achievements and qualifications after experience as well as training {...}" (5).

Both projects are labour market oriented: VPL2 speaks about "employability", AVE is intended to align a voluntary activity with a similar professional activity, it can be direct (employment) or more indirect (employability). In this perspective, the main goal of integrating the non profit sector in the VPL process is to recognise volunteering as a key issue in lifelong learning: a voluntary experience may help individuals to value skills and competencies outside of the usual places (school and workplace).
Volunteering contributes a great deal to the building of the so-called society of competence in three different ways: on the labour market, in social cohesion, for active citizenship.

Presenting the AVE project

Assessing Voluntary Experiences (AVE) in a professional perspective
Pilot Project Leonardo da Vinci (2003-2006), with the support of the Regional Council in Champagne Ardenne (France)
Countries : France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom

Two conditions to enter the AVE process:
– Justifying a representative voluntary experience
– Willing to re-engage with the labour market

Public focussed:
– Young people with no professional experience
– People kept away from the labour market
– Long-term unemployed people

Aim:
identifying, evaluating and validating skills and qualifications acquired through volunteering as an informal learning for a professional purpose.

Steps:
– a statement of the recognition of voluntary work in each of the 7 countries and the kind of training proposed for volunteers and the qualifications required
– consultation among associations to evaluate the needs for assessing voluntary experience
– experimentation of national portfolios with the following characteristics : training, missions, skills and competencies, links with the labour market

– the building of a common portfolio
– a website : www.eEuropeassociations.net

A portfolio for the volunteers with the following rubrics:
1 Telling the volunteer's biography
2 Reminding of the training followed during his/her voluntary work
3 Describing the missions fulfilled by the volunteer
4 Identifying his/her own competencies (mind-map)
5 Developed competencies
6 Building an action plan
7 Making a synthesis of the portfolio
8 Proposing a visiting card for employers
9 Appendices : European CV, certification of the association, visiting card of the association

A guide for the coach:
10 The context : a European project
11 The steps of the AVE project : four
12 A tool : the portfolio
13 The aims of the portfolio : assessing an experience
14 A method : the auto-evaluation of the volunteer and/or a need for coaching
15 The framework for coaching: the work shop
16 The steps for the coaching

Source : Iriv and alii, Assessing voluntary experience in a professional perspective, Leonardo da Vinci project, 2003-2006.

Volunteering and the labour market

First of all, it is important to remember the definition of volunteering. Generally five dimensions are referred to in definitions (6):
a The activity should be undertaken without coercion(free choice);
b It is unpaid work, unremunerated (without monetary compensation);
c It serves a common purpose;
d It must not be only for the benefit of the individual or his or her family;
e It is usually in associations or non-profit organisations but it can also take place in an informal framework.

When thinking about volunteering, it is important to look at the relationship between volunteering and paid work in three perspectives: effects of changes in work on volunteering, differences and similarities between volunteering and paid work, the relationship between paid work and volunteering on a political level.

The profile of conventional work has been subject to many changes. Stable full-time wage employment is decreasing. The trend is towards more flexible forms of work, such as self-employment or traditional 'atypical' work (short-term jobs, jobs with just a few hours a week etc.). Also working times are decreasing (even though the last legislations in Europe seem to have stopped this trend) as well as becoming more flexible. In a positive approach, this means that volunteering is becoming more relevant as a "building block" in a flexible work situation. On the other hand, it also means that people do not have a stable income and thus are forced to focus on different types of paid work rather than volunteering.

Negative aspects prescribed to the relationship between volunteering and work include fears that – especially in social services – volunteers should act as a 'job killers'. Sometimes, boundaries between volunteering and precarious, low paid jobs, are not so clear. Low paid jobs could be "disguised" as volunteering. The difficulty of identifying the differences between volunteering and precarious jobs is connected with how much payments linked to volunteering (such as reimbursement of costs) are accepted and normal in the respective countries. There is also the fear that promoting volunteering might lead to pushing women out of paid work and thus out of the labour market.

There is little empirical evidence proving the 'job killer' theory. On the contrary, the quantitative impact of being a bridge between non-work and paid work has been shown especially in the social, environment or cultural fields. Volunteers have played a major role in identifying needs and creating paid jobs, for instance in France, specific jobs were created between 1997 and 2002, (the so-called "emplois-jeunes" promoted under Lionel Jospin's socialist government). Since 2002, some initiatives have been promoted to create jobs in the social economy, most of the time with public support. Volunteers have been pioneers in finding new areas to create new kinds of jobs (7).

One major controversial topic persists, that is the relationship between unemployment and volunteering. A great deal of hope is being projected onto volunteering as a way of occupying, but also qualifying unemployed people. There is empirical evidence that unemployed people tend to volunteer less than those employed and that at least currently – in quantitative terms – volunteering contributes little to improving the dilemma of unemployment. Also, programmes prescribing social or environmental work to the long-term unemployed, such as 'New Deal' in the United Kingdom and 'Integra' in Austria (6) are frequently mixed-up with those offering incentives to the unemployed to volunteer. Drawing clear distinctions between these two fields is very important with respect to the centrality of free-choice in the definition of volunteering. Volunteering shouldn't be considered as compulsory social work. Such an initiative has been clearly denounced for instance in France, in the nineties, when the executive manager of the National agency for unemployment (ANPE) suggested that unemployed people should dedicate part of their

time to volunteering. A social counsellor of president Jacques Chirac strongly reacted, at the time, against this surprising proposal.

Positive facets attributed to volunteering are the possibility to act as a bridge to a paid job for women, people who are unemployed or other disadvantaged groups on the labour market as a field of formal and informal learning. From a qualitative, individual perspective, being involved as a volunteer can help unemployed people gain competencies, contacts and thus can be a stepping stone towards paid employment. Not only do many European countries lack incentives for unemployed people to volunteer, they could also provide barriers for this kind of initiative. These countries either have laws prohibiting people receiving unemployment benefits from volunteering and/or unclear or wrong information is provided by employment offices. The idea is that volunteering shouldn't prevent unemployed people from looking for job opportunities. So it is not a total prohibition. On the contrary, many national agencies for employment have insisted on the positive impact of volunteering on unemployed people, to meet people, to build networks, to experience new skills or better understand new fields of activity.

In the context of the VPL2 project, some examples, in the French context, have focussed on this last point. A regional project has been developed in Ile de France, between 2003 and 2006, called "Assessing voluntary experience in Aria", an association defending soldiers' families' interests. Funded by the Social Action Department of the French Ministry for Defence and the European Social Fund, this project aimed at accompanying unemployed women, soldiers' wives, faced with the mobility of their husbands (8).

The average profile of these women was 50 year old, with three children (the children were deemed to be old enough to take care of themselves). Most of these women have had only voluntary experience. The first year was dedicated to identifying the skills and competencies they could really use on the labour market. They had to be reminded of the relevance of their voluntary activity, then to build up their curriculum vitae on this basis. This team-work has been quite useful in listing their specific competencies as the women's initial attitude was to deny any kind of skills developed as a result of their volunteering. The second year was intended to confront the labour market and to meet human resources professionals to create an awareness of the reality of the labour market. A guide to interview skills was introduced. The curriculum vitae were also improved on the basis of the job opportunities they could find. In small groups, they could exchange their different professional experiences. The third year was concerned with using the portfolio as a tool or method of coping with the issue of mobility with regard to seeking employment. A new association, mostly composed of women, joined Aria's team. The portfolio was enhanced by integrating all the different aspects of the process: characterising one's own voluntary experience, expressing the missions/activities fulfilled, identifying the skills and

competencies, making a link with the labour market (direct access, proposed training, a classical VAE with a certification at the end).

The results of this three year project have been quite fruitful. Twenty volunteers started the project in 2003; twelve of them finished in 2006; seven volunteers found a job between 2004 and 2007. Two of the volunteers (the youngest) passed an exam to enter the public administration (Ministry of Defence to be a secretary, Ministry of Education to become a teacher), two were hired in private schools to look after pupils or foreign students, two are now employed by a local authority (to deal with an art workshop) and a University (as a secretary), the treasurer of the association found a job as an accountant in a religious organisation. The list is not complete as the other volunteers are still seeking a job. All the volunteers have commented on the very positive impact of the project on their self-confidence and their self-esteem. The years spent on voluntary experience suddenly appeared in a professional and positive perspective.

From the perspective of the Ministry of Defence, thoroughly involved in the social and economic welfare of soldiers' families, the project was also a very good one. The project coincided with the creation of an employment service among the human resources department (the "Cellule d'accompagnement des conjoints-CAEC"). Many studies have been completed these past ten years on the incomes of soldiers' families. Most of them, even with higher earnings, couldn't survive on only one income. The traditional profile of soldiers' wives is no longer that of a woman staying at home to raise her numerous children. But for those of fifty years who married young and wouldn't have any professional experience, assessing prior learning and especially voluntary experience should provide a very useful opportunity.
This French case is highly representative of the VPL process. It is both a main interest for the individuals (the volunteers) and the Institutions (Association and Ministry) to value prior learning: it is a way to promote employment and also to value human resources.

Volunteering, social cohesion and VPL

The context in which skills and competencies are acquired through voluntary experience is also very important to understand. Some notions need to be precise in this perspective. Volunteering is a key factor in debates on social cohesion, democracy and civil society. The guiding principle of civil society is volunteerism, while associations are its dominant collective actors. It is seen as a further model of social order next to the community, market and state. The prerequisite for taking part in civil society is commitment i.e. the willingness to bind oneself to a common course and to take responsibilities (Dekker /Van den Broek, 1998) (9).

Distinctive traits of civil society are 'social capital' and public discourse. Social capital refers to '*features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*' (Putnam, 1995) (10). Public discourse is the ability of a society to articulate collective values, to reflect upon social problems and to develop political goals (Wuthnow, 1991) (11). The increasing interest in volunteering and voluntary organizations is closely connected to the expectation of bridging the gap between the citizen and the state.

In traditional economic theories, whether you choose a liberal or Marxist point of view, the focus is on the State or the Market: the non profit sector is forgotten. Besides, a lot of economic, social or political activities are realised outside the public or private sectors (7).

The non-profit sector or third sector has been developed because of a failure of the State and the Market. Needs were expressed by some groups of the population and no solutions or offers were proposed by public authorities or commercial structures. The main reason is that the population in need can't express clearly its demand towards the public sector and the private sector doesn't see, in the beginning, the interest, in commercial terms, of such a population.
The main characteristic of the third sector is to depend on individual initiatives, most of the time through associations or NGOs, on a voluntary basis. Volunteers accept freely to dedicate their time to defend a cause or/and to be involved in a specific action. To understand the voluntary sector, it is necessary to forget the traditional paradigm of selfishness in the economy which can be expressed by: any individual wants to maximise its own utility with a defined budget. The new paradigm is altruism: you are looking out for the welfare and wellbeing of others.

On the associations' side, there are two ways to justify the legitimacy of the third sector. They are the result of the social evolution, an expression of the civil society: an original way to solve social problems different from the public way and the private way. They can also be analysed as the extension of institutional powers such as Church, State and Local Authorities: in this sense, the associative vitality is part of a strategy of social control. In both circumstances, the non-profit sector or Third sector personified by voluntary associations is the expression of solidarity on a local and human level. Its goal is not material but immaterial. Its targets are populations in need because of sickness, difficult social background …

On the volunteers' side, they are the touchstone in the organisations of the third sector; there is no material compensation for their work: they are not paid staff. But there is an immaterial reward; this is the Latin "*do ut des*" motto: I give to make you (or someone else) give. So this is not pure altruism but quasi-altruism.

British researcher David A. Kennett (1981), proposed six different types of quasi-altruism that correspond to immaterial goals (12):

- Quasi-altruism with intangible compensation: you give your time to obtain respect from the person who benefits from your gift or from people who witness the gift;
- Quasi-altruism in the games theory perspective: you give to impress a third person or to make things be positive for you in the future,
- Quasi-altruism in the socio-biology context: you give because your parents or your family have shown you the way, you have received some kind of "altruistic gene" or biological predisposition,
- Quasi-altruism and the Rotten Kid Theory: in a group, there is a social income which is bigger than all the incomes gathered, if you want to benefit from this synergy you'd better act as a volunteer,
- Quasi-altruism and social pressure: to avoid social costs and psychological guilt, you prefer being a volunteer,
- Quasi-altruism and sponsorship: you give to promote a positive image of yourself and so gain a complementary profit in the near future (in your profession, social life).

Most of the time, motivations of volunteers are mixed and subconscious. The main reasons for volunteering given by volunteers themselves are: willing to defend a cause; willing to usefully invest their free time; meeting people you wouldn't have the opportunity to meet elsewhere; acquiring or developing skills and competencies; opening new horizons. The specificity of the non-profit sector and the motivations of the volunteers play a major role in the VPL context. Valuing prior learning is a voluntary process. What should be the use for individuals or institutions to develop such a process? There could be a major obstacle to VPL due to the characteristics of the non-profit sector: the suspicion of unprofessional, amateur activity. There are so many prejudices towards non profit organisations. The third sector shouldn't be seen as a negative choice beside private sector (firms run by profit in a cost-effective manner) and public sector (public authorities serving the common purpose). Having a better knowledge of voluntary associations is meaningful in this situation. Knowing the reasons why individuals are volunteering is vital to better identify the meaning of their activity and the context in which it has been developed.

Volunteering and active citizenship in a VPL perspective

Skills and competencies acquired through volunteering have other common attributes. Some of them are personal, others are collective. Being a volunteer means defending a cause and so being an active citizen. Volunteering is a key issue in many fields of social activity as it is the touchstone of associations that have developed in all the European countries during the past thirty years. The International Year for Volunteering celebrated

in 2001, by the United Nations, has enhanced the role and importance of volunteering in so many countries in the world (13).

Thanks to the involvement of millions of people in associations, foundations, mutual societies and social cooperatives, volunteering has become a social phenomenon. It is no longer an activity devoted to a happy few, the so-called "Leisure Class" (14). It is an inherent part of ethics.
Being ethical means "*being honest and truthful, responsible and accountable, fair and equitable, respectful and mindful, compassionate and caring*" (15). Confronted with environmental collapse, economic disparities, belligerent militarism, racial tensions, gender biases and religious hatreds, many citizens' groups put forward education as the solution to solve or at least understand these global issues. Education has a double meaning: education in mind (literacy and numeracy) and in the heart (character, goodness, civility and values).

What could be the meaning of ethics as far as volunteering is concerned? It is one of the main aspects of ethics and the best way to promote innovation and co-operation in many fields of social activities. In many publications of the European Commission, one of the main concerns is to "*raise awareness of the positive contribution made by voluntary work to informal education, particularly for young people*". Especially for youth, a voluntary activity can enhance teamwork, participation, solidarity, tolerance and mutual understanding in a multicultural environment. This is very close to the definition of ethics we have given *supra*.

Volunteering gives a moral dimension. The main motivation is not profitability but common purpose. Volunteering proposes a new or innovative way to link with education.
Voluntary work allows volunteers to develop formal and non-formal skills and qualifications, to improve specific qualities (mutual aid, altruism, cooperative spirit).
Volunteering offers opportunities to take on stimulating work, to develop skills, to explore different careers and to get work experience. Being involved in voluntary experiences enriches one's background, separate from previous education.
Voluntary work has proved its impact on formal education: volunteers may improve theoretical knowledge acquired at school or acquire new skills or qualifications such as technical skills. Volunteering has also proved its impact on non-formal education: through a voluntary work, volunteers develop informal knowledge such as teamwork, participation, citizenship, solidarity, mutual understanding but also, on a personal level, self-esteem and self-confidence.
Volunteering is often seen as a negative choice and not as a positive one. It seems to be developed just for reasons of cost saving: most voluntary associations appear to rely on voluntary work only because they couldn't afford to have paid staff. This approach is quite restrictive and is also a matter of ethics.

Assessing voluntary work should be an essential issue for associations as they can't do without volunteers to run their activities. Many volunteers in Europe could be more involved in associations if their voluntary work were more recognized and could be used outside the association (for instance in their Education Curriculum). The main benefit of assessing volunteering from a professional perspective would be to give associations a chance to find more volunteers (especially among young people) and for volunteers to build a bridge between voluntary work and education.
Assessing volunteering should be a key issue to enhance innovation in many fields of social and human activities. Innovation is quite obvious. Volunteering is a way to enrich the associations' human resources. Cooperation is also beneficial as any method or tool proposed in this field would require close co-operation between volunteers, associations, public authorities (on national and local levels) and the private sector (vocational training bodies but also people in charge of human resources on the labour market). The main purpose is to assess voluntary experiences acquired in associations in a professional perspective, that is to say on the labour market, in the non-profit sector but also in the public and private sectors.
Volunteers are not second-class citizens. Volunteering is an opportunity for associations. Assessing voluntary experiences in a professional perspective could be a way to bridge the gap between voluntary work and employment, taking into account management and ethics.

The questions raised by such a process, assessing voluntary experiences, are numerous: how far can we go in official recognition, accepted both by public authorities and the private sector? Who will be responsible for legitimising such an assessment? Who will finance the training of the assessors? Could it be a danger for associations as volunteers could be more motivated by personal interests and no longer by altruistic reasons? Who will be the beneficiaries: associations, volunteers, society at large?

This is also part of the VPL project to raise these kinds of questions to go further into the implementation of the process, and its impact for lifelong learning. The first VPL project has already highlighted different learning cultures, approaches and quality processes. Thanks to the numerous examples of good practice in the voluntary sector proposed in the VPL2 project, we can have a better idea of the situation. Apart from the United Kingdom, thanks to the 2002 law of social modernisation, France seems to have been a pioneer in valuing prior learning, especially in volunteering.

Managing European diversity, the limits and perspectives of VPL

VPL strategies are strongly based on national learning systems. One last big issue of VPL is to focus on the national and educational backgrounds of European countries. The European Union has been composed of 27 countries since the 1st of January 2007. There are not 27 different learning cultures but there is a lot of diversity from one country to another, especially in the field of valuing prior learning. The learning points would consist of seven criteria: approach (tradition), law and regulations (texts), validity and independent assessment (control), form of recognition at national level (practice), transparency and civil effect (impact), accessibility (public), responsibility and accountability (procedure) (5).

Jens Bjørnåvold (16) has proposed a cluster model used to describe these various learning cultures. The first VPL project identified six main learning cultures: the dual system (Austria, Germany and Switzerland) based on work experience; the Mediterranean approach (Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal) with a strong Academic education and a weaker tradition of vocational education; the Northern European model (Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden) with a strong and common tradition in education and training; the Anglo-Saxon approach (Great Britain and Ireland) with the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), the "most and explicit example of a system for vocational education" based on competencies, achievements and outputs; the mix model (Netherlands, Belgium and France) where certification and formal diplomas are highly regarded and the Eastern-Europe approach (Bulgaria).

In this second VPL2 project eleven countries are concerned with seven different learning cultures: Atlantic (United Kingdom and Ireland), East-European (Czech Republic, Lithuania), dual (Germany, Switzerland), Low Countries (The Netherlands), French (France, Switzerland), North European (Norway) and Mediterranean (Cyprus, Italy). The different cases proposed and described by the different partners focussed on the fact that despite cultural differences and institutional contexts, valuing prior learning has raised the same kinds of questions whatever the country.

In the AVE project (17), seven countries were concerned with five main models concerning volunteering: the Anglo-Saxon model (United Kingdom) with a strong and ancient tradition in valuing voluntary work, the Medium-model (France and Austria) with some initiatives taken in the field of assessing voluntary experiences (regional portfolios, a law for France since 2000 in the Youth and sports field allowing a certification on the basis of a voluntary experience), the Basic model (Germany and Italy) with no official recognition yet for voluntary experience but some interest in this field (a regional competence of the local authorities) and the Eastern-Europe model (Poland and Hungary) with a recent revival in the context of volunteering which has become an issue on the political agenda.

The main barriers faced by the assessment of voluntary experience come initially from the volunteers themselves who are reluctant to speak the language of skills and competencies, believing these concepts to be too professional for them, in the beginning. They need time to accept these ideas. For certain associations, the opportunity to bridge the gap between employment and volunteering is also seen as a betrayal; they don't feel competent in human resources. They also need time to see the positive impact of such a process for their voluntary human resources. The third main actors are the professionals of the labour market: a voluntary experience is not yet considered as equivalent to a professional one but things should change thanks to the opportunities offered by the national legislation or the examples of good practices in other countries. The last and main actors to be convinced of the issue of the VPL or AVE processes are the employers: they need to enlighten their employees to the possibilities of a mechanism that links all the skills and competencies that they have wherever they have been acquired (school, work, voluntary experience, family…) with their current responsibilities.

What are the main barriers to valuing prior learning? The lack of information could certainly be an obstacle. How many European citizens are aware of this opportunity? In France, we have seen a huge increase in the demand for "VAE" since 2002, which is a very good point. More and more counsellors in local agencies for employment are trained to answer the needs and propose training and/or mentoring for people interested. Another positive point is the more and more numerous projects proposed in the context of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, including projects for assessing non-formal and informal learning. Moreover, with the last generation of projects (2007-2013), transfers of innovation are promoted: the examples of best practice in Europe, in the VPL field, should be very welcome.

The lack of time and motivation could be a second main obstacle. The use of identifying one's own skills and competencies is professionally oriented. Candidates involved in a VPL process are waiting for concrete results in their professional career: in terms of more responsibilities, or in terms of money (both usually go together). The risk is that VPL would open doors and create hopes which are not fulfilled in the short term. But in times of more flexible work, when any individual should have three or more different careers in his/her working life, valuing prior learning is a very good process to anticipate the future needs of the labour market. It shouldn't be considered only in a short-term perspective.

A final barrier for Valuing Prior Learning should come from the employers' side. Are they ready to accept that their employees follow this process? In France, the famous "Bilan de competencies" (Competence sheets) have suffered from a very bad image because most of the time they were proposed to employees while they were leaving the firm. A positive attitude of firms towards valuing prior learning could be seen with suspicion: they might

project that their employees valued new skills and competencies on the condition that they would leave the firm. On the other hand, valuing its human resources is a very good point in times of strong competition, especially in Europe. Competence makes the difference.

Conclusion

Assessing a voluntary experience or valuing prior learning in a more general context, have become key issues in the past ten years in Europe. Thanks to the Leonardo da Vinci programme (launched in 1998), many European projects have been initiated in this field (19) and should be integrated in the day-to-day life of European citizens, linking policy to practice thus making the goals set out in Copenhagen, in 2000, come true.
This is the main purpose of any European project to play a role of pioneer but also to answer the social needs of Europeans whatever the national diversity, the different learning cultures, the specific approach in valuing prior learning.
The VPL2 project is unusual in proposing a multi-cultural approach (11 countries), a trans-sectoral one (non profit, for profit and voluntary sectors) and a detailed analysis grid to better understand and manage diversity.
Valuing prior learning should play a major role in building the society of competence, the challenging European economy and society of the 21st Century, the "*most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy*" envisioned by the Copenhagen process.
Lifelong learning has been integrated into the policy of all the European countries. It is not a challenge for tomorrow, it is today's reality for many European citizens.

