Validation of Prior Learning strengthens lifelong learning for the learner

THE LEARNER AT THE CENTRE

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UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Institute
for Lifelong Learning

VPL

VIA University
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European Centre
for the Development
of Vocational Training

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2ND VPLBIENNALE

Series VPL-Biennale nr. 6
August 2017

Houten/Aarhus
European Centre Valuation of Prior Learning/ VIA University College

Colofon

Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.

Paolo Freire (1970)

Preface

Throughout history, people have always prepared thoroughly for strengthening and practising their skills in a profession; this has been true from the Middle Ages right through the industrial age. And this is no different in the present learning society. The prevailing systems of professional training and education do require adjustment and even innovation, because they are part of the changing socio-economic and socio-cultural landscape. Where once upon a time, simply completing a qualification was enough to gain and hold onto your place in society and in the labour market, in ever more cases this no longer holds. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to the learning society flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable in today's labour market or in other words, productive citizenship. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, labour organizations, schools/universities, social partners and legislative and regulatory bodies are bound together closely in the social and economic structure. These ties have always been present, but never before in history has the individual – or the citizen – got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in 'the learning society'. It is the systematic process of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on – metaphorically speaking - 'my' own demand. And since learning is ever more connected to social success, this focus on individualised control by means of VPL is the main feature of the changing learning paradigm in the present context; a paradigm that is centred around individual choices and competence-based and outcomes-directed lifelong learning (Duvekot, 2006).

VPL is more and more embedded in the primary processes of learning and working. VPL will be a stimulus and 'guide' for sustainable personal development, in both processes. Moreover, it will be aiming at creating shared ownership by citizens and organisations of their competency-based development.

The **mission** of *the 2nd VPL Biennale* is to share information, knowledge, ideas and visions on *the practice of VPL: the learner in the centre.* The learner is understood as the volunteer, the young one, the older one, the worker, the jobseeker, the teacher/trainer, the employer, the trade unionist, etc.

The central theme of the 2nd VPL Biennale focuses on the alluring perspective of the integration of VPL in running processes and in systems of learning and working. It's time for practising VPL.

The crucial question to be answered in this respect is how to further implement VPL as an effective method in lifelong learning perspectives, being able to integrate all citizens effectively and quality-assured into lifelong learning strategies at all levels and in all environments and contexts?
This question relates to priority areas in the practice of sectors, regions, organisations and citizens, related to enhancing lifelong learning perspectives and to fostering social and economic progress by:

a. Integrating VPL in all learning levels and environments.
b. Offering concrete and real learning opportunities to all citizens, with a special focus on underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners.
c. Strengthening the levels of professionalism in VPL-functions to be able to cope with learner-driven and learning outcome-based lifelong learning.

The 2nd VPL Biennale was hosted by VIA University College in Aarhus, Denmark on April 25-27, 2017. The aim was strengthening the platform for policy makers, practitioners, users, researchers and other stakeholders that are involved in further developing and implementing VPL-systematics and -processes.
The 2nd VPL Biennale focused on sharing information, knowledge, ideas and visions on VPL and about the creative process of learning from each other's successes, problems and solutions in 'the VPL-world'.

Finally, as a kind of disclaimer the reader should be aware that the English in this publication might have been formulated in UK- or American-English, depending on the origin or orientation of the author(s).

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Content

Introduction

Affordance of the learner's agency

Ruud Duvekot, Dermot Coughlan and Kirsten Aagaard

Where once upon a time, simply completing a qualification was enough to gain and hold onto your place in society and on the labour market, in ever more cases this no longer holds. Nowadays, flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep people viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors in the learning arena: individuals, schools, employers, assessors and learning guides, universities, authorities, trade unions, job agencies, etc. These actors are all tied together closely in the modern learning society. These ties have always been present, but never in history the learner got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in the learning society. And it's the process of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) that offers a very big 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities for all, regardless of one's social status and cognitive level. And since learning is ever more connected to social success, this means that VPL can assist all target groups in focusing on their strengths within the context of the learning society. VPL recognizes and values what people have learned so far in their lives. The VPL-process aims at linking these learning experiences to further development steps for everyone in their given context. In this perspective, VPL is not designed to highlight the lack of competences but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing competences; in other words, rather than being half empty, VPL takes the view that 'someone's glass is already half filled'.