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THE BENCHMARK TOOL AS TESTING INSTRUMENT WITHIN A FRAME OF VALUATION AND VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

10

Towards a sustainable Competence Culture to achieve Lifelong Learning

ANITA CALONDER GERSTER & KEES SCHUUR

The frame – creating a charter

Three organisations joint in developing and supporting further a charter building a frame to valuation and validation of prior learning:
Association CH-Q, Switzerland (Anita E. Calonder Gerster)
European Foundation Valuation of Prior Learning Foundation, the Netherlands (Kees Schuur)
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority QCA, England (Tom Leney)

The idea behind the charter

The driving concept behind developing a 'Competence Culture' is the recognition that effective valuation arrangements to support individuals in becoming lifelong learners are a need. The empowerment of individuals in the face of an increasing pace of change in social and economic systems remains a principal focus of these arrangements. Giving learning processes and its outcome a value is – in this context – summarized by the designation "Valuation of prior learning" (VPL[40]).
The three organisations have developed a Charter for a "Sustainable Competence Culture to achieve Lifelong Learning". This charter is added as appendix 1.

The use of the notion of 'competence' in the Charter is not reductionist or narrow. Whilst it acknowledges that it is important to link personal achievements to qualifications and to processes of formal recognition, the arrangements being developed emphasize that this is the individual's competence, that they should be helped to reflect and recognize it, and that also other valuation systems like increased self-awareness of competence – and how it has been acquired –, social valuation and non- and informal valuation systems, can help significantly with self-development and progression.
The individual lies at the heart of the process – but the idea of 'culture' suggests that a supportive framework of recognition arrangements can be constructed and maintained by specific social structures and by educationalists, trainers, guidance professionals and others supporting individual learners. This culture should be based on shared values, common practices and commitment to quality standards, although it also can be based on continuously renegotiated values. The Charter is one way in which such a culture can be created, sustained and grown.

[40] VPL = Valuation of Prior Learning, where valuation covers each form of giving in a formal, non-formal or informal way value, to prior learning. The range for valuation is from accreditation according to a national qualification system to saying „thank you".

Control in such a culture is collective – we believe that systems are required, and that systems have shared values and agreed practices. Systems should have stability but also be characterized by openness and accountability. The people for whom the systems are developed should have a principal input to the design, management and modification of the arrangements. The Charter is a means of securing this principal input within the practical actions and governing policies, which make up the arrangements.

The bottom-up orientation of the Charter is relatively novel in arrangements for valuation of prior learning and achievement. Without a commitment to quality standards, common agreed approaches and common values, there is the risk that the explicit and implicit purposes of arrangements will drift away from a focus on the individual. Many recognition processes have become mechanistic and burdensome to those involved in them; it is essential that new arrangements do not decay in this way. The Charter is an essential means of preserving individually focussed processes and preventing drift in policy and practices, but still offers flexibility and possibilities to change.

Objective (mission)

The Charter intends to give a major contribution to the setting up of a society that empowers individuals

- To act in a autonomous way (individual success);
- To participate and integrate in modern society and in the labour market (success for society).

The efforts are concentrating on building a sustainable Competence Culture within an active, permanent and wide dissemination of Lifelong Learning.

Goals

The goals set in the Charter (see appendix 1) are summarised below.

A Defining the principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and informal learning.
   1 Empowering individuals to act autonomously; giving them support to cohere to a greater whole (cultural literacy)
   2 Linking different areas of life; combining education and labour market; connecting bottom-up and top-down strategies (holistic approach)
   3 Assuring transparency of roles of the stakeholders; paying attention to bottom-up and top-down interfaces; assuring personality- and data protection; telling apart guidance processes from validation procedures (shared responsibilities, power of control)

B Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality
   4 Establishing valuation processes enabling individuals to recognise their skills, to

manage their potential, to steer their career in order to enhance flexibility and mobility (personal development, integration in society)

5 Establishing validation procedures allowing individuals to submit conclusive evidence of their informal / nonformal learning in order to get formal recognition (summative and formative approaches)

C Setting up a frame of reference for the application

6 Adopting common standards and guiding principles as fundaments for an overarching system of recognition and validation; setting up structures which reflect the different levels of processes and procedures; defining quality criteria and establishing systems of quality-assurance for the application of procedures and processes (standards, structures, quality assurance)

Applying the charter – the benchmark

The questionnaire - benchmark tool

The questionnaire is an accompanying instrument to the Charter and serves as a benchmark tool by testing the VPL-system / -procedure. It conveys institutions, providers' insight in the principles essential for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal, non-formal and informal learning. It specifies the processes, procedures and supporting actions, which guarantee access and quality.

Lifelong learning is central to new thinking about education and training. It places strong emphasis on the individuals taking greater responsibility for their own personal and professional development. The bottom-up orientation of the Charter is an answer to this. It puts the learners and their interests in the centre of the system of valuation and validation of competencies (VPL-system). The questionnaire summarises the individual issues at stake: raising the awareness about what the individuals have achieved in all areas of their lives; the way they learn and how they might undertake further development to fulfil their aspirations. Over and above that the questionnaire expresses the values which guide and structure the relevant approaches and which should lies at the heart of programmes helping to achieve 'lifelong learning'.
The questionnaire is a self-evaluation tool with a focus on outcome statements. It indicates the added value for the individual and – at the same time – for the institution or the provider involved. It suggests the kind of evidence relevant to estimate the extent of the ‚good practice' and the level of achievement that should be met.

In the actual questionnaire it is possible to give a value to each item. The values which can be given are: 0 – Not at all; 1 – Slightly; 2 – Fairly; 3 – Reasonably; 4 – Very often; 5 – Completely.

First of all it will give yourself an indication to what extend you comply with the statements in the Charter. And there can be very valid reasons for your VPL-activity (at that moment) not complying with one or more of these statements. It is important hat those choices and the why are clear to all involved (transparency).
A second use of the benchmark tool is to ask the other actors / stakeholders in your VPL-activity also to fill in the questionnaire. The points, which are seen the same by all, are the strong points where mutual trust can be further build upon and a real VPL-community of practice can develop. Point where the actors / stakeholders have a different point of view are points for discussion and can be used to give transparency in these differences and either be used to make this clear to all or to work on overcoming these differences.

It has been demonstrated, as the examples on the next pages will show, that more actions are needed to comply with the Charter:
- Accompanying structures have to be set up to make it possible for the individual to fully exploit the potential of VPL for himself or herself. All actors should be made aware about their role in this system.
- Governments, organisations and companies should change their mental model for financing from formal education and training towards alternative financing structures for awarding the (recognition of the) informal way of learning and its outcomes.
- More concrete examples of success stories and failures from a personal and organisational point of view should give more insight to a very abstract concept. This benchmark has been developed on base of the proposed European Charter for Sustainable Competence Culture to achieve Lifelong Learning.

Much attention is given to the valuation of informal learning, the most often used way of learning with adults and the formal and informal recognition of the outcome of this learning. The examples in the next chapter are just for clarification purpose and not meant as leading for the VPL-procedures.

Like VPL itself, this benchmark is continuously under development. Your suggestions are highly appreciated. Please send your constructive comments / ideas to Kees Schuur: schuur@ecommovation.nl. Also appraisals are most welcome, as it will show us that this instrument is useful. And above all, it is the best form of VPL: informal recognition by others.

The benchmark is divided in the following six sections:

I Defining the principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and informal learning.
   1 Cultural literacy
   2 Holistic approach
   3 Shared responsibilities, power of control

II Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality
   4 Personal development, integration in society Summative and formative approaches
   5 Setting up a frame of reference for the application
   6 Standards, structures, quality assurance

These sections will be discussed in the following chapter.

1 Individual, cultural literacy

DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS, ACTIONS WHICH...

Being able to act autonomously

1.a ...ENCOURAGE SELF-AWARNESS
...STRENGTHEN SELF-IDENTITY
Do the individuals get a better understanding of themselves and their possibilities? (Consistency of self-identity)

1.b ...WIDEN SELF-RESPONSABILITY
Do the individuals get a higher competence of self-responsibility?
(Steering of own decision making)

Being able to cohere to a greater whole

1.c ...PROMOTE PROBLEM SOLVING
Does the VPL system provide relevant background information, which enables the individuals to deal with today's challenges? (Cultural literacy)

1.d ...ENHANCE WORKING WITH OTHERS
Does the VPL system provide conditions, which help the integration in society?

The use of the benchmark

A Principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and informal learning

The first part of the benchmark is focusing on the position of individual in the total VPL-process. Is the individual aware of his/her possibilities and is it consistent?
Does the individual has the power of control or is (s)he lead by the system?

Valuation starts with being aware of your own capacities and with self-recognition. This is crucial for the next steps in the VPL-procedure. Without the full understanding and commitment of the individual, the VPL-procedure will stay very clinical, a formal step-by-step procedure with only little psychological relevance for the individual.
It depends often on the policy of the company or the way of working of the HRM/HRD within the company

Many AP(E)L / RPL[41] programmes use VPL for summative results, so the focus on applying to the formal (accreditation) system and the requirements set by the system. Also the VPL-instruments used are focussing on this goal.
It is often very easy to tell somebody: „It is your responsibility". Instead of contributing to the development of the person it often makes people more depressed and unwilling to adapt, because they didn't get the power of control, the steering in their hands and with that there is limited ownership. More responsibility could lead to even more frustration.

Example(s)

As an example a company is given, where the personnel got the opportunity to go through a VPL-procedure, and got the responsibility to do so, while the goal of the organisation was that the employees should help in this way to increase the quality status of the company and less on the formative development of the individual employee.
A second example is on the many psychological and job-choice tests, which are used to create a picture of a person.This image is created by the interviewer or the computer programme with the test and is often far away from the soul, the mind and awareness of the person.

[41] AP(E)L = Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning
RPL = Recognition of Prior Learning

2 Holistic approach

DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES, PROCEDURES WHICH...

Combining the relevant elements

2.a	...INCLUDE ALL AREAS OF LIFE Does the VPL system link different areas of life / activity and does it recognize and valuate achievements from all of them?
2.b	...INTER-RELATE ALL SECTORS OF EDUCATION ...FACILITATE ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKET Does the VPL system build bridges between cultural, general and vocational education and to the labour market?
2.c	...RESPECT EVIDENCE OF ALL AREAS AND WAYS OF LEARNING Does the VPL system encourage equivalence of formal and non-/informal learning as well as developing equal opportunities?
2.d	...PROMOTE MODULAR LEARNING Does the VPL system promote permeability of education and training?
2.e	...FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS Does the VPL system connect bottom-up und top-down approaches?

The second part of the benchmark is questioning the holistic approach. Too often VPL-procedures are focussing on one part of life of the individual, which makes it less relevant for the individual, who only can experience the portfolio of his/her life as a whole. Also from the point of view of the stakeholders the VPL system should have bridges between their VPL-requirements, procedures, instruments and activities. A VPL-system should have no barriers or thresholds between the segments in society, branches, institutes, organisations and private life. For a person it should be logic steps between the different VPL-subsystems. As research has shown, 70 – 90% of what adults learn, they learn in an informal way. Often the outcome of this learning is more efficient and effective, because it took place in the context of the competencies itself and is often just in time, just in place, just enough, just right pace. The individual is self-directing (the receiving) of the learning experience. Also by giving the power of control -so not only the responsibility- to the individual, (s)he can take over activities, which are important for him/her. But at the same time, the organisation / society should also have the possibility of having the power of control to develop the competencies at organisational level. The places where they connect are the places where the competence culture will flourish.

Example(s):

In volunteer organisations special portfolios for describing and valuing volunteer experiences have been developed. The quality is high but it often only refers to the volunteer work and valuation takes places in volunteer qualification settings. An example is the list of volunteer competencies for which you can qualify. But it will be difficult for the volunteer to use this outside the volunteer sector.

An army had since long time their military education and training. The contract starts with a specific military training, followed by training for a specific job within the army. There is often no direct connection between the curriculum within the army and the curriculum of vocational education, although the jobs, or at least the competence profiles are related. True, some IT-systems can differ, administration procedures can differ, and therefore at micro level

differences can be found. In one of the armies a comparison has been made between a few of these jobs and for example it has shown that in the army training less attention is given to the subject English. On the other hand, military going abroad on international missions or just working for the air force or sailing around the world are most likely confronted more with English (in the context) than an average student will do in their study.
It will be relatively simple to identify what competencies they already have and to set special training programmes to fill the gap. This needs a holistic approach, recognises each other learning programmes, (informal) learning and the valuing of the total outcome of learning.

A Principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and I informal learning (continued)

3 Shared responsibilities EGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES AND POLICIES WHICH...

Including all actors on all levels

3.a	...CLARIFY TTHE ROLES OF THE PERSONS AND DECISIONMAKERS INVOLVED Are the roles of the stakeholders defined and transparent?
3.b	...SEPERATE BETWEEN THE TASKS OF GUIDING AND ASSESSING / VALIDATING Is there a better separation between guidance / coaching and procedures of assessments / qualifications?
3.c	...PROMOTE COMMON UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN BOTTOM-UP/TOP-DOWN EXPERTS Does the VPL system give special attention to interfaces (bottom-up und top-down)?
3.d	...ASSURE PROTECTION OF RELEVANT DATA Does the VPL system provide personality protection in relation with processes and instruments?
3.e	...INCLUDE ACCOMPANYING TOOLS Does the VPL system provide adequate application of special supporting tools?
3.f	...GRANT PROCESS ORIENTED INSTRUMENTS TO ASSURE SUSTAINABILITY Do these supporting instruments emphasize the various aspects of process orientation and sustainability?

The third part of the benchmark is about sharing responsibilities.
One of the first questions is the role of the stakeholders and the tasks they have. Often by following the process of the development and/or implementation of a VPL-procedure one can already identify which issues are at stake. Who has initiated the process? Was it the government and what is their vision behind it? Is it a school, and why do they want to make such an effort in having control over VPL-procedures? Or is a branch and what would they like to achieve with VPL? Or is it a company and what would they intend VPL to be used for?
And the individual? What role does (s)he play in this game? We give them the responsibility of their own development, but often we don't give them the power of control. How would a VPL-system / -procedure / -instruments would look like if you would give them to the individual and they will start to tell the other stakeholders what and how they have to do

and telling them that it is their responsibility to do according to what you have created as instrument?

Example(s):
During a training session 'managing competencies' someone was asking for whom it was they were doing all the work. They were ,selected as volunteers' to participate in the training and they saw it as a method by the employer for selecting the best. So what will be done with the information, which comes out of it? Who is the owner of the personal information? The company finds that this information should be stored in their HRM/HRD system in order to find the right person at the right place from a point of view of effectiveness and efficiency. The individual will in that case only show those parts, which (s)he thinks will be useful for their own career. Only when there is now and will be guaranteed for the future a respect, protection of the personal data, transparency of what will happen with the information and who will be able to access it, and thus a mutual trust, the individual will show their full competence.

Another example is the present situation of the educational system in a country with the stakeholders in it. Qualifying for a vocational level is often through authorised, controlled organisations, such as schools. VPL-centres are often connected to these organisations and there is a relation, as might be perceived by others, between what comes out of a VPL-procedure (for instance exemptions for education) and the role of training institutes.

Another example in this respect is where subsidies for training courses are based on the fact if the course fits in a national qualification system. If not, than there will be no subsidy given for the course. An effect is that several training courses, especially in rural areas, have been stopped. But with this also the learning place where informal learning was triggered and where other than job related competencies where developed, has disappeared and it offers serious risks to the survival of small communities.

In a research in three volunteer sectors it was found that many of the interviewed of the volunteer organisations at national level found it very useful to have a VPL-system in place and this would be beneficial for amongst others the professionalisation of the organisation and for the volunteer organisation. At local level this dropped to a much lower level and at individual level 31% was not interested in a VPL-procedure at all. The other 69% were 'considering' a VPL-action and of those who wanted a VPL-procedure most of them were young people who saw direct advantages for instance in exemption of education at school or specific trainings and people who were looking for another job.
It also showed that the percentage of 'considering' was in youth organisation much higher than in other volunteer organisations such as a call centre.
So the importance of VPL can differ per stakeholder.

B Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality

4 Personal development, career flexibility and mobility

DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETENCEORIENTED PROCESSES WHICH...

Developing manageable, affordable, accessible processes

4.a	...CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONFIDENCY ...CONTRIBUTE TO TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN ONES OWN LEARNING Do the processes raise the individual's awareness and understanding of their potential, strengthen their willingness to use it in a deliberate and realistic way and accept full personal responsibility for it?
4.b	...PROMOTE THE STEERING OF CAREER GOALS ON A LONGTERM BASIS Do the processes widen the individuals' abilities of managing their competencies in a sustainable way?
4.c	...PROMOTE APPROACHES TO OCCUPATIONAL GOALS WHICH MATCH OWN REALITY Do the processes empower the individuals to focus on competence-oriented solutions while planning their careers?
4.d	...IMPROVE PERSONALITY BUILDING AND PARTICIPATION IN A LEARNING SOCIETY Do the processes enable individuals to use the self-management of competencies in a profitable way for their personal development / integration in society?

The fourth part of the benchmark is looking at the perspective of specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality for the individual.
The SWOT analysis in the Leonardo project Managing Diversity of Lifelong Learning demonstrates the importance for the individual of VPL for their self-esteem, self-confidence.
It is only by this confidence and by understanding their potential that an individual can accept full responsibility and develop in a realistic way.
A second point is that knowing their potential they have to find a future for their competencies and a way to manage their competencies in a sustainable way. One VPL training and / or having a portfolio has no meaning if it the process does not sustain further utilisation of it.

Example(s):

In a discussion with a large organisation the persons responsible for training told that their training in career management should not be changed, because the course was always fully booked and the evaluation shows that the trainees appreciated the training very much.
The training itself consisted of different exercises like for instance the Johari window. There was little coherence between the practices and no direct relation to their portfolio. The concept of competence and the portfolio was only introduced in the last part of the training.
This training was held outside the building in a very nice conference setting and only a limited number of employees could participate. The employees felt special, and they appreciated it because they were selected for it (informal recognition) and maybe even more important, the training was held in a that nice conference centre... So what was appreciated? The training course or ....

B Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality (continued)

5 Procedures of recognition and validation
DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCEEDINGS WHICH...

Establishing competence oriented proceedings

5.a ...INCLUDE PERSONAL RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR PROVIDING EVIDENCE
Does the VPL system provide and present understandable and valid evidence of their achievements, skills and competencies?

5.b ...ENCOURAGE THE APPLICATION OF FOLDERS OF EVIDENCE
Does the VPL system improve the submitting of evidence in an appropriate form for formal national and international certification where this is available and appropriate for the individual?

5.c ...ACCEPT FOLDERS OF EVIDENCE FOR FORMATIVE/SUMMATIVE WAYS OF ACCREDITATION
Does the VPL system enable the individuals to make use of evidence for formative as well as for summative purposes?

The fifth part of the benchmark is about evaluation of a VPL-procedure. It means looking into the procedures and specific at the objective recognition of the evidence shown by the individual.
The first question it is asked if it is possible to present and provide understandable and valid evidence. This is the most difficult part, because when the evidence is created, it is often not known yet for what it will be used. For example, specific activities as volunteer can at a later stage be relevant evidence for the HRM department, or for an assessment in a branch, or to get an accreditation in the vocational education system, or just within the volunteer organisation. The way the evidence is presented and stored in the portfolio needs to be open enough to be recognised by all, but specific enough to get the highest effect in each of the specific situation. And still there are a lot of organisations / companies which still don't work with portfolios and/or competence profiles....
For a summative use it is required that the assessor easily can find the specific information in the portfolio to match a part of the competence profile. It is very difficult to transfer this directive information to a formative purpose, which focuses more on the personal development plan and with that on the short and long term action plan.

And each procedure cost money and effort. For many going through a VPL procedure is still too expensive and too time-consuming, as the direct benefits are to small or not seen yet.

Example(s):
There are many portfolio systems used in the European Union and at national, organisational and even company level (Europass, Kompetenzbilanz, as part of an eLearning system, by labour offices, as part of a HRM system like PeopleSoft, volunteer organisations, supporting organisations, etc.) and it looks if it is impossible to make one system, which fits all.

For a person this creates often a challenge, because leaving a school (portfolio for mostly summative use) and getting a job (portfolio for a more formative purpose and for HRM) means also migrating the data of your portfolio to the other system, often with loss of data (no fields available) or suddenly asking for more data per record, which is often difficult and requires again a huge effort of the person.

C Setting up a frame of reference for the application

6 Standards, structures, quality assurance
DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES, STRATEGIES WHICH...

Providing fundaments and conditions which genuinely respond to the needs of today's overall VPL-systems

6.a	...ASSURE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF ACCREDIATION AND INFORMAL VALUATION Does the VPL system provide understandable information about procedures of recognition, which encourages individuals to make use of it?
6.b	...RELATE TO VALUES Does the VPL system emphasize the meaning of values, adopting common standards and guiding principles as fundaments for an overarching system of recognition and validation?
6.c	...GRANT APPROPRIATE STRUCTURES Does the VPL system establish structures, which reflect the different levels of processes and procedures and the different roles and activities of the stakeholders involved?
6.d	...ASSURE A SYSTEM OF QUALITY CONTROL Does the VPL system define quality criteria and establish systems of quality-assurance for the application of procedures and processes?

The sixth part of the benchmark refers to the system, to the frame of reference for the VPL-application.
Standards, structures and quality assurance have evolved to how it is at present. This can differ per country, partly due to the historical development and the social / learning culture per country. For instance, most German speaking countries have a dual learning system. This system is very much branch oriented, and thus leaving little space up to now for interchange of competencies (profiles) between different branches. To start working in another branch requires often a new start in the learning process.
The rigid NVQ-system in the UK makes it more difficult for informal learning and informal recognition to be recognised by the standard.
It is also questioned if the proposed VPL-activity related to common standards and guiding principles. If that is not the case an exchange between the VPL-activities will be more difficult.
And also a distinction has to be made between the levels in the procedure and the phase of VPL the procedure is in (5 phase, 10 steps: awareness, identification of competencies, valuation, validation, empowerment; Duvekot ago. 2005)
This also means that the roles must be clear and what activity each person has in the VPL-procedure.

Example(s):
A lady who followed an outplacement procedure, wanted to become more aware of her competencies. She described her own competence biography and started to steer the direction she wanted to go and the next steps to be taken. The outplacement company had problems with this, because she was not following their procedure and told her to make choice between her own way and their way. She wanted to do both and used her knowledge in the outplacement procedure. Only it was difficult what are the quality criteria and in the outplacement procedure was no possibility of appeal, which could help finding solution to a mutual benefit.
Her action and taking over the power of control lead to a revision of her status. She could apply for a different job within the company.