VPL makes it possible for a person to self-value her/his learning experiences and competences, making an inventory of personal richness and allowing those experiences to be valued and recognized in a social context. Recognizing and placing value on competences is known as *passive* or *summative* VPL. When VPL also stimulates further learning, this is called *dynamic* or *formative* VPL. On top of this, a third form is the reflective form of VPL in which the individual goes through a process of self-valuation:

1. **Summative VPL:** building up a portfolio against a pre-set standard, with a one-dimensional goal; looking for access and exemptions.

2. **Formative VPL**: meeting up with a portfolio to a qualification or occupational standard for deciding on what/where/how to learn further, or formulating a career-step with the portfolio as a starting point (Duvekot, et al, 2014).
3. **Reflective VPL**, takes the whole learning biography of an individual as the focus for building up a portfolio and action plan. Only after this is done, the individual makes a choice: which standard to link to, which stakeholders to address, which learning goal, etc. A high level of (social) reflexivity can be defined by an individual shaping his/her own norms, desires and objectives. It refers to the notion of autonomy of the individual.

The essential difference between these approaches is that in a summative and formative VPL process the focus is on validating someone's development against a pre-set standard. Evidence for such a validation is collected in the form of 'a snapshot of someone's present status quo' through someone's diplomas, certificates, professional products, etc. The outcome of the VPL-process is official recognition for learning accomplishments within a qualification or certificate. The award is captured in exemptions or (sometimes) in full qualifications/certificates.

The formative process goes a step further than summative VPL. The objective is to further develop one's competence) on the basis of learning evidence and validated against a pre-set standard in learning (qualifications, certificates) and/or working (function profiles in systems for human resources management). In this sense, summative VPL can be seen as a part of formative VPL.

The reflective process is quite different from the other two forms. It is geared at enabling individuals to manage their own careers, articulate their own development needs and build up their own competences. Education and vocational training should respond to this, becoming more flexible and demand-driven. Formal systems such as qualification structures and vocational education will then have less of a prescriptive function in terms of personal development, and serve more as a reference framework and repertoire within which there is individual choice. These formal systems retain a function as pegs for defining the direction and level of personal development and the relevant external communication with employers, mediators, referrers, schools, etc.

Validation of Prior Learning is as much a principle as a process, giving true evidence of the transition from the present knowledge society towards the learning society. Society changes to 'a learning society' where the need for a good balance of power between the main stakeholders in society - individuals, organisations and the learning system - is being reshaped and the individual will get a bigger 'say' in designing learning strategies. The main changes of this transition towards more personalised learning can be reflected on various impact levels:
a. Economically, aiming at getting and/or keeping a job (employability),
b. Socially, aiming at motivation, reintegration, self-management of competences and personal development (empowerment),

c. Educationally, aiming at qualification, updating, upgrading or portfolio-enrichment by means of creating output-oriented standards focusing on learning outcomes and learning made to measure,

d. In the civil society, aiming at social activation, voluntary activities, societal awareness & reintegration and citizenship (activating citizenship),

e. On the macro-level, authorities and social partners are responsible for organising the match between these levels by means of legislation, regulations, labour agreements, fiscal policy, training funds, etc.

Crucial in practising VPL is acknowledging the self-managing role of the 'empowered' learning individual in making lifelong learning a reality! The active participation of individuals in decisions about form and content of lifelong learning and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies from work-based or school/university-based is supported by VPL for many perspectives:

1 *… for improving opportunities for empowerment and mobility*: improved empowerment and mobility of individual talents is the most important motivation underlying VPL. It increases the opportunities for the learner in one's public and private life by highlighting the competences she/he already has and how these competences can be deployed and strengthened.

2 *… for creating personalised learning*: improving the match of a learner's richness with the learning system and the social system is essential for the utilisation of VPL. To improve learner's opportunities in life, formal systems in the learning arena and the social systems must be expressed in terms of competences and learning outcomes. These competences and outcomes must in turn be linked to a clear articulation of learning opportunities. The learning system must be receptive, transparent, flexible and demand-led to be able to provide personalised learning approaches.

3 *… for making learning personalised*: the validation of informally and non-formally acquired competences will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the validation of competences can lead directly to an award of or exemptions for qualifications. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The learner will not only want to learn in a personalised learning strategy but will also know better how, what and when to learn, and why she/he is learning.

4 *… for optimising other forms of learning*: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since VPL also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning suits the learner best. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. Validating prior learning experiences inevitably leads to an adjustment of the existing qualifications and human resources management systems.