Discussion and conclusions

The described benchmark tool is meant as an evaluation tool for a VPL-procedure / -instrument and is not meant as an assessment tool, because in each case the characteristics of the VPL-procedure / -instrument and the criteria can differ and there will always be more than one good solution in that specific situation at that specific time, with those specific actors and stakeholders.
The benchmark tool is meant to help self-evaluation, and by asking different involved people to fill in the questionnaire, it helps to find common ground, mutual trust and to see where opinions differ.

The benchmark tool is tested in the Leonardo project 'Managing Diversity' and proved to be a useful instrument in self-analysing the proposed VPL-procedure or instrument. The answers differed significantly. Specific questions like 2.a had answers from 0 (not including all areas of life, so very specific) to 5.(including all areas of life) and both valuations are legitimate in the respective contexts. But the result in both cases was to rethink the way of approach and in making more transparent why they had chosen to do so.

One of the outcomes was that there was little attention for the context in which the VPL-procedure takes place. One of the questions which could be added in the next version is how the context is influencing the VPL-procedure / – instrument.
It also helped reminding the persons involved that it is not about the VPL procedure / -instrument, but about the (use by) the individual and / or the organisation.

As a conclusion it can be stated that the small trial within the project "Managing Diversity" showed that answering the questions helped the persons to finding gaps in their proposed procedure / instrument, to clarify more clearly their procedure and that it didn't take much time.

The next step will be making the benchmark tool available on the website www.vpl4.eu, to be used anonymously, with a possibility of getting automatic feedback. It will be investigated if there is scope for creating communities of practice around specific development of VPL-procedures / - instruments.

The best finding of all was the enthusiasm and commitment of many people have in their work in and around the VPL-process. Informal recognition of the good work of each person and of many others working in this field shows the great potential of Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL).

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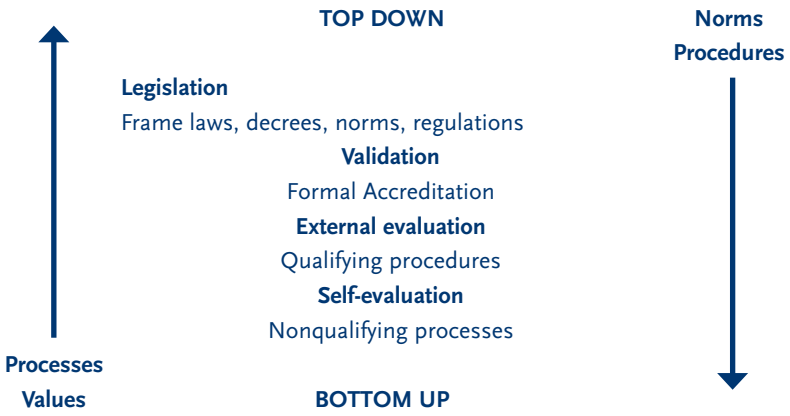
Appendix 1
National Systems of valuation and validation

1 Structures



2 Stakeholders - roles, responsibilities

TOP DOWN

Norms Legislation

Procedures Authorities, Executive bodies (conferences)

Validation / Certification
Bodies, responsible for quality assurance and control in respect of formal documents

External evaluation
Institutions / Companies responsible for qualifying and giving recognition

BOTTOM UP

Processes **Self-evaluation (auto evaluation)**

Values Institutions responsible for quality & control of self-evaluation processes

CHARTER
Sustainable Competence Culture to achieve Lifelong Learning

1. Mission

We want to make a major contribution to the setting up of a society that empowers individuals:
– To act in a autonomous way (individual success)
– To participate and integrate in modern society and in the labour market
We concentrate our efforts on building a sustainable Competence Culture within an active, permanent and wide dissemination of Lifelong Learning

2. Goals

A Defining the principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based formal and informal learning.

A.1 Individual, cultural literacy

Empowering individuals to act autonomously
– Enhancing their understanding of themselves and their possibilities (consistency / self-identity)
– Widening the competency of self-responsibility (steering own decision making)

Supporting individuals to coher to a greater whole
– Providing relevant background information which enables them to deal today's challenges (cultural literacy)
– Providing conditions which help the integration in society

A.2 Holistic approach

– Linking different areas of life / activity and recognizing, valueing achievements from all of them
– Building bridges between cultural, general and vocational education and to the labour market
– Encouraging equivalence of formal and non-/informal learning as well as developing equal opportunities
– Promoting permeability (modularisation)
– Connecting bottom-up und top-down approaches.

A.3 Shared resposibilities

– Transparency of the roles of the stakeholders
– Separation of guidance and procedures of qualifications
– Paying special attention to interfaces (bottom-up und top-down)

– Personality-/dataprotection in relation with processes and instruments
– Adequate application of special instruments supporting various aspects of process orientation and sustainability.

B Creating specific processes, procedures and supporting actions to guarantee access and quality .

B.1 Personal development, career flexibility and mobility

Establishing processes enabling individuals:
– to make them aware of their potential, to use it in a deliberate and realistic way and accept full personal responsibility for it to take charge of managing their own capabilities, competencies and qualifications in a sustainable way
– to focus on competence oriented solutions while planning their careers
– to use the self management of competencies in a profitable way for their personal development and integration in society
– Connecting bottom-up und top-down approaches

B.2 Procedures of recognition and validation

Establishing manageable, affordable and accessible procedures which enable individuals
– to provide and present understandable and valid evidence of their achievements, capabilities and competencies
– to submit evidence in an appropriate form for formal national and international certification where this is available and appropriate for the individual
– to use evidence for formative and summative purposes.

C Setting up a frame of reference for the application.

C.1 Standards, structures, quality assurance

– Providing understandable information about procedures of recognition which encourage individuals to make use of it
– Emphasising the meaning of values, adopting common standards and guiding principles as fundaments for an overarching system of recognition and validation
– Establishing structures which reflect the different levels of processes and procedures and the different roles and activities of the stakeholders involved
– Defining quality criteria and establishing systems of quality-assurance for the application of procedures and processes.

Appendix 2: The benchmark tool

A Defining the principles for an open and flexible system of competence-based learning

1	Individual, cultural literacy	DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES, ACTIONS WHICH...
	Being able to act autonomously	
1.a	Do the individuals get a better understanding of themselves and their possibilities (consistency of self-identity)?	...ENCOURAGE SELF-AWARNESS 0 1 2 3 4 5 ...STRENGTHEN SELF-IDENTITY 0 1 2 3 4 5
1.b	Do the individuals get a higher competence of self-responsibility (steering of own decision making)?	...WIDEN SELF-RESPONSABILITY 0 1 2 3 4 5
	Being able to cohere to a greater whole	
1.c	Does the VPL system provide relevant background information, which enables the individuals to deal with today's challenges (cultural literacy)?	...PROMOTE PROBELM SOLVING 0 1 2 3 4 5
1.d	Does the VPL system provide conditions, which help the integration in society?	...ENHANCE WORKING WITH OTHERS 0 1 2 3 4 5

2	Holistic approach	DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES, PROCEDURES WHICH...
	Combining the relevant elements	
2.a	Does the VPL system link different areas of life / activity and does it recognize and valuate achievements from all of them?	...INCLUDE ALL AREAS OF LIFE 0 1 2 3 4 5
2.b	Does the VPL system build bridges between cultural, general and vocational education and to the labour market?	...INTER-RELATE ALL SECTORS OF EDUCATION 0 1 2 3 4 5 ...FACILITATE ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKET 0 1 2 3 4 5
2.c	Does the VPL system encourage equivalence of formal and non-/informal learning as well as developing equal opportunities?	...RESPECT EVIDENCE OF ALL AREAS AND WAYS OF LEARNING 0 1 2 3 4 5

2.d	Does the VPL system promote permeability of education and training?	...PROMOTE MODULAR LEARNING 0 1 2 3 4 5
2.e	Does the VPL system connect bottom-up und top-down approaches?	...FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS 0 1 2 3 4 5

3	**Shared responsibilities**	**DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES AND POLICIES WHICH...**
	Including all actors on all levels	
3.a	Are the roles of the stakeholders defined and transparent?	...CLARIFY TTHE ROLES OF THE PERSONS AND DECISIONMAKERS INVOLVED 0 1 2 3 4 5
3.b	Is there a better separation between guidance / coaching and procedures of assessments / qualifications?	...SEPERATE BETWEEN THE TASKS OF GUIDING AND ASSESSING / VALIDATING 0 1 2 3 4 5
3.c	Does the VPL system give special attention to interfaces (bottom-up und top-down)?	...PROMOTE COMMON UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN BOTTOM-UP/TOP-DOWN EXPERTS 0 1 2 3 4 5
3.d	Does the VPL system provide personality protection in relation with processes and instruments?	...ASSURE PROTECTION OF RELEVANT DATA 0 1 2 3 4 5
3.e	Does the VPL system provide adequate application of special supporting tools?	...INCLUDE ACCOMPANYING TOOLS 0 1 2 3 4 5
3.f	Do these supporting instruments emphasize the various aspects of process orientation and sustainability?	...GRANT PROCESSORIENTED INSTRUMENTS TO ASSURE SUSTAINABILITY 0 1 2 3 4 5

B Creating specific processes, procedures and actions to guarantee access and quality

4	**Personal development, career flexibility and mobility**	**DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETENCEORIENTED PROCESSES WHICH...**
	Developing manageable, affordable, accessible processes	

4.a	Do the processes raise the individuals' awareness and understanding of their potential and strengthen their willingness to use it in a deliberate and realistic way and accept full personal responsibility for it?	...CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONFIDENCY 0 1 2 3 4 5 ...CONTIRBUTE TO TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN ONES OWN LEARNING 0 1 2 3 4 5
4.b	Do the processes widen the individuals' abilities of managing their competencies in a sustainable way?	...PROMOTE THE STEERING OF CAREER GOALS ON A LONGTERM BASIS 0 1 2 3 4 5
4.c	Do the processes empower the individuals to focus on competence-oriented solutions while planning their careers?	...PROMOTE APPROACHES TO OCCUPATIO- NAL GOALS WHICH MATCH OWN REALITY 0 1 2 3 4 5
4.d	Do the processes enable individuals to use the self-management of competencies in a profitable way for their personal development / integration in society?	...IMPROVE PERSONALITY BUILDING AND PARTICIPATION IN A LEARNING SOCIETY 0 1 2 3 4 5

5	**Procedures of recognition and validation**	**DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCEEDINGS WHICH...**
	Establishing competence oriented proceedings	
5.a	Does the VPL system provide and present understandable and valid evidence of their achievements, skills and competencies?	...INCLUDE PERSONAL RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR PROVIDING EVIDENCE 0 1 2 3 4 5
5.b	Does the VPL system improve the submitting of evidence in an appropriate form for formal national and international certification where this is available and appropriate for the individual?	...ENCOURAGE THE APPLICATION OF FOLDERS OF EVIDENCE 0 1 2 3 4 5
5.c	Does the VPL system enable the individuals to make use of evidence for formative purposes?	...ACCEPT FOLDERS OF EVIDENCE FOR FORMATIVE WAYS OF ACCREDITATION 0 1 2 3 4 5
5d	Does the VPL system enable the individuals to make use of evidence for summative purposes?	...ACCEPT FOLDERS OF EVIDENCE FOR SUMMATIVE WAYS OF ACCREDITATION 0 1 2 3 4 5

C Setting up a frame of reference for the application		
6	Standards, structures, quality assurance	DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES, STRATEGIES WHICH...
	Providing fundaments and conditions which genuinely respond to the needs of today's educational systems	
6.a	Does the VPL system provide understandable information about procedures of recognition, which encourages individuals to make use of it?	...ASSURE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF ACCREDIATION 0 1 2 3 4 5
6.b	Does the VPL system emphasize the meaning of values, adopting common standards and guiding principles as fundaments for an overarching system of recognition and validation?	...RELATE TO VALUES 0 1 2 3 4 5
6.c	Does the VPL system establish structures, which reflect the different levels of processes and procedures and the different roles and activities of the stakeholders involved?	...GRANT APPROPRIATE STRUCTURES 0 1 2 3 4 5
6.d	Does the VPL system define quality criteria and establish systems of quality-assurance for the application of procedures and processes?	...ASSURE A SYSTEM OF QUALITY CONTROL 0 1 2 3 4 5

11 ASSESSING COMPETENCIES

An essential step in valuating, validating and accrediting prior learning

PAUL BONSEMA

Over the last decade several initiatives have been taken to research the possibility to valuate and validate prior learning (VPL) of experienced employees in European countries. An overview has been given by Duvekot (2005).
About six years ago the HES School of Economics and Business of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA) in the Netherlands recognized the need for developing tools in order to be able to valuate the working experience of students. Part-time students asked for this possibility, because in their opinion the curriculum contained many items which they already applied in their daily jobs. This resulted in several tools (see paragraph IV) which were applied very successfully to a large number of candidates.
At the same time, the need for formally accredited employees arose in Dutch industry. Especially Corus, an international high-quality steel manufacturer, needed to increase the percentage of employees with a bachelor degree due to quality standards. They contacted the HvA in order to discuss possible cooperation. They were not only interested in Industrial Engineering programs, but also in Economics, Business Engineering, Logistics and Information Engineering.
For the HvA this meant the development of several specific VPL tools in order to meet the demand of Corus. This resulted in a Corus pilot project which started in March 2005 and will end in 2007.
In this article the VPL toolkit of one specific bachelor Engineering program is discussed: Engineering, Design and Innovation (ED&I). First the use of competencies in an engineering program is introduced. Then the VPL toolkit will be outlined in relation to the general VPL process. Finally the results of the pilot project will be discussed.

Competencies

Five years ago the HvA started a new engineering program named Engineering, Design and Innovation (ED&I). There were two main reasons for this new program. First the existing programs Mechanical Engineering and Operational Technology suffered from a decrease of registered students. Secondly the industry more and more was seeking graduated students who were not only trained in hard skills but also in soft skills. Moreover they called for graduates with a helicopter view.

In order to develop a curriculum which meets the requirements of industry the teaching staff started with a competence matrix which covered in principle the entire curriculum. The two essential ingredients of the curriculum are ‘System Thinking’ and ‘Life Cycle

Approach'. The resulting 3x3 matrix is presented in figure 1.
For each cell in the matrix a competence has been formulated. There are several definitions for competencies. At the Amsterdam School of Technology the definition of Parry (1996) is used: "A competency is a cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes – that affects a major part of one's job (a role or responsibility) – that correlates with performance on the job – that can be measured against well-accepted standards – and that can be improved via training and development".

For example lets look at Development (DE-2). The competence is:
Convert the results from technological research to a prototype or scenario, test this and further develop the complete life cycle on the basis of this research. Decide when the product and/ore service have been developed sufficiently to be marketed in the designated market.

Halfway the last year of the four-year ED&I curriculum students are assessed before starting on their graduation project. In this assessment students have to master the nine competencies at a designated minimum level. In the third and fourth year students choose a domain from the matrix to specialize in. The three competencies of this domain have to be mastered at a higher level.

In being able to relate the working experience of industrial employees to the bachelor program, a competence based curriculum is crucial.

Figure 1. Competence matrix of ED&I

ED & I		Domains		
		Business Management (feature: commerce, trade)	*Design & Engineering (feature: creation, design)*	*Operations & Maintenance (feature: production, maintenance)*
System levels	*System & Society*	BM-1: Marketing & Sales	DE-1: Life Cycle Research	OM-1: O&M Strategy
	System Development	BM-2: Project/general management	DE-2: Development	OM-2: Operations Management
	System Aspects	BM-3: Product Management	DE-3: Engineering	OM-3: Maintenance Management

General VPL-process

After the first positive results at the School of Economics the HvA recognized the need for developing tools, using general principles regardless of the program and sharing experience and knowledge. This led to the establishment of the HvA EVC Center. EVC is the Dutch acronym for VPL. Some results and the developed toolkit can be found in Lintelo (2002).
The HvA EVC Center developed a seven step procedure in order to valuate the working experience of candidates and to accredit the results of the procedure in a regular bachelor program. These seven steps are:

1 Application for the VPL procedure using a standard form (digitally accessible at www.evc.hva.nl).
2 In an personal interview the procedure and VPL toolkit are explained thoroughly to the candidate. Furthermore the candidate is given advice as to the VPL standards that matches best with his experience.
3 The candidate starts collecting evidence for his portfolio in order to match his working experience with the VPL standards. Compiling a proper portfolio takes at least four weeks.
4 The candidate hands in the portfolio (twofold and in hardcopy) at the EVC Center. Two assessors examine and judge the portfolio on completeness and usability for the assessment. They also consider the approach taken in the assessment.
5 The assessment (= a criterion-based interview) takes place and lasts approximately 1,5 hours.
6 After the assessment a provisional result is given to the candidate. For each competence there are three possible results: the competence is fully mastered, partially mastered or not mastered at all.
7 The provisional result is sent to the examining board of the bachelor program which turns it into a final and official result. Usually the result given by the assessors is integrally accepted by the board.

In the next paragraph some specific tools used in this seven step process are discussed. Many parties are involved in the VPL process. In order to control the process and to make it efficient and effective, tools are developed to enable candidates to compile a portfolio on such a short notice (step 3). This is essentially different from the way in which competence development of students in the regular program takes place. Once enrolled, other tools are used to monitor this process.

The VPL-toolkit

For some of the steps mentioned above special tools have been developed. Two tools will be outlined in particular: a self-evaluation form and a START-form.
In the pilot project Corus selected possible candidates for VPL using workplace scans and interviews. Essential in this selection is the level of working experience, which has to be at bachelor level. Selection of candidates on the basis of this criterion by Corus is a start. But in the assessment the level of working experience in relation to the bachelor program will be checked by the assessors. The Corus candidates all proved to be working at an excellent level. The ultimate question for the assessors turned out to be whether their working experience covered the competencies of the bachelor program.

The self-evaluation form

The next step for the candidate is to relate his working experience to the competencies of the ED&I program. For this aim a special form has been developed.
For each of the nine competencies a set of relevant (professional) activities is given. For a candidate to prove that he is fully competent he should master all these activities at a certain level.
As an example the competence Development (DE-2) of ED&I is given here. It has been elaborated into fourteen activities:

1 I can translate the results of technological research into a step-by-step plan for the design of a product prototype, a pilot plant for a process or a service workflow scheme.
2 I can make an accurate planning of this step-by-step plan and determine the critical path (sequence of activities and time needed).
3 I can perform an analysis of the necessary standards and guidelines and use them efficiently.
4 I can execute the mechanical calculations needed to support a design (mechanical strength, power transmission, joints and fasteners).
5 I can execute the energetic calculations needed to support a design (energy balance, efficiency).
6 I can execute the managerial calculations needed to support a design (cost-benefit analysis).
7 I can select the proper materials in relation to the performed (mechanical) calculations.
8 I can document the design process using detailed drawings and schematic surveys.
9 I can build a prototype.
10 I can formulate a procedure to test a prototype, a pilot plant or workflow scheme.
11 I can write a report with recommendations for the production and after-sales of a product.
12 I can perform a risk assessment for a product or a process.
13 I can determine the way to protect the developed product or process by means of patents.
14 I can make a tender for the implementation of the design for the client.

In completing the form the candidate has four possibilities per activity. When the candidate is familiar with the activity he has three options, namely K, C en I. If the activity is not recognized at all, the candidate does not fill in anything.
K stands for Knowledge of an activity but no experience with performing it in a working environment.
C stands for Contribution to an activity in a working environment under supervision of a project leader, department head or office manager.
I stands for performing the activity Independently with full responsibility for the outcome.
In addition to the self-evaluation form evidence regarding these activities has to be collected. This evidence can compromise reports, presentations, calculation sheets, planning results, minutes etc. The main criterion for this evidence is the fact that it has been developed by or refers to the specific candidate. As a rule of thumb the evidence supplied may not be older than three years and in order to limit the amount of paper a maximum number of three pieces of evidence is set.

The start-form

In order to select the proper evidence and to be prepared for the assessment a START-form has been made. Using the START-form forces the candidate to examine and evaluate his working experience methodically. The five letters stand for:

S Situation: what was the reason and goal of the assignment?
T Task: which role did you have in the process?
A Activities: describe the sequence of activities undertaken to perform the assignment and specify your role in these activities.
R Results: what were the results of the assignment; was the client satisfied; was the result implemented?
T Transfer: how would you deal with future similar assignments?

The form is sent digitally to the candidate. In step two of the VPL process the importance of accurately completing the form is stressed. In particular the A (activities) and final T (transfer) are good indications for assessors when it comes to the candidate's level.
With the help of both forms a candidate now can start filling his/her portfolio.

The assessment

During the assessment assessors use the START-form as a guideline for interviewing the candidate. It should be noted that an assessment is not an exam. The candidate is asked to elaborate on his working experience and in particular on his approach to solving problems and tasks.

At the end of the assessment the assessors judge the level of mastering the competence. This judgment is based on five criteria. For the competence 'Development' these criteria are:
- Being cooperative in order to achieve the goal
- Forming an opinion based on information
- Judging the applicability of proposed solutions
- Applying criteria properly to make decisions
- Working methodically

These criteria have been determined by the teaching staff of the ED&I program and subscribed by relevant industrial companies.

From VPL to APL

The developed method using the VPL tools as described has been put into effect for the ED&I program with a group of about 15 candidates from Corus. Although there have been some difficulties due to poor communication, in general the results are good for both parties.
The seven step procedure is clear for all parties and works satisfactorily. The personal interview (step 2) must be well prepared by the representative of the ED&I program in order to outline the essence of the engineering bachelor program and the VPL procedure. Clear instructions on how to fill in the forms and how to compile the portfolio pay out for the candidate as well as for the assessors.
Several candidates pointed out that it was difficult to gather recent evidence. Discussions with colleagues and managers helps the candidates in the process.

The assessment is considered an agreeable event. In the beginning most of the candidates were quite nervous, but little by little they all became comfortable with the assessment procedure. They all more or less agreed with the outcome of the assessment.
Striking was that most of the candidates looked up to the bachelor level and that they were not aware of the fact that for some specific activities they performed on an even higher level due to their vast (over twenty years) working experience.

Most of the candidates were specialized in the Operations & Maintenance domain and became competent in Business Management through managerial responsibilities and contacts with suppliers and clients.
On average most of the nine competencies were mastered with the exception of 'Development'. Particularly the criterion of working methodologically was usually not met in the assessment. Some outstanding candidates mastered all nine competencies.

After the assessment the provisional result has to be accredited by the examining board of the ED&I program (step 7). This accreditation of prior learning (APL) leads to a personal development plan (PDP) once the candidate has enrolled for the ED&I program.
By the VPL assessment, no exemption is given for the final graduation research project. In some cases students had to attend specific modules or courses as well.
When possible a student receives made-to-measure assignments which can be performed in their working environment on the basis of Action Learning (Abrahamse, 2006). This means that the assignment has a general or specific theme such as the methodological approach to (mechanical) design problems. The students needs to find a real problem in his working environment which fits the theme. A coach is appointed from the ED&I staff who supervises the student's learning process and reviews the result of the assignment. This approach works well and leads to good results which immediately can be implemented by the company. The company must of course be cooperative and facilitate the student. As yet three Corus students have completed their PDP and have graduated as Bachelor of Engineering. Most of the Corus students are used to perform under pressure and need little guidance in performing their assignments. Due to the hectic industrial environment they are not used to writing extensive and transparent reports. Therefore specific attention should be paid to writing skills by the accompanying ED&I coach.