So, there's a lot to gain with VPL. It can help in various contexts and with different objectives. What is always clear is that VPL is a process that fits any target group in

society: working people, jobseekers, migrants, low-skilled, high-skilled, old and young, etc. It's just a matter of truly putting the learner in the centre of learning processes, not just in terms of written statements but rather in truly affording learner's agency.

The learner at the centre!

This sixth volume of *the Series VPL Biennale* provides more insight in the diverse ways that learners have at their disposal when it comes to making use of their personal learning experiences. Learners are owner of their learning history and are more and more allowed to capitalise on the personal richness that this history holds. That's what Validation of Prior Learning is about:

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

As the companion to the 2nd VPL Biennale in Aarhus, Denmark on April 25-27, 2017, this book provides insight into the many ways for designing and applying VPL across the globe. Enriching articles were written for and presented at this Biennale, demonstrating the international diversity in utilisation of Validation of Prior Learning-systematics. It's a variety that spans Europe's culture of providing VPL-services for creating a learner-centreedness attitude in the member-states of the European Union, the development of lifelong learning strategies in Latin America, UNESCO's kaleidoscope of initiatives to enhance the role of learning for social inclusion and participation, South Africa's search forward with a national strategy for the recognition of prior learning, the next steps taken in personalising learning by shifting from instruction-driven towards learning-driven processes in the USA, the Dutch focus on strengthening this shift by integrating the VPL-process in the process of personalised learning, the Irish and Finnish focus on linking VPL to work-based learning, the Nordic democratising efforts for creating quality-assured linkages between the learning system and the learner, and many more contributions.

The first contribution in this volume by *Madhu Singh* conveys on the issue of organizing the Recognition, Validation and Recognition (RVA) systems in the international debate. Existing empirical findings show that organizing RVA at the national, regional and especially local level is a real challenge for all those involved. Singh presents an approach that examines countries in terms of their specific socio-economic and cultural contexts and takes account of the stakeholder perspectives

in RVA-processes. The outcome of this global enquiry is (1) a framework for organizing RVA at the macro, meso and micro levels and identifying possible problems or obstacles and (2) listing the initial indicators for organizing RVA at the local level, putting the end-users at the centre of the validation process and considering the acceptance and ownership of learners and local groups.

Ernesto Villalba and *Jens Bjørnåvold* discuss the extent to which the values underpinning validation have been accepted and/or internalised at national and European level. Validation of non-formal and informal learning, or the efforts to make visible and value the learning taking place outside formal education, is gradually becoming an integrated part of national education and training and lifelong learning systems in Europe. While most countries now officially state that they aim for the introduction of national validation systems, this is not always translated into practical arrangements on the ground giving citizens access to validation. Policy efforts to introduce validation as a systematic part of national qualifications and skills formation systems now date back more than three decades. The authors want to contribute to a better understanding of the history of this policy field and illustrate how national and European level policy initiatives interact over time.

James Rickabaugh addresses the need for personalising learning. He states that the greatest gift to learners is to give them the tools, insights, and understanding necessary to be in charge of their own learning and lives. When learners understand how to channel their interest and curiosity, they gain the ability to motivate themselves. When learners act on their interests and motivation, they begin to understand the power they possess to support their learning. When learners understand the relationship between effort, strategy, persistence and use of resources to meet learning challenges, they gain the power to control what they learn. And when learners begin to own their learning, they gain a prized possession to protect, build, and maintain for a lifetime. The main question addressed in this contribution is why and how validation of prior supports this notion of 'the Learning Independence Continuum'.

Ruud Duvekot further explores the argumentation of James Rickabaugh by integrating the concepts of VPL and personalised learning. Both concepts concern learning processes which allow learners to allocate themselves an active role within the 'learning society' when it comes to achieving personal, civil and/or social effects. Civil effect means achieving a learning outcome in the context of a particular qualification standard within the education system. Social effect is focused on results which are relevant to job profiles, targets, participation goals, or assignments. Personal impact may mean achieving empowerment, career and study orientation or personal development. While the concept of VPL identifies the potential value of a person's learning experiences and empowers the learner, the concept of personalised learning presupposes that somebody's contribution to the dialogue

with other actors on the meaning, form and content of learning is based on this potential value. Therewith, VPL can be regarded as a precondition for truly activating personalised learning processes in which the learner has a – or even the - voice. As a result, added value of integrating both phenomena or concepts arises when linking the learner's autonomy with the roles of the other actors in learning processes.