Not every staff member is a good assessor. The assessor needs to have a helicopter view of industrial engineering in general and of the domains of the ED&I program in particular. Furthermore, the assessor must be very pragmatic in order to be able to relate the candidate's working experience to the competencies of the program. It goes without saying that the assessor needs to participate in an extensive training in question techniques.

Conclusions

The method described for valuating and accrediting prior learning lead to good results in the Corus Pilot project. The VPL tools that have been developed proved to be quite useful in the process and are also applicable to individual candidates from different companies. In the near future the VPL tools will be evaluated on practical usability.
The results were satisfactory for all parties involved. Therefore the HvA EVC Center is approaching more industrial parties to investigate the possibility of applying the VPL method in upgrading experienced employees.
Action learning appears to be a good methodology for active learning in a working environment. ED&I regularly evaluates the outcome of the learning process of students with the aim of improving the program and the assignments given.

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VPL2: SPRING OUT IN ITALY

12

LUCA FERRARI & ELISA MANCINELLI

Introduction

"Spring Out[42]" is an Equal project promoted by Enaip Foundation[43] located in Rimini. The project started in 2004 and will finish in December 2007. The general aim of the project is to support and strengthen active policies to improve job opportunities at local level, based on the assumption that only a society which puts forward a sense of solidarity can contribute to assure greater wealth and better general cohesion at individual and community level. The addressed target groups are individuals with psychiatric disability, who are willing to start a professional path overcoming their disability. In this way, they are accompanied in the process through which their "*life project*[44]" comes true.
The project previewed the design and delivery of a set of integrated actions: within "Spring out" an important action was realized by the *Service of students with special needs*[45] of University of Bologna which contributed to develop the tool of VPL process, called "Bilan de Competence" (*bilancio di competenze*).

Italian VPL policy framework

Historically, "…the situation in Italy reflects a number of elements which play a decisive role in giving direction to the debate and to actions. In particular, the enormous formal and juridical value of educational qualifications linked to formal education paths and the fact that there is little or no tradition of brief or adult training has created a situation in which it is difficult to make visible the 'social' and cultural value of training in itself and of their related certification"[46]. Furthermore, the formal and juridical value of educational qualifications linked to formal education also characterises labour market and its regulations and dynamics.
In May 2001, a Ministry of Labor Decree ruled the "*Certification of competencies in vocational training system*: the objective of this system is to obtain transparency in the training and educational system, to better assess the individual experiences and to acquire a better match between supply and demand on the labour market. In 2003 the Italian Government adopted the "Training Booklet", created by the decree 10/09/2003 and based on the

[42] Official site of the project: http://www.resrimini.it/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=65&MMN_position=45:45
[43] The En.A.I.P Foundation. S. Zavatta Rimini was founded on the 20th of December 2002 as a centre of services for guidance and vocational training of young people and adults in all the fields of productive activities and tertiary sector. For further information see: http://www.enaiprimini.org/
[44] For a first overview about the concept of "life project" : Ianes, D (2003) Il Piano educativo individualizzato - Progetto di vita. Guida 2003-2005, Trento, 2003
[45] http://www.studentidisabili.unibo.it/ServizioDisabili/default.htm
[46] http://www.transfine.net/Results/Brno/8ItalySummary.doc

agreement among the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, the Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies, and the Social Partners. The Training Booklet has been conceived as a tool to record competencies acquired through formal, informal and non formal learning, as well as to help the learning citizen in reflecting on personal and professional development.
One of the main innovations occurred during 2006 has been the set out of a *common standard system* of competencies, shared between the different actors involved in education and training, and aimed at improving the geographic as well as the professional mobility among Italian and European regions.

The case of the Emilia Romagna region

In the framework described above, Emilia Romagna region represents one of the best innovative cases in Italy where, at least in the last ten years, different experiences regarding the recognisement, evaluation, validation and certification of competencies acquired not only in formal but also in non-formal and informal contexts are being piloted. It is this regional context where the "Spring Out" project is being carried out.

Within this regional political framework, an important recent regional Law – *Law 12/2003* – sets up a **Regional Qualifications System**[47]. It has been conceived as an important tool to strengthen the identity of Regional Vocational Training. The Regional Qualifications System contains a first directory of professional figures which are meaningful for the specific economic-productive woven of the Region; it is the result of a deepen analysis of the vocational system of the regional territory, carried out thanks to the decisive contribution of entrepreneurial associations and trade unions who are the key actors of the regional labour market.

The idea of Inter-provincial centre of bilan de competènce

In the European framework, the first experiences of "Bilan de competence" (hereafter BDC – acronym from the Italian *bilancio di competenze*) were developed around 1980 in France, within public training and guidance service centres. The BDC had the aim to allow the worker the right to pursue his/her professional development, to improve his/her working conditions and, if desired, to modify them.
In the framework of the "Spring Out" project, started in Rimini in 2004, a model of inter-provincial centre (*Centro interprovinciale*) as a place where to test BDC was set up. The idea to create a *BDC* model specifically addressed to people with psychiatric dis-

[47] This system refers to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). For further information see: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

ability came from Andrea Canevaro[48], professor of special pedagogy at the University of Bologna. Furthermore, some local stakeholders of the area around Rimini, though with diversified level of awareness, judged this idea as a good opportunity to enhance the cooperation amongst different institutions spread out in the territory. During the BDC piloting at the "Centro interprovinciale" , it became evident that the BDC tool could be applied effectively also not only to people with psychiatric disability, but also to other people experiencing disadvantaged, e.g. immigrants. Furthermore, the actors involved decided to test a BDC's with people with special needs within the framework of another European project: "OLTRE"[49] (Territorial job opportunities: the disables net). The BDC's was tested in "Spring Out" project targeted to people with psychiatric problems. The aims of OLTRE and Spring Out projects are similar: these projects are not just intended to produce the BDC tool but also to test a sustainable and transferable model of BDC.
The willingness to set up a centre of BDC's resulted from the collaboration amongst Enaip foundation, Province of Rimini, Municipality, Ausilioteca, Local Health Agency and University of Bologna[50]. Currently it is a under developed feasibility study plan related to administrative and financial aspects. Furthermore several elements have to be developed in future such as: an economic and financial sustainability plan; a simulation path aimed at testing the net of services involved in the use of the BDC tool; a list of available professionals which may be interested in working within inter-provincial centre (mapping of professionals). Up to now, despite the fact that there are not formalized results of the testing phase yet, the general outcomes can be considered as positive.

How is structured the bilan de competènce?

First of all, it is important to clarify the concept of "Bilan de competènce". What is the BDC? The BDC could be defined as "…a whole range of actions that allow individuals to analyse their own professional and personal competencies, as well as their attitudes and motivation. So as to set out a professional project and, if necessary, a training project"[51].
The principal key actor of that process is the individual who has a system of competencies characterized by capacities, motivations, values and self image useful to express professional and competent behaviours.
The BDC was elaborated on the basis of *ICF* logical. ICF is an International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health promoted by World Health Organization: "The overall aim of the ICF classification is to provide a unified and standard language and framework for the description of health and health-related states. It defines components of

[48] Prorector of the University of Bologna with delegation of student with special needs
[49] http://www.enaiprimini.org/progetti/oltre--opportunit--lavorative-territoriali--rete-disabili
[50] According to the "Local cooperation agreement", the project partnership is "open" to the entry of new partners, who can be involved during the project development.
[51] www.welfare.gov.it "…quell'insieme di azioni che hanno l'obiettivo di consentire ai lavoratori di analizzare le proprie competenze professionali e personali, così come le proprie attitudini e motivazioni, allo scopo di definire un progetto professionale e, ove necessario, un progetto di formazione".

health and some health-related components of well-being (such as education and labour). The domains contained in ICF can, therefore, be seen as *health domains and health-related domains*.[52]" As mentioned above, the BDC is targeted to people with special needs who are currently unemployed. This target in most cases have: difficulty to recognize difficulties and limits related to their capacity and potential; difficulty to make a choices; difficulty re-defining and contextualizing works environments.
By means of BDC it is possible to undertake at least three important tasks:

1 To observe/verify: capacity, potentiality, limitations, expectations and motivations
2 To sustain self-evaluation paths
3 To provide elements in order to allow individuals to make a conscious choice

The main factor of innovation of the BDC tool is that it inquires cross-sectional dimensions of competence of people with special needs, thus favouring a global vision of the abilities, skills and competencies acquired by the individual in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Based on the "co-evolution" assumption[53], the BDC model seeks to re-activate the individual's energies, resources and competencies that the guidance services, as well as the individual him/herself, usually ignore.

The BDC process

The BDC process consist of the following steps: induction, testing, feedback, monitoring and follow up.

1 **Induction**. This is the most important phase of the BDC. The involved individuals[54] are introduced to the project and to the BDC (approach, aims, tools, expected outcomes). The involved users are then grouped according to specific criteria such as individual preferences and availability (especially in terms of time schedule). Gender, age, type of disability are also taken into account. After the person has registered, s/he will be interviewed to collect the required information and carry out the process.
2 **Testing**. In this phase, the participants are involved in individual interviews, for a rather long period (approximately 40 hours). The practitioner[55] (psychologist, educator) guides the interviewee with the aim of eliciting his/her past experiences (in formal as well as in non formal and informal learning contexts), personal and professional strengths, expectations for the professional future. The BDC has been conceived as a flexible toolset, allowing for personalisation consistently with the characteristics and needs of the individual users.

[52] W.H.O. 2002, p. 11. Or see: http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/site/intros/ICF-Eng-Intro.pdf
[53] The "co-evolution approach" implies that all individuals have the possibility to learn by experience and to foster change (at individual, organisational and contextual level).
[54] For the pilot activities, 80 people have been identified. The selection process has resulted in 16 users whose profiles match the pilot requirements.
[55] The ideal team consists in three practitioners qualified in social or human sciences such as psychologists, experts in training need analysis and BDC procedures, educators, social workers. They work together during the BDC process.

Five useful macro categories have been identified within the BDC tools to analyse the individual: 1) Basic skill and cognitive capacity: this category include the following competencies: reading, understanding, speaking, numbering, reasoning and thinking, memory, learning… 2) Transversal and relational competencies such as self-esteem, organizational awareness, communication and relational capacity, working in group capacity, interaction and interpersonal relations. 3) Dexterity and motoric capacities: to move the head; to move the left/right hand… 4) Self autonomy: personal abilities, social autonomy, free time management… 5) Technical competencies: informatics, foreign languages, capacity to use a measuring instruments and so on.

3 **Feedback**. In this phase the BDC outcomes are returned to the individual user. The practitioners involved in the particular BDC process elaborate the feedback. On the strength of what emerged from the interview phase, they clearly outline the past experiences and the crossroads encountered by the individual, and delineate some hints for further personal development. These 'hints' are then presented to the individual and discussed. The rationale here consists in empowering the user and in stimulating his/her own autonomy in decision-making.

A fundamental phase is represented by the "feed back process of the BDC result". During this phase in which the "user" and careers advisor meet and carry out an in-depth analysis of the results of BDC. This phase formally conclude the path and it is also aimed at sharing work expectations. The objectives of that phase are two-folds: to provide the users with an in-depth analysis of results emerged by using of BDC; to support them in the self- evaluation of his/her own competencies acquired in informal, non formal and formal contexts. To conclude the careers advisor elaborate a document which will send also at the labour services.

4 **Monitoring and follow-up**. The users who have started their own development process are not left alone. Practitioners from the different involved centres provide them with support and follow-up actions, such as periodic monitoring sessions.

Strenghts, weakness, opportunities and threats of BDC tools

The testing phase of BDC carried out during the last four months, have allowed a better understanding of the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the BDC.
The territory and the individuals have been identified as the must strong elements of BDC. As far as, for the territory is concerned, one of the positive effects was the improvement of the relationship between the local support services and the individual users; shaking off the distance resulting from bureaucratic practices that usually slow down these processes. Furthermore, the enhancement of individual employment opportunities

in terms of enhancement of self-esteem and self-improvement opportunities; awareness raising about one's own personal potential has been considered the second main strong aspect. To conclude, it has to be underlined that during the testing phase the opportunity to design individual training and development plans, in a lifelong learning perspective, emerged and is, currently under development.
The most interesting opportunity emerged from the testing of BDC, was introduction at local level of new "mediation tools" which allow users to feel at ease with local support services. These new tools have enhancing the confidence of users towards the available support opportunities.
At this stage, can be identify at least two weakness point that characterizing the BDC tools: on one side, not sufficient economic resources to train the practitioners; and on the other, some users have abandoned the testing because they had not understood well the rationale and benefits of the BDC.
Finally the model developed in Spring Out proposes approaches and practices which have never been used in this context, and therefore might be considered too innovative. In this respect there might be some resistances from other services and practitioners.

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HAPPY WITH THE VALUATION OF YOUR COMPETENCIES

13

JOS PAULUSSE

Introduction

Developments of the labour market, Europeanising of the labour market, increasing mobility of labour and the need for employees necessitate 'a job for everyone'. Despite this, the 'special' group is not accepted by employers, with some exceptions.
In the past a lot of work has been mechanised, automated, computerised and outsourced (to cheap countries) without wondering about consequences and other options.
People with a work disability were 'happy with their regular work at the assembly lines", etc. The need for more efficiency has replaced this kind of work but no other functions came in return. Yes, the society felt the need for therapies, social workplaces, unpaid volunteer and social work. It does not stop and nowadays we can see that social workplaces have to be profitable and the original aims, giving a social support for work disabilities, are being removed or reduced.

Development

Valuation of Prior Learning (= VPL; = EVC; = VAE, =APEL, etc) is a hot item nowadays. Many educational institutes have procedures for VPL. Employment offices, temporary employment agencies, employers and other organisations prefer this development. Governments subsidise this development and some have even special departments to stimulate and support developments in this area.
All these efforts aim to increase the efficient employability of workers and to increase the efficiency of educational programs. The focus and emphasis is more towards efficiency than towards the development of ability to present personal competencies, work willingness and reliability of the backlogged group on the labour market.

This development and focus are understandable but on the other hand it is not desirable to let the number of unemployed people grow for whatever reason.

The VPL procedure, sometimes subsidised, aims to put the student on the right place in the educational program and to avoid the student attending lessons which do not suit the intended professional competence profile. This results in more study time which can be spent on the chosen profession.
Recognising that a student already has certain insights, experiences, knowledge (the total equals competencies) decreases the input of the college and the student and shortens the

duration of the education. This can be a profitable situation for the student and the school but... also for governments!
Companies can also profit from this development. A smart company has good insight into the competence profile of the employees and has developed a personnel policy that can focus on 'the right person in the right place' and checks this in regular work assessments.

Government regulations aim firstly for efficiency and only secondly to the individual. Economic use of this status 'disabled for work' is good but at this moment the situation is (not always) that people with only a small percentage of disability (in NL up to about 35%) have to accept this. It means that officially in The Netherlands the person is not 'structurally disabled for work' and in practice the employers do not like to have these people employed. Regulations for this group are complex and not always focussing at an increased possibility for work.

The development of VPL started more than 10 years ago with 'the bottle is half-filled (Duvekot, 2000), in 1999 with a European project 'Accreditation Achieved Competencies and much earlier in France in 1934 there was already legislation based on VPL Probably in medieval times in the period of guilds there was recognition of competencies achieve during the working life, however not always resulting in independent entrepreneurship because the 'profit of the master had to be secured'.

Competencies

Valuation of Achieved Competencies includes all terms indicating the recognition of personal competencies whenever, wherever and however achieved.
A competence is the 'total of knowledge, insight, skills, and attitude that a person can prove and is required to fulfil a profession, function or job in an organisational context'.
The focus is at the competencies achieved and is (further) developed during somebody's career.
From this point of view VPL is an important instrument for employees for their career development.
For colleges assessing students to get them in the right place of the educational program is comparable with what we already did in former times when a student requested an exemption of certain obligations of the educational program.

Target groups for VPL

a *Unemployed people*: there are a lot of people willing to work but for some reason do not find a job. Many activities and initiatives have been developed and executed to solve this problem. National and local governments support these initiatives with subsidies and / or tax incentives and reintegration activities. In The Netherlands the government has initiated the Learn-Work Counters supporting these people. Offices for reintegration supporting people to find a job have now to live with the 'no cure-no pay' principle which stimulates these offices to focus more towards positive results. Despite these measures there are too many non-workers.

b *People with a labour disability* may have suitable competencies but have almost no chances to present themselves to the employers and VPL instruments should be applied for this group in particular.

c *People who have taken care* for the household (often women with children) during ten or more years cannot prove their competencies. Running a household often means a lot of management, being in time, making appointments etc., this is underestimated by employers.

d *Youngsters without* sufficient qualifications, etc. This group has had a period of little interest in school and study but might have had a number of jobs and will be accustomed to work in very different circumstances. After some years this group is willing to attend additional training and interested in covering their shortfall of qualifications on the labour market.

e *Elderly people*, already over 40 years (unemployed, receiving a social benefit or little pension, etc.) have problems in finding a job despite their willingness to work, despite work experience and despite their competencies! The point here is that employers prefer young people because of expected health, costs, mobility, etc.

f *Job rotation*. After 20, 25 or more years in the same profession it is not unusual to have new opportunities, new challenges and new work environments. Some decades ago workers needed to get a pension because they were at the end of their working life and their efficiency decreased. Even nowadays it is almost inconceivable that a person functions over 40 to 50 years in the same profession. During the working life people develop new competencies and individuals should be stimulated to start a second or third career.

g *Non-natives*. This group of people has a lot of difficulties to demonstrate their ability to work, their experiences, their skills. Some of them can make use of *the facilities of a bureau that* compares diplomas and certificates of official foreign educational institutes with the national regulations and receive a document that proves their educational level and competencies.

I am convinced that there are more groups of people that can be mentioned for which VPL or Recognition of Prior Learning and Competencies is an instrument that supports them entering the labour market.

Many educational institutes make use of VPL as a kind of intake procedure to test the candidate and to be able to offer the candidate the right place in the available educational programs. In practice means this that the institute gives exemptions for parts of the educational program that have already been achieved by the candidates. This is not new, this is something we did 25 years ago with a slight difference; now the Dutch government financially supports this activity!
VPL should be applied by employers as an instrument to test, to value and validate the competencies of people who have not been able to attend the regular educational program and that have developed and achieved competencies during their work.
Institutes that offer so called VPL procedures to grant exemptions to educational programs should focus more on the target groups mentioned above because these groups need this kind of support most of all.

'Everyone is happy'

Starting-point: governmental organisations pay a social benefit, employers need workers, and non-workers need social recognition and acceptance.
Another point of view: employers provide non-workers with a job, governmental organisations continue to pay a social benefit and non-workers are now able to show their values.
After some weeks or months the employer reports the efficiency of the new employee(s), let us state that this is Q hours per week. Than the government can send a bill to the employer for Q hours times a certain (agreed) rate (at least the fee for the social benefit). If the employee has a high value for the employer they can agree that the employee receives an additional allowance.

The profit here is that now the government get a part of the paid social benefit reimbursed, the employee has a social status and might earn some extra income and the employer has no financial risk (the most important reason for not employing 'special' people) because the government still is responsible for the social benefit. Besides this, there is a group of people that continues to need extra care. In a society in which the average age is rising it is quite a burden to take good care of elderly people lounging around.

Who is not happy?

This approach requires an agreement between the social partners but this need not in fact be an obstacle. The fact that we accept foreign workers while having a domestic labour potential that is not full employed is bizarre. It is the well-known position of 'having blinkers on' and only calculating one's own profits and reckoning with an increasing economy.

Process

Using this approach in practice, it will be clear that we have to solve some related consequences. Institutes offering VPL support are very suitable to support the described target groups. The coaching process includes: intake, portfolio development, assessment, employment and evaluation afterwards.

1 Individuals should work on their portfolio (education, certificates and diplomas, work experience, functions and jobs and experience in volunteer activities). For this there are several possibilities. The individual can ask for guidance and support. The local government can stimulate this activity by offering support and to make this activity an obligatory precondition to receive social benefit. Colleges may offer coaching services to produce the portfolio.
2 The portfolio has to be assessed by an expert organisation. The report of this expert organisation gives sufficient information for a future employer to be able to put the new employee into a matching job. Even a volunteer organisation should be able to make an agreement with the local government. It will be clear that this might become a pitfall because many employers want to have 'free workers'! Regarding the target groups we need to test this because otherwise we keep turning around without any solution.
3 The matching of the competencies of the new employee with a job can be difficult. Guidance and support by the employment office can be required to organise the right match. In the employment office there is insight into the needs and the offers and they can stimulate the matches between the individual and the company.
4 The establishment of Learn-Work-Counters nowadays in The Netherlands can support the job-seekers. Learn-Work-Counters are institutes established in association with social partners and local government in a region aiming to stimulate and to support the matching of individuals with employers (companies / organisations).

Costs and results

The costs of a VPL procedure depends of the time required for coaching and assessment. The tariffs vary between €900 and €1400 for a full VPL procedure and official document and educational advice. Parts of this procedure e.g. analysis of attitude or special profiles cost less than the mentioned amounts.
Employers in The Netherlands can get tax reduction when they stimulate and support these activities of about €300 per candidate.

The VPL procedure ends with an individual report. The standard for this report is still in development. This report includes the following parts:
- Personal information of the candidate. Name, address, date of birth, etc.
- Relation to the developed and completed portfolio of the candidate. This portfolio is the basis for the assessment report.
- Description of the national standard applied to check the competencies of the candidate and indication where this standard can be found
- Description of the competencies of the candidate compared with the competencies described in the national standard.
- Information about the assessment organisation and the assessor or assessors involved in this report.
- Short description for what purposes the report can be used: the individual candidate, the employer, external VPL offering institutes and granting exemptions, certificates or diplomas of educational programs (well described and documented) under the condition that the educational institute accepts the VPL assessment report.

Evaluation of the report

The report indicates a lot but begs the question, is the future employer able to read about the competencies and especially about the professional competence profile of the candidate? Valuation Achieved Competencies means in my opinion that a future employer can compare this candidate based on the assessment report with other candidates for the same function and so be able to select the right candidate for the job or function.
The candidate aims to get a document in which it is indicated by an official assessor, which professional profile of the valuated competencies match best and with advice regarding the missing parts.
It looks at this moment that this aspect is secondary but VPL includes valuation of a career.

It is intriguing how many people have found a (paid or unpaid) job based on a personal

VPL report and would they also have got this job without this report? This indicates the value of this procedure and must be researched and reported on in future. Probably a task for the Knowledge Centre VPL or the LWC' s.

Future

It remains of great importance that people with a labour disability are accepted in the labour market. It is profitable for society as a whole. It will not happen automatically but must be initiated and stimulated. It needs input. It also needs respect and a different attitude from involved organisations.

An employer that is obliged to keep an employee in the company will not be enthusiastic. Paying a person who does not do the job well a salary or even has not the right labour attitude is a loss-making item. Keeping this person in the firm as an employee must be considered in a way in which the local government or the social services department of the local government has an important role. Guidance of these people is required, measuring the efficiency and the profit for all involved groups and the work ability should be checked regularly. Only in this way can the employer have a good impression of the available labour force, can influence the career development of e.g. elderly people, can stimulate people to accept another function in the company and can offer training on the job and on the spot.

This approach requires close cooperation of involved bodies and will than result in less financial burden and there will be more interest for the slogan 'work for all, all for work'.

14 VPL ISLANDS FROM THE BOTTOM

Good practices in Eastern Germany

ANETT WALTER

After working on the topic "recognition and valuation of prior learning" for several years, there are some approaches in the German education system, where previously acquired competencies are recognised and valuated. In addition the individual is able to use informally and non-formally acquired skills and knowledge for their further vocational training.
The idea is, that the individual can utilise work in a specific field of activity of at least 3 to 5 years duration in order to fulfil the criteria to be accepted for a certified vocational training or study. If you bring the expected practical work experience, you are allowed to follow the complete formal education finished by official chamber of commerce exams (see the cases of vhs Stuttgart).

In this article I wish to describe some good practices of VPL. The focus will not be on the educational institutions but on enterprises, authorities, volunteer associations, schools and disadvantaged people. Following the adoption of the concept of lifelong learning by many organisations throughout Europe they are now looking for instruments and methods to recognise and validate it. The objective is to connect learning effectively with the individual's and organisation's development. The following innovative examples show VPL islands coming from the bottom up.

Introduction

In the next section of the article I am going to use a fictional telephone conversation between a management development consultant and a representative of the HR department of the government of a rural district in Saxony.

Consultant: Good morning Madam I am aware of the planned restructuring of the Saxony Administrative structures. It is my understanding that the current 22 administrative districts will be rationalised into 10 consolidated units. The outcome of this proposal as I see it will result in the merging of two to three counties into one larger unit. The net result of this plan will be that the number of people working in the governments and administration will have to be reduced, because in the future they will not need 3 of them anymore, but only one for each position.
The purpose of my call is to see if I can be of assistance to the Saxon Ministry for Interior Affairs in their effort to identify a socially acceptable and reasonable way to implement this change.

Mrs. XYZ (HR department of the rural district): [laughing helplessly and then with bitter irony replies] Yes, yes, we will all be reassigned to other positions and functions but, they cannot just fire us. Most of us are civil servants or town employees; they will have to offer us new jobs.

Consultant: Yes, I am sure, they will. Of course the Ministry is interested in a social restructuring process and will try to as supportive as possible. It will be much easier and much more individualized, if all employees became active partners in this process of finding a solution that will be acceptable to all parties. My proposal therefore is to give training to all employees to enable them to recognize, how much and what they have already learned and experienced, which strengths and skills they possess and from this to identify new potential fields of activity for the future, apart from the position they currently occupy. Based on that information people can decide to be placed somewhere else – maybe in a completely different job – where they can make use of other competence and abilities then they did before.

Mrs. XYZ: Well, … [longer pause than previously and, then with very strict voice] ... I would like to inform you that this is a very serious topic and I do not wish it to be the subject of jokes or flippant remarks. So please do not propose to me such outlandish proposals as you have just outlined. It is clear that there will be many stupid plans and ideas put forward which will be, playing with the fear of the people. How can you go around and speak about 'new' or 'other' competencies. I am a HR Specialist. This is what I have learned and the profession I have been practicing for some time now. I have had no training for some years, because those who leave their workplace for some weeks can be replaced immediately. I have not learned anything new since … uh, a very long time. There are no HR positions in other administrations or governments left, so my future is clear and this is the case for many individuals. Most of them are too old to learn a new job; they will become unemployed or be retired before retirement age.

(…)

The phone call went on for a few more minutes, only leading to more sarcasm and anger from the HR Professional. The HR manager did not see the idea of having a lot of things learned in ones own life, which are not written on the job contract or on the university diploma. In this case, we have to state, that it was of course a very difficult situation for this woman, who was even involved in the restructuring and job reducing process herself. That said the example is very typical in many ways.

Firstly, the connection of fear, helplessness and consternation is a bad omen for the future development. Whether we work with people who are in fear of losing their job or those

who are already unemployed or with those who have not finished school or vocational education, all of them feel helpless and loose faith in their own capability to manage their life and development. The immediate next step is the blocking out of every experience and competence and only seeing the deep black hole to come. For these people the glass is most certainly half empty.

Secondly, is the concept that the only things that matter are certificates and diplomas. The rigid notion that you can only work in the role for which you are formally qualified for and only if you show the right certificate. This is not just the thinking of the employer, it is also the thinking of many employees. They take the view that you become a medical doctor only following attending medical school. But does this mean that doctors only have abilities in medicine? Can you never maybe work as treasurer in a foundation for children?

Thirdly, is the belief in the equation no certificate equals no knowledge. It is a widespread feeling that you always need a diploma or other certificate, to show someone else, what you are able to do. It is a very efficient and quite objective way for the employer, to decide about your suitability to the job by checking the diploma. He can fall back on the educational standards compared with the general job requirements. If you have no certificate, it is much more difficult and means much more effort on behalf of the employer to evaluate the candidate. You have stepped outside the box and consequently there is no given framework. This consequence of staying inside the box is making the assumption that the candidate does not fit into the given standard framework. So he might not be the perfect employee.

Fourthly, is the old fear of change – change is always resisted. Change and its implementation however afford us the opportunity to discuss with people and to make them think about it. If no one cared about new ideas and everyone accepted everything, then you would never come to the point to speak with the people and to try to explain the idea and to try to understand and, if possible, reduce their resistance.

Fifthly and finally, as mentioned previously there is the general belief in many people's heads that the bottle always seems to be half-empty. It is a psychological fact, that if there comes a big important incident, this can outshine all the rest. This can be positive and make you happy immediately. Or it can be negative and afflicting, and then it can stifle all positive thinking. E.g. people, who are unemployed because of physical reasons, only think about their unemployment time and their disease, almost never about positive experiences and abilities they have acquired. The other side is that we always look for fulfilling the standards set. There are planned levels, that have to be reached, then it is ok, otherwise you do not pass the test and thus fail. So it is understandable, that most people only think

and act goal-oriented. They never look back on what they already have, but always see the far objective, which they have not got yet. Unfortunately, in running forward, there is not much time to be satisfied with what is reached already.

So, after that analysis, how could we expect that anyone would welcome us with open arms – bringing the idea of a half-full bottle? More to the point what has this thing called VPL to do with changing people's perspective of half full versus have empty?

Well, for a start most people do not call it VPL and even if they do the chances are that they may not know or understand the term VPL. I now invite you to read through the following examples. This is what happened in different creative places in the same area, where no one ever called it 'Valuation of prior learning'.

VPL and drop-outs

In one of our training groups we worked with a young man, Sven, 26 years old. He left school after the 7th grade without any certificate. Learning meant for him pain. He never wanted to speak about teachers, classrooms or timetables. He proclaimed to everyone – whether they wanted to hear it or not – he was not able to learn and consequently a looser of our society. The only thing, he was ever interested in, was working with wood. So he had tried to find a vocational education, but without success, because he had not finished school. Since then he was unemployed and frustrated a position which he felt justified his view that he was a looser.

During the weeks we worked with Sven, we spoke about all possible things, also about his hobbies. He said, he was 'working in wood'. No one could imagine, what he meant by 'working in wood', but we understood 'wood'. So the whole group of course asked him to explain what he meant and what he was doing. Sven then outlined the true extent of what he meant by "working in wood" and outlined his knowledge and understanding of furniture. He told us about the furniture, he had restored in his cellar. Later he went on, speaking about very old furniture and the different woods in the different pieces. He continued and he introduced so many things to us. He displayed that he had a deep knowledge of all different kinds of wood; he knew all kinds of varnishes all artistic style epochs, all the old masters, and all the tools needed for restoration. He detailed the textbooks he had at home, and explained that he very often conducted research on the internet concerning new background information and new professional material. He stated that not alone did he read many texts but also wrote articles on an internet platform and answered the questions of other people working in the area.

All in all, Sven was an expert in wood restoration. For him it was only a hobby, but he had brought it to a very professional level, which could easily be compared with a vocationally educated conservator. So what about learning then? Together with Sven we identified many learning points in his story. He discovered that he was learning like a world champion – not in the formal way at school but in his free time, in his cellar and on the internet he did little else but learn around the clock. We also identified, that this informal and non-formal learning had the same value as the formal way. By understanding this, Sven wanted to present it to the outside world. He valued himself for his cellar-work and he wanted to be valued by others, too. His biggest dream from former years arose again. He wanted to become a professional conservator.

Sven left our centre with a new self-awareness and belief and he applied for jobs and vocational training positions. Presenting his new portfolio with all his knowledge, experience and competence in restoration, he found a job at a small restoration company, where in addition to undertaking the restoration work he loves he can attain the – still missing – theoretical education.

VPL and Voluntary Fire Brigades

Being part of the voluntary fire brigades is quite normal for children and youth in rural areas in Eastern Germany. Usually the grandfather was active in the fire brigades, the father still is, and the children – especially, but not only the sons – follow their example. In rural areas it has the value of a meeting point or social outlet. It is an unwritten convention to show the personal affinity with the village / small town cementing the concept of a sense of place.

Nowadays it has become hard for many young people to find a job in rural areas. Many of them go to bigger cities for vocational education, studying or working. For those that do not take that road and stay in their home environment other problems arise. In the past involvement in such community based activity was seen as a major point in ones favour when seeking employment. In the present day this position has changed significantly. For many companies today it is a high risk factor to employ a person working for the voluntary fire department. Firstly they can be called out everyday. That means costs due absenteeism. Secondly the fire worker can be injured everyday and this can result in additional high costs associated with injury and absenteeism. Thirdly, the employer often feels that the employee will never give one hundred percent for the company resulting in a reduction in efficiency and productivity. So being in the voluntary fire brigades is not really an advantage when seeking to find a position in the modern labour market.

This position is not lost on the young people of today and consequently many young people are leaving the fire brigades. The knock-on effect of this is that a number of administrative districts are considering closing their fire departments and connecting to the emergency system of a neighbouring region – which is of course a high risk strategy from the perspective of the health and safety of the inhabitants of the districts due to the distances which the services have to travel in the event of an emergency. So the challenge for the fire departments is to find new members to engage voluntarily and so assure the survival of local emergency services.

In an effort to address these issues together with the fire brigades we developed a concept, which aims on identifying all the abilities and competencies, young people acquire in their voluntary work and to highlight how usable these are for their future development. If the volunteers could plausibly show and describe what they have learned they will not only have a certificate for that, but they will also be able to present it to potential employers or schools. So they will not just go out with the disadvantage of being a risk, but they will have their portfolio with them, including all the worthy skills and strengths. In this way the voluntary work, and especially all the learning during the voluntary work, can be documented and valuated highlighting the advantages which accrue to employing them far out weigh the negative impacts highlighted by the employers. It will be brought in a useful form, which supports their personal and professional development.

It is however not just an issue for the young people and the benefits that accrue from the system devised. It equally has an important impact for all members of the local community and indeed for the fire service itself. The fire brigades are always seeking to recruit new members and in general it does not matter, whether they are young or old, whether they are male or female. Through the implementation of the competence portfolio system in the voluntary fire brigades, they have an interesting opportunity to attract future volunteers. People can make sustainable use of their voluntary engagement for their career development. That means the value of the voluntary work is growing in the same moment and more citizens can be attracted to the fire brigades.

Of course, the portfolio has to be of high quality and companies have to be involved very much. The volunteers will have to learn to develop their portfolio and to present themselves in an appropriate way. The project is still at the pilot phase of development with a network of about 20 youth fire departments. Once it is running, the effects will be evaluated and disseminated.

VPL and long-term unemployed

A very special project has been developed and realized since autumn 2006 in Leipzig. The Ministry for Transportation, Engineering and Urban Development initiated a pilot project, which offers long-term unemployed people useful employment for three years. The objective was and is, to find new employer contacts in these 3 years and to find a job in the first labour market.

They work for the Municipal Transport Services (MTS) as service men and women. Their job is to accompany the busses and trams through the city, to provide the customers with information, give support in going in and out of the vehicles and by being present giving a safer feeling to visitors to the city, especially at night.

As they have contact to the customers every day, they have to be service-oriented, friendly, have to answer questions in an appropriate way. They have to deal with all strata of society – children, youths, adults, workers, retired, and also with drunk and angry and anti-social people. Their social competence will need be very high. Their communication skills are being trained and challenged every day. They need to stay calm, when people are nasty and they have to be very careful to keep to the rules, because everyone is looking on the pilot project, waiting for some mistakes. These people have another hard challenge to manage: Up to now they were 'only' long-term unemployed and could not take part in many fields of society. From now on they are outing themselves in the public as long-term unemployed and so everyone can see the 'poor losers', marked by an official MTS uniform.

To be accepted on to the project, all 300 long-term unemployed had to apply for the 'job' voluntarily with their best application documents. They had to go through an interview with HR and / or psychological experts and they had to give plausible reasons, why they wanted to do the job, which does not lead to a regular work contract, but means staying unemployed – just now busy in a project for 30 hours a week.

At the beginning of the project all participants had to go through a special professional training called 'Bus and Tram Service', where they learned the technical and daily business topics. After their 3 - 16 years unemployment period they went through that 3 weeks training and then started working on the trams and on the busses.

To support the strategy to bring these highly motivated people into paid jobs; together with MTS we developed a training concept with the following objectives:
– They shall get back their self-esteem,
– They shall be employed,

– They shall find out new potential fields of activity for their future development,
– They shall take over responsibility for their own life and development.

For the participants the bottle was always half-empty. So the idea was to raise awareness for their own resources and for their prior learning. The way they had tried to find a job during the last years was obviously not successful. So we wanted them to develop another point of view on themselves and on their opportunities. Here is just one example of the programme and its outcomes.

Petra is 45 years old. She has not had a job for more than 7 years, is very frustrated and feels too old, ever to come back on the first labour market. After school she had learned a textile engineering profession, which is not needed anymore nowadays, because everything works automatically. Later she got a second education as painter and varnisher from the employment office. She passed the exams successfully, but never found a job in that branch, because of missing work experience. This is what she introduced to us at the beginning and she brought those very logic explanations, why she could never ever find a job in these fields of activity in the future.

When we started working with Petra, she was active in the bus and tram project, talking to people everyday, providing them with information, providing a service and enjoying all the new tasks. She told us about her activities and hobbies, like photography, writing short stories about everyday occurrences and showing it to her children, neighbours or friends. She described everything very in a very detailed fashion and we could see that she had learned professional stylistic tools and methods to a very high level by reading about it on the internet or in a library. Later on she brought some of her stories to let other people see her work and she started to understand that this was a great job based on extensive learning. She analyzed what it meant to write a short story and to take professional photographs and she put all her abilities, skills and competencies in her own portfolio, with which she gave herself a new value.

Of course part of our training was also to start creating a professional future. Based on her portfolio – which included more than the writing – she developed a few objectives, one of them was to work for a public relations department. So Petra went out with her portfolio and applied for a position with a theatre. She presented her formal skills, but she also presented her informally acquired skills. She described and showed her competence in writing and photography, she outlined details of her current job, where she is providing people with information, answering questions and trying to treat every customer in an appropriate way. Finally she explained plausibly why this job would fit to her strengths and interests.

Today Petra is working at the reception desk of the theatre and during the day she is public relations assistant, writing articles for the website and the newsletter. Her prior – never certified – learning was valuated and accepted by the employer. Thus she left the employment project long before the 3 years deadline and is back on the labour market.

VPL and civil servants

A joke at the beginning: What do you think is 'civil servants pick-a-stick'? Well, the first one, who moves, loses. Things like that describe the typical public image of clerks working in the civil service. You meet them in authorities and administrations. They always send you to the other desk, they never take responsibility for any task and they always leave the work place on time. They are world champions in avoiding essential tasks and in delegating jobs, which cannot be avoided.

Sure, this might be true for a part of them, but you will also find such 'efficient' people in other sectors of the economy also. The less funny point is that many civil servants in the age of 40 to 60 only go on working like machines – automated, without any reference to their job, doing something they cannot describe and counting the months till retirement. They are unsatisfied, have stopped every activity and sometimes it ends in psycho-somatic diseases. This cannot be the consequence of having such a cosy and nice job without any trouble, only relaxing and having fun, can it?

While this development is happening anyway, the German administrative systems are being modernized and restructured. The paper & pencil authorities for citizens turn into service networks for clients and have to act and present themselves on a highly competitive market place against other service centres. This can only happen together with the employees, but how to motivate and activate a burned-out administrative official, to be service-, customer-oriented and innovative from one day to another?

Together with the HR department of a town administration there is a pilot project with a small group of participants being developed. The idea is, not to force those employees to be active, motivated and innovative, but to let them recognize their own value and self-worth again. The civil servants analyze and describe everything they really did and do on the job. They learn to see their real tasks and work steps, not only their professional title. They furthermore raise awareness of all the learning points and situations they had and so they widen their focus to all the experiences and competencies they have acquired. Most likely this will not only be sleeping, sitting on a chair without any movement or being out of the office on time. They will find much more abilities and strengths. An important part of the project is developing a portfolio and collecting all the learning information about oneself.

What are the consequences? Before the project they are all administrative officials, everyone has the same title and label, it is not visible from the outside and for themselves whether there are differences in their tasks, in their motivation and in their quality of work. Through that missing transparency it is quite easy, to state they were obviously doing nothing important, to put them altogether in one pot and it is the perfect base for branch jokes.

By finding out their own competence and strengths, the employees start giving themselves a value. They recognize what they were and are learning and how they use the competence on the job. That leads to more self-awareness, to more self-confidence, to better identification with the job and – what I think is very important – to the perception of more self-efficacy. This means, they see now, what they are able to do and they have it written down, that it is an important job with an important function. So they know they are not superfluous.

The portfolio will also be used in the HR development of the organisation. At least once a year the disciplinarians have a target orientation interview with their colleagues. Defining own competencies the employees are able to set their own development goals and can use this as base for further trainings, job enlargements or changing the workplace to a more suitable one. The portfolio will be accepted and valuated for the career development in the organisation.

When the administrative workers have a better self-understanding of their quality, they will be able to be service-oriented and being more identified with the organisation they can also be innovative, because now they have a reason and the motivation, to create their own work environment. Of course, this will also be seen by the public – by the clients. In some years we will see, whether the public image changes. Maybe then we are joking about technicians?

Prospect

As you can see in all these case studies, ‘Managing Diversity for lifelong learning’ has identified that there are many spots, where VPL approaches are being realized already. It is needed and used as a linking mechanism, which connects the individual, the learning, the personal and professional development, the organisation and – to close the circle – the education system.

Valuation & validation of prior learning has not been made a standard in the German education system yet. We still need tailor-made and innovative instruments to recognize and

measure forms of non-formal and informal learning and to make it transferable to the dual education system.

To valuate prior learning – not only by certificate – but to self-valuate it, leads automatically to better self-understanding, to better self-esteem, to new ideas for one's own future, to sustainable interest in the your own development and to the joy that is in self-responsibility. So it will not only be a tool for effectively creating educational pathways, but it will also be the means, to involve the individuals in the process of lifelong learning and to give the power of control to those who learn, not only to those who create the system.

IDENTIFICATION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

15

HANA ČIHÁKOVÁ, MARIO STRETTI, HELENA MARINKOVÁ

The present concept of lifelong learning (LLL) stresses the responsibility of each individual for his/her own job and educational career. The aims of implementing the LLL-concept as well as those of creating the European Area of LLL require developing systems of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (VPL) at the national level in all EU countries. At the level of policy innovation in the Czech Republic a number of strategic and programme documents have been adopted, the implementation of which should create the necessary preconditions for setting up the national VPL system. The need for VPL has not been primarily caused by the situation of the labour market, which is considerably deregulated, but by too rigid circumstances in the field of formal education in the Czech Republic. VPL should especially benefit groups of people at risk of unemployment. These groups comprise people without vocational qualification or with a qualification which does not enable them to participate in the labour market. Another reason for the involvement of candidates into the VPL system can be their efforts to acquire qualification for the field (branch) of qualified work in which they already have had their own business or been employed.

Historical background

The Czech Republic is a country with long and well-established tradition not only of the initial formal education including vocational and technical education and training[56] but also in adult education and lifelong learning. In the first half of the 19th century the Czech patriots organised courses for adults which aimed at practical training of future craftsmen or workers and enabled them to be successful on the labour market. In the latter half of the 19th century efforts to educate ordinary people both for vocational and more general social and cultural purposes increased.[57] At that time various associations pursued their educational and edifying activities in the territory of Czech countries. At the end of the 19th century a series of lectures for the general public were organised by university readers. Professor Masaryk, later the first President of Czechoslovakia, was one of the promoters of these lectures. He aimed for the popularisation of knowledge and

[56] Along with Styria, the Czech countries were the industrially most developed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Due to this fact, besides much older traditional universities and mining academies, the technical HE institutions (now technical universities) for various fields of industry and commerce were established here comparatively early, since the late 18th century, and the non-tertiary VET schools preparing for both the labour market and the subsequent technical HE started to be established in the latter half of 19th century.

[57] A wider participation of women in both post-obligatory formal education and lifelong learning started, however, later, and especially VET and HE opened to women gradually during the 20th century along with changes of family and every-day life on the one hand and technological development with increasing qualification requirements in most employment positions on the other hand.

the democratisation of education which should first of all enable people to be well versed in world affairs and to reflect real needs. Moreover, education should be available for all, which is the precondition of democracy.

After the independent Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed in 1918 educational activities of various associations, academies and individuals were further pursued. Then the government decided to regulate adult education by law and not to leave it to the discretion and goodwill of various associations and individuals. The government extended and reformed the system of the higher cycle of "Lidová skola" (People School) which became an institutional base for systematic post-obligatory education[58] of "out-of-school" people (both youths and adults) at the lower and upper secondary levels, i.e. the levels of "Metanská skola" (Civic School) and both general and vocational upper secondary schools. These schools achieved a very high standard; education for the poor was free except for vocational or practical courses. These schools were state-funded institutions, which did not perceive education as a commodity but as national assets.[59] At that time schools for the unemployed were also established. Every citizen being on the dole had to attend these schools.[60] We must also mention here the development of in-company training, which was especially developed in all details in the Bata companies.