Kirsten Aagaard, Per Andersson, Timo Halttunen, Brian Benjamin Hansen and *Ulla Nistrup* explore the question of quality in validation in the Nordic countries[1]. Validation of prior learning (VPL) has been at the Nordic agenda for the past 15–20 years, and validation is well established in the Nordic countries. In this contribution, they present a study of quality work in validation based on the Nordic quality model. The study of quality work employs an interactive approach, which is described briefly. Preliminary results from the on-going processes in three cases from Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are also presented. Finally, some conclusions from the study this far are drawn.

Heidi Bolton, Joe Samuels, Takatso Mofokeng, Omotola Akindolani and Yvonne Shapiro analyse the case of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa, in a system. They sketch the way forward from the already-growing islands of good practice, to a fully operational national RPL system which includes a vision and a five-year implementation plan. Long-term SAQA Partnership Research into an inclusive RPL model, and other short-term research as part of the work of the Ministerial Task Team undergirded this work. The contribution closes with a reflection on the development of RPL in the South African context and its implications for access and redress, learning pathways, and lifelong learning.

Per Andersson discusses the process of validation as being on the one hand a separate activity, and on the other hand an intertwined part of a process of validation *and* new learning. He explains this by considering prior learning as the object of validation and participation in validation as a learning process. To unlock the debate, he identifies three dimensions of this learning process: (1) to learn what you know – that is to develop awareness of your prior learning, (2) to learn what is required in a validation process and (3) to learn how to present your knowledge to get recognition. He argues that perceiving validation as a learning process can help in the further development of practices of validation, but also of the theoretical understanding of these practices.

Yazid Isli reflects on the Spanish experience in validating prior learning on the labour market. In Spain, the Royal Decree 1224/2009, of 17 July 2009, on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience set the ground for all

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1   The Nordic countries are a geographical and cultural region in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic, consisting of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, including the associated territories of Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Åland Islands.

institutions involved in the recognition, validation and accreditation of the competences acquired during people's professional life. Since then, almost all Spanish regions have organised, based on the need of the regional labour markets, at least one call to recognise, validate and accredit competences related to specific professional families. His contribution briefly presents the main characteristics of the Spanish regulatory framework and summarises the results of the experiences undertaken by Spanish regions between 2010 and 2013.

Validating the skills of refugees and immigrants as part of educational and professional guidance is key to their integration into the workforce and society. However, language deficits often stand in the way of learners communicating their relevant experience. The development of *Competence Cards* by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany offers a flexible, low-threshold introduction to competence assessment. The cards are based on tried and tested competence terms. *Martin Noack* and *Kathrin Ehmann* describe in their contribution the *Competence Cards* and analyse their impact within the existing frameworks of competence- and skills-tests. The objective is to identify an innovative approach towards linking the competences of refugees and immigrants to the competences and skills needed in the German labour market.

Arnheiður Gígja Guðmundsdóttir and *Fjóla María Lárusdóttir* reflect on a study on the status of guidance in validation in the Nordic region in the period of April 2014 to August 2015. The purpose of the study was to bring forth a common ground for improving the quality of guidance in Nordic validation systems. According to the results of the study it was quite evident that there are considerable differences in the scope of guidance provided in validation within the Nordic region. The main challenges evolve around the issue that the role of guidance in the validation process has not been clearly identified in addition to the need of increasing knowledge of the validation concept among guidance personnel and other related professionals. Policy makers need to develop clear standards which increase transparency and coordinated cooperation in the process to the benefit of service users.

Deirdre Goggin and *Irene Sheridan* focus on the Irish employer as a partner in the learning design and delivery stages. It places an emphasis on the nature of the relationship between the provider and the employer which is required to support these innovative and responsive learning pathways. The examples considered illustrate the range and extent of partnerships through which courses are developed. This represents the workplace-relevant learning provision of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT). Despite the variety in discipline, level and credits associated with the examples provided, conclusions emerge which are generally applicable to a broad range of course developments.

The contribution of *Anna Gabriela Pérez* and *Francklin Rivas Echeverría* aims at (1) analysing the educational offer in Venezuela by studying the working population,

and (2) identifying occupational categories of the economically active population (EAP) that might open up to validation or certification of learning experiences. This analysis generates valuable input for possible actions to establish and consolidate a Venezuelan National Qualifications Framework that could be linked to formal, non-formal and informal learning practices in the country. For this purpose, the occupation categories of the economically active population in Venezuela that could require validation or knowledge certification, their location in the country geography, and the institutional, normative and legal basis for the creation of a National Qualifications Framework were investigated.

Guus Bremer and *Jo Peeters* elaborate on the contribution of volunteers to the society by sharing their time, knowledge and experience. They not only give and share what they already possess, they also enhance their competences and gain new ones. In this way volunteering doesn't only hold value for society, it also has value for the volunteer's personal and professional development and career. The authors are developing ways to make volunteers and volunteer organisations aware of this added value, and how to get it validated. Easy-to-use tools and methods for the individual volunteer and for the volunteer organisation are presented.

In order to promote new lifelong learning opportunities, one needs practices of assessing and recognizing individuals' competences across different regimes of recognition, in particular business/industry and the formal education system. Recognition by business and industry requires an instrumental perspective and refers to structures and mechanisms of the labour market, assessing the perceived ability of the subject to function in the work situation. Recognition by the educational system is based on documented completion and description of formal curricula, based in an academic setting. *Henning Salling Olesen* explores the challenge of developing a language that can grasp the re-configuration of life experiences and learning that is involved in competence development.

Céleo Emilio Arias Moncada explains historically how higher education in Honduras has evolved according to traditional educational models that have been developing, accumulating and intensifying exclusion and contributing to a systemic inequality in the Honduran society. The relevant question in his contribution is how to integrate prior learning, especially informal and non-formal learning in the educational model of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras (UNAH) to achieve optimal overall inclusion and to lead to redistributive social justice.

Bodil Lomholt Husted focuses on the necessity of acknowledging the complexity of VPL when considering its effectiveness measured against the impact on the benefits for the learner. While addressing the Biennale 2017 theme, 'VPL strengthens lifelong learning for all – The learner at the centre', the contribution targets specifically the learning aspects of the VPL process for the individual. These benefits are envisioned from the perspective of the target group of disadvantaged people.

Manuel Carabias and *Luis Carro* seek to analyse the role of Spanish VET centres in supporting the validation of competences by means of open educational resources. In 2013, the process of validation of competences carried out by those centres, was investigated and assessed. It demonstrated that these centres have certain limitations regarding the procedure itself as an open educational resource. The mission of the centres clearly specifies their role in the validation process, but there are deficiencies concerning the organization procedure, the training process of their staff, and their ability to inform and advise with respect to the procedure.

Anu Moisio and *Marjaana Mäkelä* present the outcomes of an ongoing national project in Finland concentrating on validation of learning occurring at work, implemented in the framework of universities of applied sciences. They outline the challenges the different stakeholders (institutions, students and employers) face when new models to combine work and study are launched within higher education. They also introduce solutions to enhance pedagogical processes to meet the needs of the changing worlds of work. For this purpose, they articulate a new concept for validation of learning occurring at work.

Deirdre Goggin and *Josephine Finn* reflect on the development of an RPL-practitioner network in Ireland. The purpose of the network is to inform and enhance the discussions surrounding the recognition of prior learning (RPL) nationally by bringing practitioners together in a community of practice. The contribution discusses some of the key reflection the authors have from building a RPL practitioner network in Ireland with a top down and bottom up approach for all practitioners across all sectors.

Jeanette Leth reports on the experiences of validating prior learning as seen from students' subjective perspectives in Denmark. In 2007, the Danish Government drew up a strategy on implementing the European policy of lifelong learning. This led to the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), covering non-formal, informal and formal learning. It, amongst others, led to new legal admission requirements to higher education, so that students with no formal upper secondary qualification could be admitted to higher education on the basis of RPL, in relation to their social and cultural background and their life history experience. The focus in this contribution is on the subjective experiences of the RPL-process as well as of being a RPL-student.

Organizing RVA at national, regional and local levels

1

Making RVA the core mechanism of quality lifelong learning systems

Madhu Singh

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a specialized institute and works with 195 countries world-wide. Only a few countries have progressed in a systematic way to implementing their recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) systems. In many countries that have an RVA policy and legislation, true implementation remains limited or it is focussed only on certain institutions and certain fields of study and certain groups. Often implementation excludes the delivery of RVA that reaches significant numbers. There are several studies that concentrate on isolated good practice and project-oriented approaches. Only few countries have undertaken evaluation studies into the successes achieved, problems encountered and long-term impact. Most perspectives on the organization of RVA come from developed countries. Very seldom is a comprehensive and detailed analysis undertaken of the diverse needs and perspectives of local stakeholder groups, such as employers, young people, elected representatives, representatives of training systems, and trade union representatives and how these needs interact with the education, employment and social systems.