World War II stopped the development of further education and the democratisation of the school system. The system of educational institutions which had been formed for nearly a century was disorganised and after the war was not rebuilt in the original spirit. Instead of this the educational centres were established on the whole territory of Czechoslovakia and used for political indoctrination. Still, in the VET (both IVET and CVET) at all qualification levels and in most of its fields, it was the case only to a lesser extent, a comparatively well functioning CVET system (for modifications of already achieved qualification or re-training) was developed and moreover the so-called recognition of practice was introduced in the sphere of work (for people without the respective formal qualification who proved his/her adequate abilities by performing the work in question well). In the 1960s a certain easing of political tensions started. At that time first working units dealing with adult education were established at higher education institutions. Moreover, an independent branch of science – andragogy (which does research into adult education) – was founded.

After the Soviet invasion in 1968 this R&D branch (the development of which was promising) began to be reduced, being replaced by an increased development of in-company training. This type of education being important from the viewpoint of the economy was less linked with the ideology. A wide range of departmental institutes was established.

[58] The compulsory school attendance still covered only the 5-year „Národní skola" (National School) at that time and has been increased to 8 and later 9 or 10 years only since the early 1950s.

[59] Vymazal, J.: Ceské vzdelávání dospelych ve svetle tradice a pri pohledu do budoucnosti. In: Benes a kol.: Idea vzdelávání v soucasné dobe. Eurorex Bohemia, Praha 2002, s. 96-97. [J. Vymazal, Czech Education of Adults in the Light of Tradition and in the Future Perspectives. In: Benes et al., Idea of education at the present time. Eurorex Bohemia, Praha 2002, pp. 96-97.]

[60] Ibid., p. 97.

They very often employed people who could not be employed for political reasons at higher educational institutions.
After 1989 the situation became complicated again. A wide range of institutions dealing with adult education was not functioning well. A great many of them were abolished and their equipment lost. Companies got rid of them because they did not need them. This fact is quite understandable but it was surely not an example of good planning.
Continuing education is achieved through various tuition forms and with different targets (professionalisation, wider acculturation and/or socialisation, personalisation). Since the beginning of the 1990s the area of continuing education has gone through a rather spontaneous development, due to the fact that, besides an immense number of special legal norms and rules, no overarching legal framework, which would regulate all of this area existed.
Political representation was gradually forced to discuss this issue. The EU played a positive role in this field because one of its priorities is also lifelong learning. In 2003 the government of the Czech Republic adopted a new Strategy of Human Resource Development for the Czech Republic. Its origin was inspired by the EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. Recently the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOYES) prepared the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment to Some Other Acts (the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results). Its bill was widely discussed with the representatives of social partners, professional associations and trade unions. It was approved on 30 March 2006 and it will come into force on 1st August 2007.

School vet system

School attendance in the Czech Republic is compulsory for nine years currently and consists of primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1 and ISCED 2A, which form together the so-called basic education, containing no VET and completed without any final examination by every participant). Almost the entire population continues directly in post-obligatory upper secondary education,[61] which can be divided in three main streams:

– General upper secondary school (ISCED 3A, completed by the final upper secondary leaving examination, the so-called Maturita; its main target is to prepare pupils for tertiary education, but its graduates can also enter follow-up courses for obtaining a non-tertiary VET qualification or directly enter employment where no specified VET qualification is formally required);
– Secondary technical schools (ISCED 3A, completed also by the final upper secondary leaving examination, the so-called Maturita; they provide professional preparation for the performance of secondary technical, health, administrative professions, etc., but

[61] In addition, most early school leavers and drop-outs from the upper secondary (that is people with basic education only as the highest educational attainment) do so later within "second chance" education.

their graduates also have direct access to tertiary education, in the same or a related field of study, but no legal barriers exist for them to enrol in any other field);
– Secondary vocational schools (ISCED 3C, completed by the final examination of vocational training which enables participants to obtain the apprenticeship certificate; they provide preparation for the performance of crafts or skilled worker occupations; their graduates cannot directly continue in tertiary education, a follow-up study completed by final upper secondary leaving examination, the so-called Maturita, is necessary).

The rate of graduation of upper secondary education (covering the three streams) in the age group 20-24 years is rather high in the Czech Republic – it is 90,9 %; on the other hand the ratio of 18-24 aged early school leavers is very low – 6,1 %. Most of the Czech population go through the VET. Educational programmes for the vocational education and training in the Czech Republic contain a theoretical part, where general and vocational educational subjects belong, and a practical part, which is usually completed as a period of or a continuous practice/training, in branches at the ISCED 3C level as vocational training. In educational branches of the ISCED 3A level general educational subjects are at least 45% of the entire program, in branches of the 3C level it is 30% of the entire program.
Unlike the dual system (as for instance in Germany), in the Czech IVET, the complex VET programmes (both theoretical and practical parts) are organised by schools, with vocational training being provided in their training workshops and/or their internal production workshops and only supplemented by periods of external experience in enterprises. Consequently, pupils' learning and its results in both educational and training parts of the programmes are assessed by pedagogical staff (teachers/trainers) of the schools according to common assessment Czech Republic criteria and by means of similar assessment methods and tools.
The work of Czech schools providing initial vocational education and training was based so far on teaching documents, which are drawn up on the basis of educational content – these documents indicate what should be learned at school, they do not define sufficiently what the pupils should really know after graduating. This method of designing education and training unfortunately does not lead to sufficient comparability of learning outcomes; therefore works on curricular reform, which puts stress on educational outcomes, have started since the mid 1990s and have come to the implementation stage recently, taking into account also the European LLL concept and issues of its implementation under national conditions.

Therefore the concept of a two-staged curricular design was adopted. There are, in principle, two levels – that is the national (state-administration) and the school (provider) level – of designing curricula including assessment tools and procedures within the Czech initial formal education and training, with corresponding levels of educational programmes

(the so-called Framework Educational Programmes, FEPs, and the so-called School Educational Programmes, SEPs). The FEP, which is prepared for each educational branch, should represent the curriculum on the national level. FEPs for individual branches should contain the specification of requirements both on general and vocational education and practical training of pupils, they should also define the minimum level of required knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the successful completion of the respective branches as well as describing the subject matter necessary for the acquisition of required knowledge, skills and competencies.
Every single school is obliged to work out their own SEP – school curriculum, which is based on the respective FEPs for branches the school provides. SEP must respect the relevant FEPs, it cannot reduce the target knowledge, skills and competencies defined in the FEPs, but it can extend them, within the VET particularly in view of regional labour market specifics.
Both general concept and particular occupational specifications for summative assessment procedures (for final examination and certification purposes) in IVET at national level are designed by the NÚOV (National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education) in cooperation with the relevant sectoral bodies, and approved by the MOYES together with other relevant ministries (if appropriate). VET providers – in cooperation with regional authorities and employers in the relevant sectors – are in charge of designing their tailored SEPs, in compliance with the relevant FEPs.

This two-level curricular structure is reflected also in designing awards and assessment procedures for completion of non-tertiary IVET programmes which are completed by an examination (the ISCED 3C type, completed by the so-called Záv_re_ná zkou_ka [Final Examination] with or without Apprenticeship Certificate, the ISCED 3A and the ISCED 4A types, completed by the Maturitní zkouska [School-leaving Examination]).
The current curricular reforms described above have preceded the start of the Copenhagen process. In connection with it, they were to be expanded to the extent of the European concept of lifelong and especially life-wide learning. The measures taken in this context so far include passing the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. of 30 March 2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment to Some Other Acts (the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results), developing the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and elaborating its tools with pilot projects of their use in trial implementation of procedures for IVNIL. According to the provisions of the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results, NÚOV is in charge of establishing and maintaining the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Otherwise, no essential changes are foreseen, in IVET as well as in the structure of responsibilities and coordination of work at the national and provider levels. It is too soon, however, to anticipate possible further changes in this direction in connection with the process of making the European concept of LLL a reality. For a detailed description and characterisation of the Czech educational system see Appendix 1.

National qualification framework

Recently, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was developed in the Czech Republic, which reflects both national needs and the respective European recommendations. NQF is regulated by the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on the Recognition of Further Education Results. As per this Act it will be represented by the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ), defined as "a publicly accessible register of complete or partial qualifications acknowledged, distinguished and recognised in the Czech Republic".[62] NQF will become an important link between initial and further/continuing education.
NQF specifies complete and partial qualifications, describes relations between them and specifies qualification and assessment standards for partial qualifications (arranged and structured descriptions of partial qualifications and methods through which acquisition of the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies of individuals will be verified).
The developed NQF will enable social partners to "inform about their requirements" regarding the aims and content of education. NQF will support comprehensibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications and the corresponding knowledge, skills and competencies. This is the way in which the macro-environment suitable for the development of a system for the IVNIL will be created.

NQF and the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results enable the IVNIL. The need for it has not been primarily caused by the situation on the labour market, which is considerably deregulated, but by too rigid circumstances in the area of formal education. IVNIL should especially benefit groups of inhabitants at risk of unemployment. These groups comprise people without vocational qualification or with a qualification, which does not enable them to participate on the labour market. Another reason for involvement of candidates into the system of IVNIL can be their effort to acquire a qualification for the field (branch) in which they already have their own business or been employed.
Concerning the assessment standards prepared in connection with NQF for assessment and certification of partial qualifications (units), another accounting mechanism is likely to be used, namely a qualitative meeting/failing scale for each of the set of assessment criteria pertaining to the assessed unit, with a required total (number or rate) of fulfilled criteria for acquiring the unit in question.
For the time being and for the complete qualifications that can be obtained within IVET, VET providers (schools) are entitled to carry out examinations and other summative assessment procedures and to deliver certificates as well.
For the certificates that can be obtained within the so-called normative education (e.g. various driver or welding licences, etc.), providers of the respective training courses are entitled to do this, with legislation and other regulations concerning the normative education being prepared and put into action by the respective ministries (and organisations charged by them with this task).

[62] Section 2 (Definitions), letter e).

For non-formal education and informal learning (connected with work, voluntary public activities, leisure activities, hobbies, etc.), no formal certificates exist, in principle. However, various forms of appraisal and awarding do exist, of course (for instance in sports).

Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning

For the time being, only validation of learning within the formal education and the so-called normative education leads to formally recognised certification (except for some possibilities, within the formal education, of passing examinations without having attended the respective courses). The same is true, in principle, for the formally recognised CVET leading to modifications of already acquired complete vocational qualifications (their specialisation or extending, etc.).
Prior to 1989, under different general circumstances of completely regulated interrelations between the spheres of qualified work and the preparation for its being carried out within the formal VET, a kind of validation of work experience without formal certification existed, namely the so-called recognition of experience (proved by doing the respective qualified work) instead of normally required formal qualification (being regularly a prerequisite for carrying out the work in question). Of course, this procedure did not concern all fields and levels of qualification (especially regulated professions sensu stricto were excluded as well as other regulated activities where completion of the so-called normative education is required now).

The nominal and the real sense of qualification (standards to be met and real learning results) should not be confused. Accumulation and transfer of real education results are in relation to what individuals have really acquired and are able to use in relevant contexts (according to their roles and/or occurring situations), accumulation and transfer of educational attainments (formally attested and certified "units", be it partial or complete qualifications) are only "labels" (pieces of information) designed to facilitate social intercourse (however, their real value may or may not agree with the indicated value, which again may or may not be really useful in activities connected with real life roles and/or situations).
Besides preparing the mentioned NQF with its occupational and assessment standards (see the NQF system project, www.nsk.nuov.cz) it is necessary to carry out pilot projects for the implementation of a system for IVNIL. No validation of prior and especially prior experiential learning exists so far, only a first pilot project in this direction has been made within the Leonardo EPANIL project, and a following pilot project in greater extent is being made within the UNIV system project (in connection with development of the NQF).

The pilot implementation project UNIV (Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in the Network of Schools Providing Adult Education, www.univ.nuov.cz) as a complementary empirical system project to the creation of both qualifications framework and particular qualifications within the NQF system project follows the first pilot project carried out within the Leonardo da Vinci project (EPANIL, European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning, www.epanil.net). The EPANIL project focused on target groups and regional conditions in adjacent regions of the Czech Republic, the SR and PL. The UNIV project works as a feasibility study for the creation of the Czech IVNIL based on NQF.
In these projects, standards and other system tools for IVNIL are developed, networks of schools and regional LLL centres are established, training of pedagogical staff including assessors and guides/counsellors for IVNIL is organised. The focus is especially on the last issue because the legally requested tools (qualification and assessment standards for the respective partial qualifications at the ISCED 3C level and methods and procedures of the assessment itself) are being developed but people expected to use these tools (assessors and guides/counsellors) have not yet been prepared to carry out their activities. The pilot verification of the educational courses for assessors and guides/counsellors and assessment standards take place in regional networks of schools providing the educational service for adults in the Czech Republic.

1 Project EPANIL (European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning)

EPANIL was a two-year pilot project completed within the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Duration of the project was 24 months: 10/2004 – 09/2006. Nine partners were involved in the project, four from ”old” “ EU member countries (GB, FR, DE), five from ”new” ones (Czech Republic, PL, SR), the co-ordinator of the project was the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education, Prague, Czech Republic.

Preliminary pilot studies like the EPANIL project are necessary for adapting the general IVNIL concepts, implementation frames and models to national conditions. The way such studies are made, as well as their extent and legal status depend, of course, on the current system conditions in the countries concerned. That is why these conditions have always to be studied, in the first place. The project intention was not to implement the system for IVNIL, but to map – just on one VET field (branch)/one qualification – all steps which are necessary for gradual preparation of this system.
The aim of the EPANIL project was to develop and verify appropriate IVNIL methodologies and tools by drawing from the best European practice within the frame of “Common European Principles for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning” derived from the Copenhagen process. The “old” EU member states have got a long-time and wide experience with IVNIL, which can be very useful for the ”new“ ones.

Target groups of the project were all groups usually described as vulnerable or being at risk of social exclusion (drop-outs and early school leavers, recent school leavers, unqualified and people with low qualification, unemployed or economically inactive people, especially women (re)integrating into the labour market, ageing adults and seniors, ethnic and other minorities, including the Roma, disabled, individuals in custody and care, etc.) and monitored as to their situation in the countries concerned in general or within different regions. Main characteristics of the target group situation in participating "new" EU countries in general and their adjacent regions where the EPANIL pilot study took place in particular were as follows:

- Educational attainment of early school leavers or drop-outs is generally at the ISCED 2 level in all the "new" EU countries involved;
- Attaining a VET qualification at the proximate level (equivalent to ISCED 3C with an ISCED 3A opportunity of subsequent studies) is the most accessible way for them, regardless of the reasons for their former poor school achievement;
- Unemployed (15+) with basic education (ISCED 2) form 24% of all unemployed (15+) in the Czech Republic, one fifth of this occurs in the Moravian-Silesian Region; the situation in this respect in the SR and Poland in general as well as in the regions concerned is similar.

Three adjacent regions of the Czech Republic, the SR and PL with considerably high general unemployment rates have been chosen for this purpose, namely the Moravian-Silesian Region in the Czech Republic, the Upper Silesian Region in Poland and the Nitra Region in the SR, and the occupation of Cook seemed to be the most suitable for all the above-mentioned conditions. The occupation of Cook has been chosen for developing the model of IVNIL. The reasons for choosing just this occupation were as follows:

- Its fit from the viewpoint of employability;
- Its fit for gender as well as social disadvantage reasons (including socially inactive women);
- Its fit as a model occupation for a range of other occupations at the same level in the service sector;
- The fact that no substantial differences of the cook job profile exist between the countries involved so that the experiences of the "old" EU countries can be used in the "new" ones in adapting them to their national conditions.

For developing the assessment standard it was necessary to develop the job profile for the occupation of cook. The only element that can be considered as more or less common in all countries involved is the competence needed/required for carrying out the qualified activities comprised in the occupational unit cook, although this structure (the job profile concerned) also may vary a little from country to country (in its scope of the activities comprised and/or in consideration of each of them as unqualified or qualified at a certain level).

The assessment standard should be in relation only to the relevant parts of the existing curricular standard of the regular IVET programme in the respective country. For instance, in the Czech Republic, unlike curricular documents (i.e. the Framework educational programmes, at national level, and current school curricula at school level), the assessment standard for the needs of the EPANIL project should not contain the part of general education (i.e. the language education, the social science and natural science education, etc.). Another difference is that the assessment standard should not primarily focus on skills and knowledge, as they are defined in the FEP, however on practical competencies (qualification requirements) needed for carrying out the occupation (work activities concerned). There are, in particular, two types of competencies: occupational (first of all functional, i.e. skills, other than cognitive skills, i.e. knowledge), which can be demonstrated; personal (first of all social, i.e. behaviours and attitudes, other than meta-competencies, facilitating learning), which cannot be demonstrated, but only testified by references – e.g. by the previous employer(s).

The social partners were already involved in the project in the stage of developing the assessment standards as well as preparing the institutional network for identification and validation, i.e. a centre for carrying out procedures of assessing and certifying candidates' disposable competencies, connected with a school and/or a work place for needed completion of their competencies. This involvement of social partners helped to increase credibility of the identification and validation process.
Within the project a three-day educational course for guides/counsellors and assessors was prepared. It is a three-module course, where module A is concerned with lifelong learning and the process of prior learning recognition, module B with counselling and guidance of the client throughout the process of prior learning recognition and module C is concerned with assessment of prior learning.

Guides/counsellors and assessors must be prepared and able to communicate with a broad spectrum of clients with different social backgrounds and from different environments; they must be able to adapt their communication to clients from different socio-economic environments.
The basic task of the guide/counsellor is to guide clients through the whole recognition procedure and motivate him/her to follow it on up to the best possible end. The guide/counsellor helps the client to identify his/her prior learning outcomes in the widest possible extent and participates in the formulation of their portfolios. He/She assists the client in attaining relevant documents by means of which his/her listing of required competencies should be proven. On account of the recognition process, the guide/counsellor suggests suitable possibilities of further education to the client.
The assessor is responsible for controlling whether the candidate really posesses the competencies listed in the assessment standard of the respective qualification. He needs to be

able to assess professionally, with high-quality and impartially the documents submitted by the client in order to prove his/her prior personal and occupational experience, i.e. certificates acquired in non-formal training or education, references testifying his/her experience acquired in practical activities as well as certificates from formal education. He also needs to be able to judge professionally, in high-quality and impartially, clients' current professional competencies during the process of their verification.

In the framework of the project, regional networks of partners involved in pilot testing were developed in particular countries. The role of the regional coordination centre has been played by partners involved in the project who organised the network of their regional partners. The role of local LLL centres has been played by secondary vocational schools providing initial education and further education for adults in the cook field of study. The role of guides/counsellors and assessors has been played by VET teachers and trainers and also by social partners. They were prepared for their roles through the above-mentioned educational course for guides/counsellors and assessors which was developed within the project. Bodies of social partners have been created for developing and modifying/rectifying assessment standards as well as procedures and tools. Labour offices were involved in the phase of choosing clients for pilot testing.

For pilot verification of the developed model in each country involved, a group of assessors and guides/counsellors who were trained through the prepared course was chosen. Teachers/trainers and social partners were prepared through this three-day course for their involvement into work with clients in the role of either a guide/counsellor or an assessor. Although the same person could theoretically obtain a certificate for both of the two roles, a conflict of interests through fulfilling the two roles in one person within the recognition process was strictly avoided, of course. For the role of guides/counsellors especially VET teachers from involved schools were prepared; for the role of assessors, trainers and social partners were instructed. 36 counsellors and assessors have been prepared in total within the project (6 in the Czech Republic, 8 in the SR, 22 in Poland).
Pilot verification of prior learning outcomes for the chosen occupation of cook was carried out in partner secondary technical schools. 67 clients took part in this procedure in total (11 in the Czech Republic, 13 in the SR, 43 in Poland). Clients recruited from both unemployed and people at risk of unemployment were people with certain work experience in the occupation of cook, but without the respective formal VET qualification. These clients were chosen by employers in the regions or chosen with help of labour offices.
The EPANIL project was submitted at a time when, in the Czech Republic, the recent Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on the Recognition of Further Education Results was not even prepared. Therefore the project had only the status of an experiment and for that reason the recognition procedure could not have been adopted as a system measure, because of the nonexistent legal framework.

2 UNIV (Accreditation of non-formal education and informal learning results in a network of schools which provide educational service for adults) project

Results of the EPANIL project have been used for the development of the IVNIL system within the UNIV project where its pilot implementation will be realised in large scale. UNIV is a system project of MOYES implemented by NÚOV, which is financed by ESF and the budget of the Czech Republic.
Works on the UNIV system project were started in August 2005 (www.univ.nuov.cz). The common target of the project is to support further education provided by secondary schools and higher technical schools. To fulfil this given target, there are two partial targets, two basic outlines of the project:

a) The development and improvement of further education offered in secondary schools and higher technical schools;
b) The enhancement of educational service for adults through enabling schools to provide the process of IVNIL.

These two lines are implemented in the first two years more or less independently of each other. In the third year of project implementation, they will suitably replenish and intersect with each other, to radically support the development of further education offered by secondary schools and higher technical schools.
About 20 assessment standards corresponding to the initial VET branches on the ISCED 3C level are produced during the course of the UNIV project. The recognition procedure and processes will be verified on two assessment standards in each region and in each of the newly created networks. The recognition process will be performed on 16 assessment standards in total, which should bring enough experience for a fast extension of recognition procedures to all of the assessment standards corresponding to the education branches on the ISCED 3C level. The assessment standards, which will not be produced within the UNIV project, will be prepared in the NQF and Quality projects. In the final stage of the project, assessment standards corresponding to the education branches on the ISCED 3C level (i.e. for complete qualifications on this level) will exist as well as assessment standards for partial qualifications of this level.

Conclusion: possibilities and obstacles to the implementation of LLL in the Czech Republic

No crucial problems seem to stand in the way of the reform changes to be made in connection with the implementation of LLL in general and the NQF, especially since these reform changes are being introduced "top-down" in the Czech national context (as a next step following the ongoing curricular reform). Favourable synergies might be expected in:

– The extended possibilities of (both geographical and horizontal) mobility for learners and/or job applicants;

– An increased involvement and importance of providers (schools) extending their supply to the full scope of VET both in its life-wide and lifelong dimensions, and
– An increased closeness and flexibility of interrelations between/overlapping of the carrying out of work and preparing for it within LLL (both in its life-wide and lifelong dimensions), along with maintaining a sufficient system rigidity of these interrelations, especially within IVET (through maintaining and achieving a set of complete IVET qualifications, and a set of partial qualifications with defined relations to the complete ones).

The main possible obstacles might be expected in:
– Insufficient motivation of both learners and VET providers for engaging in these reform changes without being sufficiently "driven" to do it (through sufficiently clear and truly effective – both threatening and promising – incentives from the world of work);
– Possible lack of necessary balance of flexibility/rigidity of the overall VET system, especially in the direction of its over-structuring through creating a new set of partial qualifications (where no regulations have yet been agreed and this lack of regulations has had a noticeable effect as well);
– There is also a possibility of a synergy of these unfavourable conditions. However, it is too soon to consider the probability of real risks for such events at the very start of the process.