This contribution spells out the conceptual approach for organizing RVA. The approach is based on findings documented in literature and in UIL's work on the *Global Observatory of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* with 28 countries and 50 case studies (UIL, 2017). It also draws on UIL's contribution to the *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks* (Cedefop, ETF, UIL, UNESCO, 2017).

1. Conceptualizing the organizational aspects of RVA

Provision of a comprehensive framework for understanding the conditions for organizing RVA in different countries has three aims. The first aim is to highlight the different contexts in which RVA operates such as the nature of skill formation systems, the way education and training are organized, the level of standardisation and the level of practice-based learning in the countries. This contextual awareness is important as it determines policy needs and actions for organizing RVA. Second, the paper aims to promote an understanding of the organization of a holistic RVA

system, reflecting the full range of dimensions and processes in quality: harmonizing social and economic objectives, as well as dealing with quality elements around reliability, validity, standardisation and measurability, as well as flexibility and individualization. Thirdly, this paper aims to adopt a systems approach seeing RVA as a core mechanism of a lifelong learning system, involving improving RVA at all levels –macro, meso and micro – including quality components of structures, processes and outcomes. The paper particularly emphasizes the importance of defining indicators of organizing RVA at the local level. This is important as it is at the local level that the product of recognition processes is developed and RVA practices help the end-user to demonstrate relevant knowledge, skills and competences.

Table 1. Macro, Meso and Micro levels

Macro level	Education and training, skill formation and lifelong learning systems
	Legislation
	Financing
Meso-level	Standardisation and quality assurance approaches
Micro-level	RVA practice

At the *macro-level* a key consideration is to arrive at a rough categorization of countries. The skill formation model is used as a starting point for categorizing countries according to the influence of State and potential for activity from companies and the private sectors and other stakeholders (Pilz, 2017). Where both influences are limited, other stakeholders may be prioritized. On the basis of this understanding it is possible to come to up with a constellation of stakeholders groups. The needs for RVA must be discussed explicitly with the decision makers and with those involved with local stakeholder groups. Political decisions ensuring the legal basis for ensuring RVA initiatives as well as well as the issue of direct funding and financial involvement and the governance of RVA are of crucial importance in understanding how RVA is implemented at the macro level.

Another important dimension to take account of at the macro level is the level of stratification in the education system as this has an influence on the organization of RVA. Stratification is related to issues of tracking, the differentiation and separation of general and vocational education, and the different routes to education and training in a system depending on access, selection and transition mechanisms (Allmendigner, 1989, p. 233). Stratification, can for example affect the status of certain tracks in the education and training system. How can instruments such as qualifications frameworks and recognition mechanisms be effective in developing

flexible progression pathways between, often, separated general and vocational education tracks? How can RVA be an alternative route to qualifications or credits and thus facilitate lifelong learning opportunities of quality? How can RVA be effective in improving the image, status and quality of certain non-formal learning tracks in the education and training system? A case in point is the image of vocational education and training and adult education in several developed and developing countries.

At the *meso-level*, a key consideration is standardisation. Shavit and Müller (2000, p. 443) define standardisation as follows. (…) the degree to which the quality of education needs the same standards nationwide. Variables such as teacher training, school budgets, curricula, and the uniformity of school leaving examinations are relevant in measuring standardisation'. Standardisation is a useful term to understand the *structures, processes and outputs* underpinning the organization of RVA systems. On the input side focus should be on RVA in relation to reference points such as curriculum, qualifications and occupational standards. Input also relates to the level of expertise of RVA personnel. Processes will refer to the role of regulatory agencies, inter-institutional relationships and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Agencies and partnerships are important for ensuring quality processes in the development of standards and maintaining tools and methodologies etc. Certification and the accompanying entitlements relate to the output side and are of particular relevance. For example, they may explain whether RVA forms part of exit-based or entry-based systems. For example, entry-based systems are those where follow-up training institutions devalue certification.

At the *micro-level*, the pedagogical perspective comes into the discussion. Here the focus is specifically on the concrete relevance of the delivery of RVA in education, working life and civil society. Many approaches can be made use of. On the one hand, the learning content or the standards used to compare the individual's evidence of prior learning need to be analysed in relation to learning outcomes. It needs to be ensured that learning outcomes are defined holistically, and not based on a fragmentary and non-integrative understanding. This means, for example, that in addition to technical skills, it is necessary to consider the situational orientation and context. On the other hand, it is also important to consider whether the personnel involved in RVA are able to undertake comprehensive personal career planning processes for the individuals. Furthermore, the methods used and the kind of arrangements made, are all very important. It is also important to ask if the employment system is included at the micro level with the necessary support services. Of importance is also the extent to which institutions and organisations (public or private, workplaces, industry, NGOs and community-based organizations, TVET and educational institutions) employers and employees' associations, have a stake and interest in RVA processes and are able to ensure real benefits in terms of their employability, lifelong learning and personal development.