Main characteristics of the initial education system in the Czech Republic

As the non-formal education and informal learning within LLL are complementary to how the initial formal education is structured and what its functions are in relation to the adult life of individuals, raises a very substantial question as to whether the initial entry to the labour market is already possible at the upper secondary level, or no earlier than at the post-secondary level[63]. This actually determines both
– The lowest age of early school leavers and drop-outs from initial formal education,[64] and
– Their highest educational attainment.

In the Czech Republic, the lowest age of such individuals is given by the upper level of compulsory school attendance (15 years of age). The highest attainment of early school leavers thus cannot be lower than so called basic education[65] (ISCED 2A only in the general population, ISCED 2C only within special education for a very small population

[63] The Czech Republic already has initial vocational education for workforce and similar occupations (ISCED 3C) and for occupations of secondary technicians (ISCED 3A) at the upper secondary education level (ISCED 3), unlike countries with Anglo-Saxon and partly Scandinavian types of education systems, where the education at this level is only general, and vocational education at all qualification levels and in all fields is post-secondary, as Further Education (ISCED 4) or Higher Education (ISCED 5).

[64] If a definition used for purposes of LLL and IVNIL is applied to the term of formal education (not the one of ISCED), not only the initial formal education but all formally recognised education (whether designed for youths or adults) is to be considered formal education. For more detailed information on functional types of formally recognised education, see bellow.

segment), however an absolute majority of the population continue in education. Thus drop-outs also have partial education in some of the three main streams of subsequent education. However more than 90% of each population year complete ISCED 3 and thus gain general, technical or vocational secondary education with the maturita certificate (ISCED 3A)[66] or vocational secondary education with the apprenticeship certificate (ISCED 3C). All these outputs enable direct entry to the labour market and also continuing education at tertiary level, namely directly for ISCED 3A programmes and after completing follow-up education for ISCED 3C programmes. A considerable part of these school-leavers enrol directly in this follow-up education, but quite a lot of them do not complete it, thus forming another drop-out group.

The fact that programmes of post-obligatory education in all the three main streams at the ISCED 3 level also continue in providing general education is another substantial characteristic of initial formal education in the Czech Republic. All the ISCED 3 level programmes (ISCED 3A and ISCED 3C) together with the previous basic education at ISCED 1-2 levels thus provide their school-leavers with general education, forming a platform for lifelong learning, as is also the case in both basic IVET streams with the initial vocational qualification in some field, enabling immediate entry to the labour market. The possibility of direct entry to the labour market however also applies to general education at grammar schools (as well as other wide-profile ISCED 3A educational programmes), as no legislation barriers to that exist, and in fact school-leavers from grammar schools and other wide-profile ISCED 3A educational programmes gain good ground (unemployment rate among them is not higher than among school-leavers from other ISCED 3 programmes). The curricular concept of parallel general and vocational education at the ISCED 3 level thus enables high vertical and also substantial horizontal transferability of initial formal education, and the high vertical transferability makes clear why participation in IVET at the ISCED 3 level is so high in the Czech Republic (pupils and their parents prefer the possibility of gaining an initial vocational qualification here, if they do not loose the possibility of subsequent tertiary education directly or after completing follow-up studies to get a maturita certificate).[67]
This is why including ISCED3 level to the description and analysis (i.e. to draw the border between obligatory and post-obligatory education, and not between initial and further or secondary and post-secondary education[68]) is more appropriate for the system applied in the Czech Republic.

[65] SAs there is no final exam in primary education, all pupils reach the primary education level.
[66] From a legal point of view the maturita exam achieved in any type of ISCED 3A programme is equal to and enables access to all tertiary education programmes (both ISCED 5B and ISCED 5A types).
[67] From the pedagogical point of view this concept brings the advantage of enabling pupils interested in studying or those successful at school, to choose a programme with maturita (whether with a wide or narrower profile), and those more practically focused to choose a practically focused VET programme (whether with a certificate of apprenticeship or with the maturita certificate), while neither of these possibilities would disqualify the other one in further development of an educational or professional career. For example grammar school-leavers do not have to continue studying at tertiary level, but may train in a vocational field and those who originally did not choose an academic path can decide for that later.

As there is a well operating initial formal education in the Czech Republic as well as IVET for all levels and fields of initial qualifications within its framework, further education is always a supplement here, either for providing a "second chance" or for maintenance, development and updating or modification of initial qualification achieved previously, provided generally within initial education.
A parallel concept of initial general and vocational education at the ISCED 3 level in the Czech Republic ensures the following:

– There are no remarkable problems with illiteracy or functional illiteracy amongst adults,
– Both "second chance" education and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic (i.e. for Czech Republic citizens and foreigners-residents) have a particularly compensational function (everybody enters adult life with initial qualification and the basis for LLL),
– With the exception of regulated occupations and other regulated activities the choice of necessary input qualification and the choice of the method of its possible in-career extension or modification are left to employers (including the self-employed), and individuals' further education and learning thus runs to a remarkable extent – according to the needs of the learners and/or the requirements of their present or potential employers – in all suitable forms (as practical informal learning and/or non-formal education, in-company or external in other companies or in various educational institutions or as formally recognized CVET).

This overall situation, as far as the concept and implementation of initial and further education is concerned, is in principle convenient, and if there is something that needs to be changed, it is particularly in relation to the efforts for mobility of the workforce or people preparing for employment in Europe or a wider international extent (the European concept of LLL and its tools and the corresponding tools at national level, i.e EQF and NQFs, ECVET and ECTS with national equivalents as well as Europass, Ploteus, etc.). The curricular reform, in operation since the early 1990s, generally focused on transition to a competence-based education and training and also to the provision of an increased autonomy to schools and other providers of formal education (and particularly VET) of all non-tertiary levels,[69] is thus linked to the development and implementation of the NQF

[68] Particularly the latter specification is not suitable for systems like the one operated in the Czech Republic. The ISCED 4 level includes here besides the follow-up study for ISCED 3C programme leavers, see the diagram above, also regular programmes of continuous vocational education and training (CVET) for maintenance, development and updating or modification of initial qualifications of the same level already achieved.

[69] This reform is a part of changes that had to be done particularly in the field of education and its functional links to qualified work and employment in connection with the overall transformation process after 1989. On the other hand the – basically pragmatic – functional approach to initial and further education as preparation for assertion in the whole complex of individual's roles is older and has characterised the long-term development of education at least since the reform pedagogy era in the first half of the 20th century. The initiatives to establish equivalence between the VET and the general (academic) education at both ISCED 3 and ISCED 5 levels, completed in the 1940s and 1950s, also have their origin in that period. Vocational education itself has a tradition of more than 200 years at tertiary level and 150 years at non-tertiary level as it corresponds with the industrial character of the Czech countries already in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy times.

and other tools necessary for the integration of the Czech Republic into the growing European area of lifelong learning in both its dimensions (LLL and LWL). Nevertheless, due to the overall situation in the Czech Republic, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning has above all the character of enabling learners to be offered other and shorter pathways to the same formally recognised qualifications (learning outcomes) as in the programmes of regular initial and continuing vocational education.

Functional types of formally recognised education in the Czech Republic

The definition of formal education from a technical point of view is essential within LLL, as non-formal education and informal learning are defined as being complementary to it. The only negative comparison is the absence of some of its features (non-formal education by the absence of certificates with nationwide validity, informal learning by the absence of educational programmes).
What is essential in this connection is that a great deal of relevant education/learning of both youths and adults in the Czech Republic has to be compared with the formal learning when this definition is used (and not that of ISCED '97). With this definition being applied, the formal education/learning in the Czech Republic can be sub-divided as follows:

1 Initial formal education and training in the strict sense of the word (according to the ISCED '97 definition), consisting (within ISCED levels 1+2) of 9 years of compulsory schooling (normally at the age of 6 to 15 years), leading to basic general education (ICED 2A), and the post-obligatory general (ISCED 3A) or technical (ISCED 3A) or vocational (ISCED 3A or 3C) upper secondary education, in turn leading to complete secondary education in programmes ending with the Maturita examination (ISCED 3A) or to secondary education with or without an apprenticeship certificate in programmes completed by the final examination (ISCED 3C), which can be followed by non-university (ISCED 5B) or university (ISCED 5A) tertiary education, directly in the case of graduates of ISCED 3A programmes, indirectly in the case of graduates of ISCED 3C programmes who need to initially pass an extension course completed by the Maturita examination (ISCED 4A);
2 "Second chance" formal education and training (for drop-outs and early school leavers but also for re-entries aimed at proceeding to a higher-level qualification than the acquired initial one), enabling out-of-school people aged 15 years or more to attain the same qualifications as those which are usually attained within the "first chance" initial formal education and training;
3 Formally recognised CVET of all levels and fields, covering regular CVET programmes designed for modifications or changes of the acquired initial qualification at the same level (specialisation or extending, refreshing, upgrading, innovation programmes, etc.,

or retraining programmes aimed at attaining a completely different full qualification);

4 So-called retraining courses, organised by labour offices for unemployed and other registered job applicants and leading mostly to various partial qualifications which are supposed to be necessary for or useful to their (re)integration into the labour market;

5 So-called normative education, that is formally recognised education and training leading to licences which are a prerequisite for carrying-out some regulated activities, separate from or bound to some full qualifications (such as various driver's or welder's licences or engineering inspector's licences, etc.);

6 Formally recognised educational and training programmes provided – for some age groups or independently of age – by several types of accredited schools operating outside the formal education and training system as defined above (sub-paragraph 1), typically for instance the language schools authorised to provide language education leading to the so-called final state examinations or the so-called basic art schools the programmes and outcomes of which can serve as preparation for enrolment to art schools within the formal system but, besides this, can lead to achievements quantified by formal certificates.

All these types of E&T programmes sit side-by-side with the formal learning by virtue of their being both designed and delivered under formally binding legislation and administration conditions stipulated and guaranteed by competent bodies established or accredited by respective state administration bodies of the Czech Republic. The formally binding conditions usually concern their curriculum and expected learning outcomes as well as their mode of delivery (or even teaching/training methods) and procedures for assessing acquired learning outcomes and awarding them by formally recognised certificates. At the level of the whole education system, these formally binding conditions concern regular learning pathways into which particular programmes can be combined (with access and transfer requirements to be met by individuals).

If all the above is absorbed into formal education (according to the criterion of formal completion with a certificate or in some instances the completion of appropriate education defined by the appropriate educational programme), only education without any formally recognised certification (non-formal in that sense) and self-education or learning from experience not backed by any educational or training programme (informal in that sense) obviously remains outside the formal education defined in this way.

The first group would then include various in-company education or educational and/or training courses organised or provided by various educational institutions (including schools) and focused on various general (comprehensive) and not strictly vocational education (e.g. languages, mathematics and science, social science, culture and arts) and practical preparation (for various public and citizen roles and activities as well as for various practical daily activities useful at work and within families and households or in common social contacts, and various leisure activities, sports, hobbies etc.).

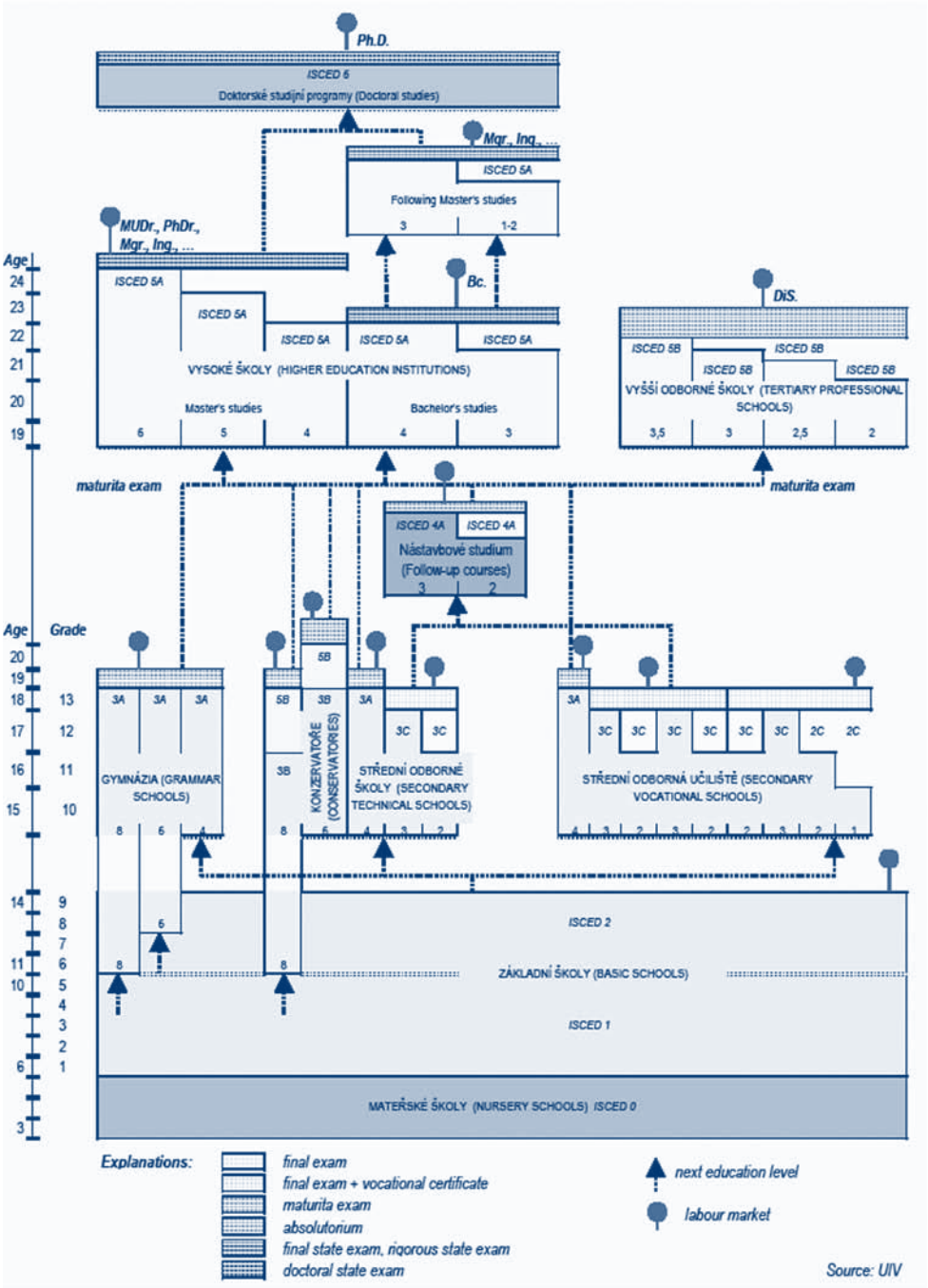
The second group would include self-education and learning by doing or various implicit

experiential learning in the same fields as to its subject- and/or function-based delimitation (but not based on or completely implicit with any educational programmes).
The whole sphere of non-formal education and informal learning has only complementary status in the Czech Republic, as mentioned above, since most of the core-relevant learning has already been included in formal education (in the above defined sense), and when the NQF for complete and partial qualifications is developed and continuously maintained and modified (especially updated), this starting situation will become even more remarkable, i.e. there will be just different paths to formally recognised partial or even complete qualifications (where process of their achievement not only within formal education, but also through non-formal education and/or informal learning will be accepted by the respective regulations related to qualification achievement and/or recognition).
We may add that if the described starting situation does not totally change, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning results will probably have just limited relevance, to shortening the paths to formally recognised qualifications upon:

- The direct recognition of so far formally unrecognised qualification-relevant results of prior learning within formal or equivalent non-formal education and/or informal learning,
- The identification and assessment of various learning results acquired in this way as to their qualification relevance for enabling them to be complemented in an individually tailored educational programme for gaining the respective formally recognised qualification(s).

Both are or may be nevertheless in progress even now – unless it is obstructed by regulations related to regulated occupations and other regulated activities or programmes preparing for their performance – in the types of formal education mentioned above in items 1 through 4 and 6 (it is up to headmasters or other staff of the respective schools or educational institutions, whether they admit an applicant for admission to an educational programme or for assessment and formal recognition of mastering requirements to this or that grade etc., or take him/her to final exams directly or after fulfilment of some other conditions). On the other hand this does not apply, or applies to much lesser extent, to the type of formal education mentioned above in item 5 and in the part of formal educational types mentioned in items 1 through 4 which are subject to special regulations related to regulated occupations and further regulated activities or programmes preparing for their performance. And finally, the present situation is likely to remain even after introduction of the NQF and recognition of prior learning results (at least neither the Act No. 18/2004 Coll. on the Recognition of Vocational Qualifications or the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on Recognition of Further Education Results, introduce any change in this direction).

Appendix 1 The architecture of the Czech educational system



16 FIVE STEPS UP

A how-to guide for getting started with VPL for organisation and individual

ERICA AALSMA, RUUD DUVEKOT & LEX SANOU

Five Steps Up gives you a practical tool that you can use whenever you need to or want to coach a VPL process. *Five Steps Up* is designed for advisors who face VPL issues in their work with companies or organisations: what steps to take and how to make sure that you're not missing important aspects of the process? This guide shows you how to get started with *Five Steps Up*.

What is VPL?

VPL stands for "Valuation of Prior Learning." It is based on the premise that not all learning happens via formal education or organised work-related trainings. Learning can also happen, and in fact most learning does happen, in other places: on the job, at home, at the club, etc. VPL procedures are geared towards identifying the entire package of competencies that a person has already acquired, and acknowledging those competencies in one way or another. The object is to use VPL to give everyone a chance to keep developing in any desired context and to collect and compile the evidence of that development.

Importance of VPL

Putting this vision of "learning and developing within organisations" into practice strengthens the position of personnel and companies in the knowledge economy. At the same time, VPL procedures make the development of the personnel (and their utilization within the organisation) much clearer, thereby generating an encouraging effect on both the organisation and the employees.

What does Five Steps Up do?

Five Steps Up shows you the steps you need to take to embed VPL procedures in the policy of the organisation, and design your VPL procedures, start them and run them. *Five Steps Up* takes you step-by-step through the process you need to follow to make the right decisions in the VPL process.

How to use Five Steps Up?

When you follow *Five Steps Up* from start to finish, the result is an overview of the complete and ideal picture of how VPL procedures can function optimally in your organisation. But as a professional, you know that the real world is far from ideal, and the only certainty is uncertainty. In the course of your discussions you have no doubt discovered that the will to apply VPL procedures differs among companies and among individuals. One organisation may have a very specific need for VPL to address, while the next may be just starting to learn about VPL. Some individuals may have very outspoken ideas about their careers, while others take things as they come. As a professional, it is your job to make an assessment of the next step the individual or the organisation needs to make into the world of VPL. But whatever step that is, you can always take time to recall the steps so far (whether for yourself, or, if necessary, for your discussion partner), which together make up the solid foundation that the next step can be built on. This is what makes Five Steps Up a tool that you can tailor to your own needs. And, paradoxically, the better you get with the tool, the less you need it. In a way, *Five Steps Up* is a tool that is designed to phase itself out.

Stay practical!

The five steps of *Five Steps Up* are set up in sequence, that is, in an order that goes "from point A to point B". But be sure you adjust to the real-world situation in your work, and apply the steps in a different order if you need to.

As you go through all the questions on the cards, it may seem like a VPL process is designed to produce a mountain of paperwork and a vast and complicated checklist for every step of the way. Be aware of this, and try to avoid it, because piles and piles of paperwork can be off-putting and have a demotivational effect. Use *Five Steps Up* as a road map for your discussion, not as a fixed script!
You will find that for many of the issues addressed in *Five Steps Up*, smaller companies in particular do not have everything set out "perfectly" on paper. A lot of knowledge is in the boss's head, or if not in his then one of his employees'. This is why we recommend that you don't show the cards to your discussion partner too quickly; that could create the wrong impression, and ultimately work against you. Go with the knowledge and ideas of the people in the company, even those not on paper, and use the cards as a checklist. In essence, be as flexible with this tool as you are with your discussion partner.

Five Steps Up ..... in your organisation!

The organisation
Step 1
The Climate

Key question:
Is the organisation sufficiently aware of the essential nature of learning within the organisation?
Is there enough of a basis to start working with valuation of previously acquired competencies?

- Does the board and management endorse the importance of learning and training for the achievement of the organisational objectives? Is there regular communication on this issue?
- Is there an education/training policy for all employees? Check whether:
  - a vision of learning and training has been formulated;
  - learning and training is embedded in the personnel policy;
  - learning and training is directly linked with the organisation's market strategy.
- Are the personnel encouraged to develop in the direction the organisation desires? Check whether:
  - a clear course has been set out/is being followed, and whether there are plans available for the coming years;
  - the demand for personnel, for today and in the future, is formulated in terms of competencies and levels;
  - the personnel are offered access to "learning" with the support of the organisation.
- Is there a clear vision of the certification of employees within the organisation, and is there sufficient insight into the procedures and options to certify or qualify?
- Does the organisation use certification to increase the deployability of the personnel?

The organisation
Step 2
The Focus

Key question:
Is there a sufficient view, among both the organisation and the employees, of the competencies to be developed in relation to the objectives those competencies are intended to help reach?
Is there sufficient insight into the costs involved in learning and training?

- Has the organisation mapped out some or all of the following elements? Check whether:
  - the organisation has mapped out the desired competencies for the achievement of the business goals;
  - the organisation has a picture of the potential of the active personnel in relation to the business goals;
  - the organisation has an insight into the costs involved in certifying and training/retraining personnel.
- Has an analysis been made in response to the question of how much board and management wish to invest (time/money) into the upgrading/certification of the competencies of the personnel?
- Does the labour organisation have a plan for specifying the organisational vision for personnel, both in terms of content and method (communication)?

The organisation
Step 3
The Preparations

Key question:
Are sufficient preparations being made for the launch of VPL processes in the organisation?

- Does the organisation have profiles available for every position? Does each profile also give an indication of the roles that the position-holder fills?
- Are the goals that the organisation wishes to achieve with VPL set out on paper, and are they accessible to all personnel?
- Are there tools available that employees can use to map out their own experiences and expertise by means of documentary evidence (portfolio)? Are there people in the organisation who know the ways to collect documentary evidence for the portfolio, and can they get these methods across to others?

- Is there a view of the options for external support for the engagement of tools, advising and financing?
- Can the same be said for the options for certification and upgrading?
- Are the supervisors willing to work with the portfolio? Do they know which people can function as role models for the organisation?
- Does the organisation know how many people, and which, it wants to start a VPL process with?

The organisation
Step 4
The valuation procedure

Key question:
Is the procedure sufficiently clear to everyone involved?
Have the standards for evaluation been properly communicated to every employee involved?

- Is the organisation capable of determining at the outset whether a person already meets the set requirements? What external requirements are used in making this determination?
- Has the organisation set an evaluation protocol for the evaluation of portfolios, and does it communicate this protocol clearly to the employees? Does it also indicate the external parties the organisation works with?
- Does the organisation clearly establish which persons are involved in this procedure and what their roles are?
- Does the organisation make sure that all people involved are adequately facilitated in performing their role and task in VPL procedures? Check whether:
  - the organisation holds development meetings with the employees;
  - the organisation can coach employees in portfolio-making;
  - the organisation is capable of evaluating documentary evidence.
- Does the organisation identify which trainings and other development opportunities are available within and/or outside the organisation?