Figure 1. Organizing RVA at the macro, meso and micro levels
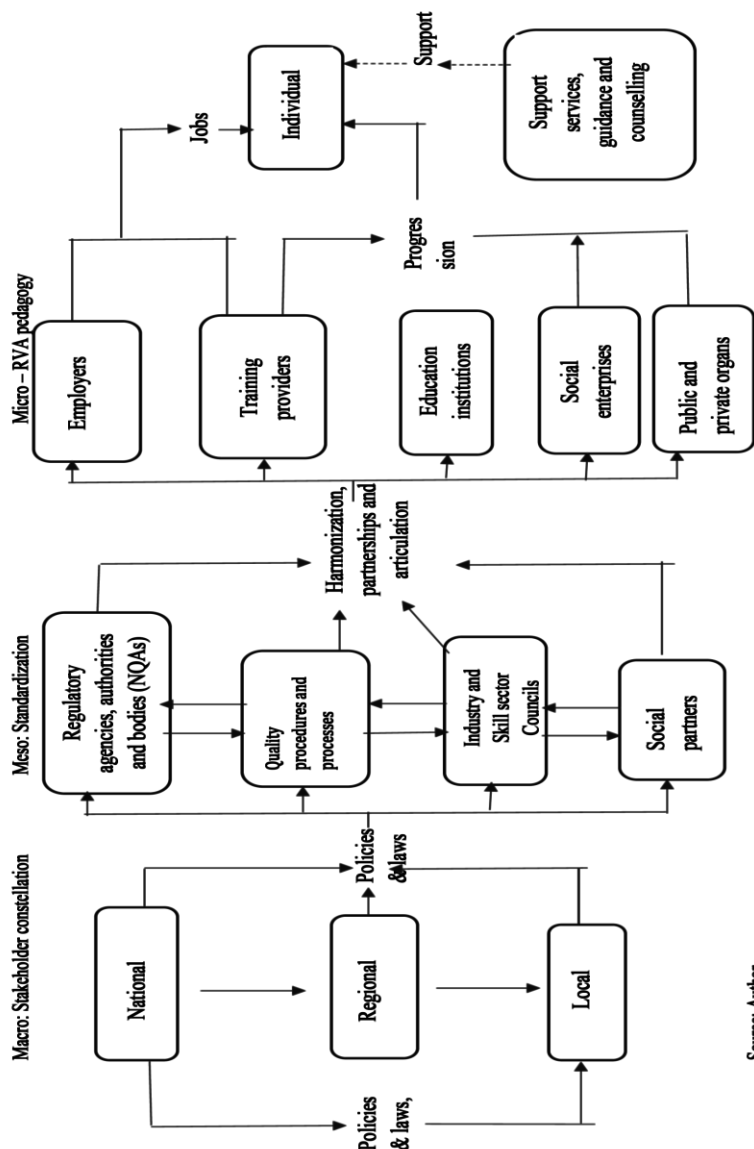
At the micro level questions of ownership and control as well as usefulness must be clarified (See Bjørnåvold, 2000, p 20). The participation of stakeholders and the role of information as highlighted by Eriksen (1995) are also important micro-level issues. The organization of RVA, therefore, cannot be limited to questions of methodology. It is important for enterprises and institution to trust and accept the results of RVA of non-formal and informal learning. The organization of RVA at all levels must pay

attention to all these aspects. Figure one is a diagrammatic presentation of organizing RVA at macro, meso and micro levels.

2. The macro-level: understanding different contexts as a starting point for creating a lifelong learning system of quality

To understand the organization of RVA systems in different contexts, this section classifies countries according to the nature of their skill formation systems, and the way their education and training systems are organized. This contextual awareness is important as it determines lifelong learning policy needs and actions and how different stakeholder groups use recognition processes for addressing these needs. The categorization draws on the works of Saar and Ure (2013) and more recently, on the work of Pilz (2017), who rely on previous approaches that combine various dimensions such as 'skills formation', 'stratification', 'standardisation' and 'learning practice' to produce different typologies of education and training, lifelong learning and skill formation systems. Drawing on Pilz's (2017) typology, we categorize countries according to their skill formation system, the level of stratification, standardisation and practice-based learning. This could be the first step to understanding the requirements for RVA and its governance and organization at the national level.