The organisation
Step 5
The Feedback and look ahead

Key question:
Has the application of VPL processes resulted in the desired effects for the whole organisation?
Should goals and tools be adjusted for future processes?
Is there a view to the potential for using VPL in the future?

- Do people within the organisation evaluate whether the upgrading/certification process has contributed to the achievement of the organisational goals? What is the ultimate return in relation to the desired return?
- Do people in the organisation evaluate with the persons involved what the results of the process have been for the individuals and the organisation?
- Are people in the organisation communicating to the persons not directly involved what the results of the process have been for the individual subjects and the organisation?
- Are the process and the results officially documented in the POP?
- Is the cooperation with any external parties documented?
- Has the organisation gained insight in to potential for VPL procedures in the future?

Five Steps Up ..... for yourself!

The individual
Step 1
The Climate

Key question:
Is the employee sufficiently aware of the essential nature of learning within the organisation? Is there enough of a basis among co-workers and elsewhere in the organisation to start working with valuation of previously acquired competencies?

- Does the employee have a perspective on his own role and position on the labour market? Check whether:
  - he can indicate why the opportunity for lifelong learning is important to him;
  - he can indicate why learning within this organisation is important;
  - he can indicate why learning is important for his individual career;
  - he can indicate why collecting documentary evidence of what he can do is important from a career perspective.
- Is the employee's social environment one that is receptive to learning?
- Is the employee prepared to invest in himself?
- Does the organisation encourage ongoing development on the part of the employee?
- Is the employee capable of reflecting on his own career and planning his next moves? Is it clear within the organisation who the employee can go to on these issues?

The individual
Step 2
The Focus

Key question:
Does the employee have a sufficient view of the competencies to be developed in relation to the objectives those competencies are intended to help reach, both for the organisation and the employee himself?
Does the employee have a good insight into the costs involved learning and training?

- Does the employee have tools available to help him gain insight into his own competencies?
- Does the employee have insight into the commitment (time/financial) involved in upgrading/certifying his competencies? Can he get this information relatively easily?

– Does the employee have attractive prospects in mind that he wishes to achieve with his efforts?

The individual
Step 3
The Preparations

Key question:
Are sufficient preparations being made for the launch of VPL processes in the organisation?

– Does the employee know his job profile, and does he know the documents that describe the goals the organisation wishes to achieve using VPL processes?
– Does the employee know how to work with a portfolio, does he understand its purpose and does he endorse the usefulness of a portfolio? Does he also know who to go to for advice?
– Can the employee express whether he wants to participate in a VPL process and why?

The individual
Step 4
The valuation procedure

Key question:
Is the procedure sufficiently clear to the employee?
Have the standards for evaluation been properly communicated to every employee involved?

– Does every employee know the requirements he has to meet? Is the communication on the requirements clear and transparent?
– Is the employee aware of each step in the evaluation procedure?
– Is the employee willing to pursue the required and requested supplemental education called for as a result of the evaluation?

The individual
Step 5
The Feedback and look ahead

Key question:
Did the completion of the VPL process have the desired effect?
Should goals and tools be adjusted for future processes?
Is there a view to the potential for using VPL in the future?

- Is the employee in a position to evaluate whether he has achieved his objectives with the process?
- Does the employee have an insight into potential for VPL procedures in the future?
- Does the employee have a clear understanding of the management and maintenance of the portfolio?

DIRECT ENTRY AS A SCIENCE TEACHER INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN GERMANY

17

URSEL KREH & WOLFGANG KLENK

Introduction

There is a shortage of teachers in schools providing vocational education throughout Germany, particularly in engineering science subjects. The classical path to becoming a vocational school teacher is via a tailored course of study specifically designed for teaching in vocational schools (Lehramt an beruflichen Schulen) or alternatively through an equivalent university study leading to a qualification as a teacher of commercial subjects, or perhaps to a degree in vocational education.
A forecast published by the conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) in 2003, suggested that the demand for vocational school teachers would far outstrip supply as far into the future as 2015. The forecast broke down as follows:
– 4,100 teachers less than required per year on average until 2008
– reducing in the period from 2009 to 2015 to an average shortage of about 3,300.
In order to avoid classes being cancelled due of the lack of teachers, engineers without a classical degree in education are increasingly being employed as science teachers. This "lateral entry" into vocational school positions can be achieved in various ways:
1 Graduates with a technical degree such as electrical or mechanical engineering can apply to do a Referendariat at a vocational school directly after qualifying.
2 University graduates who have already worked for some years in industry or commerce can be accepted directly into the teaching service, and through in-service training programmes can attain appropriate qualifications which qualifies them to teach and be accepted as registered teachers.

This second alternative, direct entry for university graduates with career and life experience into teaching positions in vocational schools is the subject of this article.
In the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg there is currently a special programme aimed at attracting teachers to those subjects where there is an undersupply. Following appointment, without having to complete the otherwise compulsory two year preparatory service, the applicant completes a two year in-service pedagogical training programme with an accompanying reduction in their teaching responsibilities during this time. On completion of this training and being employed for a further year in a probationary capacity the applicant is offered a permanent civil service position.

In the first part of the article, the general issues associated direct entry to the vocational school teaching service will be described, and the second section we will outline the personal experiences of an engineer who gained a teaching position through the use of the direct entry system.

The Baden-Württemberg Model

Advantages of direct entry

The Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs, Youth Affairs and Sport in Baden-Württemberg has, through a special programme, has managed to place university graduates with some years of relevant professional experience in industry and commerce directly into the vocational school teaching service. As a consequence of the decline in the manufacturing sector of the economy and the resultant job losses , many highly qualified, experienced scientists are taking advantage of this opportunity for a career change.
Direct entry candidates work with the students in the classroom giving lessons right from the first day of their training, in part under supervision and in part independently. In parallel to this "on the job training" they can gain also qualifications through in-service training. The direct entry system facilitates schools to recruit and appoint teachers at short notice, and as a result the cancellation of classes is avoided and the current shortage of teachers can be rectified appreciably quicker than would occur if it had to happen solely via 'normal' educational qualification channels.

The high degree of technical knowledge that direct entry candidates bring with them to the teaching profession, and their 'know-how' from industry give rise to high quality lessons that relate to and based on experiences from the world of work. In addition the transfer of knowledge from these new teachers to those with a conventional teaching background is a further bonus to the educational system and indeed to industry and commerce in due course.
The perceived deficiencies of the experienced professional applicants as the consequence of the much-reduced length of training (when compared to a university teaching degree) is more than compensated through their hard-won, well-recognised competence gained by them over the course of their employment and it application in their teaching career.
In a certain sense, it is assumed that the necessary competencies for employment in the teaching profession have been gained informally, and are able to be used without further, or more in-depth training.

Prerequisites for direct entry

In order to be employed as a science teacher at a vocational school using the direct entry path, particular prerequisites must be met:

- A university degree in one of the subjects they are required to teach;
- Some years of relevant up to date professional experience gained following completion at university studies;
- Maximum age 41.

In addition the applicants must show that they have the potential to be good teachers and this is gauged through the measurement of their competence in their subject area and their

capacity for empathy and assertiveness. They must for instance be able to stand up and speak in front of a large audience without fear or inhibition, and of course they must be able to get on well with young people and be able to develop a good rapport with them.

Possible areas of service for direct entry candidates

– Vocational Schools for Industry
  Direct entry is possible for university graduates with degrees in mechanical engineering, automotive engineering, energy technology, information technology, media studies, printing technology, nutrition, design, colour and paint technology and photography.
  In the subject areas of telecommunications engineering, interior design, health studies, wood technology and textile technology direct entry is only possible in special cases, if a particular demand in an area arises, and a corresponding position at a school is advertised.
  Direct entry is not possible at the present time for those with degrees in civil engineering or architecture.
– Vocational Schools for Commerce
  Direct entry is possible for those with university degrees in business data processing or computing, from which two school subjects could be derived.
– Vocational Schools for home economics, agriculture and social work
  Direct entry is possible for applicants with university degrees in the areas of bioinformatics, biotechnology and teaching of health care (Pflegepädagogik).

Direct entry teachers with a university degree may be employed as teachers in the upper levels of all types of vocational schools (Berufschule, Berufsfachschule, Berufkollegs, Berufliche Gymnasien und Berufsoberschulen, Fachschulen).

The Application Procedure

Direct entry applicants have to apply in the first instance to the regional administrative authority. They have to complete an on-line application form and send it in accompanied by the required application documentation. After acceptance of the application, the applicant is registered in the state wide direct entry applicants' list. This is a basic prerequisite for participation in the teacher placement procedure.
The majority of positions are advertised by the schools themselves. After registration in the direct entry applicants' list, the applicant can respond directly to advertisements by schools for vacant teaching positions.

Proof of subject competence; updating competence

An applicant must show that he or she has met the standardised minimum study course requirements for at least two of the subjects offered at the vocational school.
In the case that subject knowledge is insufficient, it is the responsibility of the individual

to rectify any shortcomings by either further studying the particular subject or gaining the necessary expertise in some other fashion.

Selection of applicants

Appointment depends on aptitude, ability, and subject competence; in the case of positions advertised by particular schools additional special aptitudes or qualifications of the applicant may be taken into account.
An extensive job interview is held during which the applicant will be assessed for his or her basic aptitude for the vocational school teaching service.
In the course of this interview, there is an aptitude-screening test. The applicant has to sit in on two lessons and then give a lesson him or herself in the presence of the school head master. This provides an assessment of personality, and not of subject knowledge – it is assumed that this is either existent, or can be gained.

In-service training and examination content

In-service training lasts for two years. Direct entry candidates work with the students in the classroom giving lessons right from the first day of their training, in part under supervision and in part independently. The number of contact hours taught independently increases successively compared to the hours under instruction during the first three half years of their employment. There is a strong coaching element to the training and each trainee has a mentor assigned to him or her. Parallel to this, there are one to one and a half days per week spent in a state seminar for didactics and teacher training which satisfies teacher training requirements.
In the fourth half year the direct entrant gives only independent lessons and sits the teacher training examination.

The content of the in-service training examination is:
- Pedagogy and pedagogical psychology;
- School legal framework and school organisation;
- Teaching (general didactics): The examination in this subject consists of a lesson plan for a teaching contact hour, and the sitting in on the lesson by the director of examinations and a subject teacher;
- Specific subject teaching (subject didactics) in the subject to be taught. Knowledge of the subject itself is not examined, but rather the ability to communicate it.

After these two years the direct entrant has to prove himself by giving independent lessons for a full year. On completion of the two year training programme, the successful passing of the examination, the one year probation and the satisfying of other legal civil service requirements the candidates will be admitted to the civil service as qualified teachers, This teaching qualification to teach in vocational schools is recognised in all states of Germany.

Summary
Direct entry into the teaching service is based to a large degree on recognition of the competence and personality of the applicant. It is of note that in the aptitude test, knowledge of the subject is not evaluated, but rather criteria such as charisma, composure, assurance, a relaxed attitude, and natural authority are sought.
A further important aspect of the employment procedure is to be seen in the recognition of life and professional experience, but it is equally important to note that it is not just the experience that it recognised but rather the ability of the candidate to transmit the knowledge to the students. Life and professional experience is to be understood here as encompassing all competencies gained, both formally and informally. In the procedure described, the applicants can prove that they have gained the necessary competence required to teach. How this competence is acquired is of no relevance.

The model in practice – an individual case study

The following is a report on the Baden-Württemberg special model seen through the eyes of an engineer who changed her career path and entered the teaching profession. During the course of this casestudy we will refer to the individual as Barbara which is not her real name.
Barbara is married with two children aged seven and nine. She worked for ten years as a software developer for a large firm and then at 40 years of age decided on a career change. While undergoing a development programme to become a registered trainer, she realised that she had certain traits, abilities and aptitudes which she felt would make her a good teacher. Her first thoughts were to qualify as a trainer in adult education, and become self-employed. A special model released by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Youth Affairs and Sport at that time which offered the possibility of direct entry into vocational school teaching, presented her with an alternative prospect. The model allows for in-service qualifications to be gained, leading to a qualified science teacher in vocational schools with full pay from the start. Barbara decided to embark on this path.

As a first step she applied to the regional administrative authority in Stuttgart for registration purposes, and subsequent to this she applied in response to a job advertisement, directly at a vocational school in Stuttgart. The advantage of a direct application was that she could determine if she wanted to work at that particular school and what subjects she should take on. In the case of a placement from the centre itself she would have been sent to 'any' school, and employed for any of the subjects within her competence.
Barbara was invited by the school to go for a job interview. The purpose was to assess her aptitude for the teaching service. In the course of discussions she had to sit in on two classes, and then in the presence of the school's headmaster, give a lesson herself. During

that lesson her personality was assessed and not her knowledge of the subject she was teaching. It is assumed that the knowledge is existent or can be gained. After this part of the test the interview continued.
The school then made her an offer of employment, and after she had had a second interview at the regional administrative authority, the position was confirmed. She was to teach Electro-technology and Information technology.
The first year was a trial year but there was little time for reflection as she was thrown in at the deep end. It began for Barbara at the start of a school year with a three day 'crash-course' in pedagogy, psychology and lesson planning. At the same time lessons had to be prepared: she was given a timetable, a syllabus and a breakdown of when in the year subject material was to be taught, and was put in front of a class immediately.

During the training period, the Barbara was allocated a mentor for each subject; other teaching colleagues give additional support. The headmaster and the head of department gave feedback on her teaching after each of their visits to her classes (about four times each half year).
Right from the start, a full wage was paid; even the time spent in training was remunerated..
During the first three half years, Barbara attended a seminar on didactic methods for her subjects one day a week. The content of these seminars were later tested in the examination:
- Pedagogy;
- School legal structure and school organisation;
- Teaching (the examination for this part consisted of producing a lesson plan for a lesson that was then viewed by the examiner and a specialist in the subject).

As well as the topics mentioned above, the subjects being taught were assessed, not for expert knowledge, but rather for the ability to convey it. The examiners were the lecturers who had taught the seminar.

The examinations were all oral, and were held over many months. They occurred mostly in the fourth half-year; the preparation for them however began for Barbara at the beginning of the second school year (on completion of her trial period). In addition to the examination results, there is an assessment by the headmaster which counts three times as much in the final grading.
Currently the examination has only to be sat; it is evaluated together with the assessment of the headmaster. The marks have no influence on the acceptance or otherwise into the teaching service. The trainee teacher has his or her position confirmed during the trial year i.e. before the exam takes place, and would only in exceptional circumstances be given notice to leave.

It should be noted that this arrangement will probably be altered so that an exam pass mark of at least four will be required in future. The examination will be able to be re-sat once.

After successfully completing the year, Barbara had to complete a full of year of independent full-time teaching. This final probationary period marks the end of training and Barbara will have a qualification recognised in all states of Germany as a vocational school teacher. She had already made written application at the start of her training (as is necessary) to be appointed to the civil service and can be granted this promotion after these three years in total have been completed.

Summary

Barbara is enthusiastic about her new career. She can utilise her life experience, her expert knowledge, her personality (charisma, composure, empathy, ability to listen, energy) and find space for her creativity. The examples she uses in class spring from the realities of business life, her experience allows her to be in full command of the situation and that makes her dealing with her students more confident and sure and more importantly of greater benefit to her students when they move into the work place. Her professional experience is further augmented as she also imparts to her students the pedagogical and psychological knowledge she has attained through daily experience as a mother and parent of two small children.

Apart from a secure job with good prospects for the future, Barbara appreciates the fact that she can pass on her own values and through that has the possibility to take a hand in forming today's youth.
In addition, she has got to know the diversity of vocational education on offer in vocational schools, and no longer worries so much about the educational chances for her own children.

AUTHORS

Erica Aalsma works for an advisory business company for corporate education *EMC leren in bedrijf* (= the business of learning). Chaning the workplace into a place of learning is one of the utmost motives in Erica's work. Erica's trackrecord consists mainly of innovative projects and extensive certifying projects in education. Innovation and communication are inseparable for her. She performs in projects on the cutting edge of education and business life. She is an advocate for the "do-didactics", in which vocational education and the business community work closely together in innovative ways. Since Octbober 2006 she has lead a separate business unit within *EMC Leren in bedrijf* that focuses on developing 'learn & work companies' in close cooperation with educational partners.

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Jens Bjørnåvold is working in the Brussels office of European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Employed by the centre since 1996, his main focus has been on research and analysis related to transparency and recognition of qualifications and validation of informal and non-formal learning. In recent years he has been working on questions related to learning outcomes and how this influences education and training policies and practices, for example in the form of national and sectoral qualifications frameworks.
In the period 2000-2005 Bjørnåvold worked for the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. During this period he was closely involved in developing the Copenhagen-Maastricht process in vocational education and training, the Europass and the European Qualifications Framework.
Before entering the services of Cedefop and the European Commission, Bjørnåvold worked as a researcher and research co-ordinator in various Norwegian research organisations. His work concentrated on the link between education and work, with a particular emphasis on the role of adult education and training. He has published a number of reports, articles and books on these themes.

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by networks of schools providing the education service for adults, she took part as expert in A Study on the Implementation and Development of an ECVET system for apprenticeship (ECVET Reflector) as well as in A New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. She is working as the national coordinator of the TT-net network CR.

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Apart from this professorship he works for the Foundation Empowerment centre EVC as VPL-advisor. This foundation focuses on VPL for specific targetgroups: minorities, drop-outs, unskilled workers.
He also chairs the Foundation European Centre Valuation Prior Learning. This foundation focuses on stimulating research on VPL and dissemination of results of VPL-projects in Europe. He was projectleader of the VPL1 (2002-2005) and VPL2 (2005-2007) Leonardo-projects.
From 2000-2005 he was managing director of the Dutch "National Knowledge centre on VPL".
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Luca Ferrari is a junior researcher in the Formative Design and Evaluation Unit at SCIENTER, Italy. He has a degree in Education and Training Sciences at the University of Bologna with a specialization in Design of Continuous Training actions. He has participated in several projects in the field of Vocational Education and Training, among which 'TRACE' (Transparence Competence in Europe), 'TUTOR-RING' (Tutors For European Sandwich Course Training), 'SLOOP' (Sharing Learning Objects in an Open Perspective) and 'IPERTOOLS' (Innovative proposal for an Experience of Research Training for Over 50 Organization of Labour and Solidarity).

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Karen van Hoeij has studied at the teacher training college in Nijmegen for four years. During her study she also lived in Belfast for a short period. There she attended several courses at St. Mary's University College. Now she is an English teacher for secondary education in The Netherlands. She has worked at various schools and has taught pupils of different levels. She also has experience working at the Human Resource Centre of one of the largest supermarkets in The Netherlands. She co-developed and presented the research method for the cross-case analysis of VPL-2.

Ruud Klarus is professor at HAN University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. HAN is a University of Applied Sciences with over 20,000 students and 2,000 staff.
The research themes of Ruud Klarus are: developing competencies in authentic vocational contexts, workplace learning and assessment of competencies, competence development of teachers and teachertraining students in professional development schools. He wrote his PhD thesis on assessment of competencies and is still involved in developing and research projects on VPL.
An important part of the research is carried out in close cooperation between teachers and student teachers together with researchers within the professional development schools. The character of the research reaches from survey to case research and from design to action research.

Students are part of the educational and research activities. Actually two research projects focus on the quality of workplace learning within professional development schools.

Wolfgang Klenk, with a degree in Education, has been the programme director of the Volkshochschule Stuttgart for many years, trainer/expert in CH-Q (a Swiss programme for vocational qualifications), leadership experience in the profession and in honorary positions, works also as a tutor in the area of his core work: Quality development/development of organisations, competency management (using CH-Q), experience over several years in advising both at the institutional and personal level and with facilitation of decision making processes for individuals and institutions.

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Ursel Kreh chose to become self-employed after having worked for many years as a planning engineer in a telecommunications firm. Extensive experience in a variety of leadership and managerial positions as well as sound advanced training are the basis for her currently successful work as a freelance tutor in adult education with emphasis on the management of competence using CH-Q, on job application training and on computer instruction. Her collaboration in the VPL2 project was arranged under contract to the Volkshochschule Stuttgart.

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Greg Scanlon is a full-time student and a part-time Project Researcher at the University of Limerick currently researching the incidence of recognition/validation of prior learning in Ireland. His primary research interest is in the area of the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education and since October 2004 has been investigating the potential of technology to assess conceptual learning. The purpose of this research is to better enable self-directed learning both as a means of making learning in general more enjoyable as well as encouraging greater participation in lifelong learning. He teaches an undergraduate course on ICT in Education at the University of Limerick.

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He worked as engineer and informatics teacher at a vocational training centre and worked in Africa and the West Indies as development worker for FAO. From 1989-2002 he has worked for Stoas, a Dutch support organization for the educational, rural and agricultural sector. He has developed and managed national and European, mostly innovative, R&D projects in the field of learning, VPL, ICT.
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He developed several European projects, amongst others the ESF-EQUAL project 'Scouting your Competencies' in the army.

Lina Vaitkute is researcher at the Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training In Lithuania. This centre was established in 29 February 1996 by the order of the Minister of Education and Science. The activity of the Centre is coordinated by the Governing Board. Currently 24 permanent employees work in the Centre; annually the Centre accepts not less than 300 supernumerary employees. Its aims are to ensure methodological provision to vocational, college-type schools and colleges; to contribute to the increasing of employment and effective integration to the European Union in the areas of youth vocational training and human resources development, consolidating efforts of various institutions.
Anett Walter is certified psychologist, mainly focused on occupational and organisa-

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Managing European Diversity in lifelong learning

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that initial education is no longer enough for a lifetime social-economic career. It is more important to develop your competencies (skills, knowledge, attitude & ambitions) throughout life by realizing that 'your glass is already half full', and by understanding that everyone always learns
in every possible learning environment: formal (school) and non-formal or informal environments (working place, at home).

The Leonardo-project "Managing European diversity in lifelong learning (VPL2)" aimed at strengthening the use of valuation & validation of non-formal and informal learning for both summative and formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the validation of non-formal and informal learning by individuals
and organisations, supported by a more demand-led and customer-oriented learning system.
More than 200 case studies were analysed in 11 European countries representing the main European learning cultures: Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The analysis showed that this goal was served by working both top-down as well as bottom-up. The bottom-up approach made the specific needs for lifelong learning on the labour market in different sectors visible. The 'top-down' data showed the various services national and sectoral learning systems are already offering to or designing for the potential users, for example the modern, lifelong learning workers.

The VPL-evidence in this project shows the diversity in lifelong learning across Europe indicating where the common features prevail and where one learning culture can learn from another. The main result of the project is the creation of role models in the workplace; showing that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country
and culture; and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the valuation & validation-principles.

This book was written by the partners in this project. This project has been carried out with the financial support of the Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Commission.

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