According to Pilz (Pilz 2017), in 'mixed systems', both companies and State have a high influence on skills development. 'Individualised systems' are those where both companies and states have low influence. A third group of countries are those where the State has a high influence. Finally, there are those countries where the private sector dominates. For illustrative purposes, only some cases are elaborated below. The values of high and low are relative values rather than absolute values.

Mixed systems

Within *Germany, Switzerland, Austria*, both State and the private sector share responsibility for skills formation and skills recognition. Germany has recognized the need to widen participation through RVA routes, but it is faced with several obstacles given that Germany has a stratified education and training system. Germany has the tightest link between academic success in the school system and eligibility to enter higher education. This means that introducing RVA routes into the German system effectively calls this tight link into question (Ore and Hovdhaugen, 2014). As a result, RVA routes mainly come from the vocationally-oriented side of the education system. Accordingly, legislation exists in a range of relevant legal acts and regulations set in the education and training systems, allowing institutions and government departments to develop a variety of mechanisms and practical arrangements for RVA, depending on the diversity of purposes of RVA and different interests at stake. In line with its skills formation system, social partners play an important role in RVA legislation in Germany. The inclusion in collective agreements of arrangements for the recognition of experience-based non-formal and informal

Table 2. Categorization of countries to the nature of their skill formation systems

Countries	Skill formation system	Stratifi-cation	Standardi-sation	Practice-based learning
Australia and New Zealand	Individualised (low State, low employer activity)	High	High	High
USA and Canada	Individualised (low State, low employer activity)	Low	Low	High
France	State Dominance	High	High	Low
Germany, Austria, Switzerland	Mixed (state and company dominance)	high	High	High
Denmark, Norway, Finland, Netherlands	Mixed (State and company)	Low	High	High
Portugal, Greece, Turkey	Individualised	High	Low	High
Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt	Individualised	High	Low	Low
Rumania, Bosnia and Herzegovina	Individualised	High	Low	Low
India, Mexico, South Africa, Philippines	Individualised	High	Low	High
Afghanistan, Pakistan	Individualised	High	Low	Low
South Africa Namibia, Mauritius	Individualised	High	Low	High
China	State dominance	High	High	Low
South Korea, China Hong Kong SAR	Market oriented	High	High	Low

Adapted from Pilz, 2017.

learning is particularly conducive to the development of RVA. A legal basis for the recognition of employees' skills and qualifications in collective agreements is provided by Article 9 Section 3 of the Basic Law, in which freedom of association is defined as a fundamental right, and the Collective Agreements Act, asserts the principle of the autonomy of collective bargaining. Pursuant to these acts, employers and employees are free to agree on working conditions in companies with no regulatory intervention by the state. In addition to defining pay and working hours, this includes arrangements for training and continuing education (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008, p. 50).

In Germany, while the country's unemployment rate has declined as a result of greater buoyancy in the labour market, there are nevertheless concerns related to qualifications and unemployment, particularly as affecting specific groups such as migrants and youth (Germany (Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008). The recognition of migrants' prior learning and experiential learning is expected to become an important integration policy issue in the coming years. In addition, there is emphasis on utilising existing potential skills in the economy (BMBF) 2008). In Austria, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is considered to enhance the integration of marginalised groups such as migrants, elderly persons or the unemployed by giving them a "second chance" (Federal Ministry of Education Arts and Culture 2011).

In *Norway, Finland, Norway, Denmark*, as well as in *the Netherlands*, while the main stakeholders in skills formation and skills recognition are the national authorities, social partners encourage skills formation in the context companies and organizations. With regard to stratification, particularly the entitlement to enter higher education, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, when compared with Germany, have relatively weaker links between school success and eligibility to higher education. This has made RVA routes to higher education more likely. A number of countries, especially the Scandinavian countries, have started public policy with a legal framework. Laws stipulate functions and criteria for RVA and also allocate tasks to specified institutions, bodies and authorities. The involvement of social partners, including professional associations, is a key feature of RVA legislation. Legislation targets specific groups, such as adults lacking secondary education adults, who may benefit from participating in a process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In Norway, principles anchored in legislation are reflected in the successive introduction of various elements which together comprise a national lifelong learning policy package (Christensen, 2015). However, here again studies (Ore and Hovdhaugen, 2014) have shown that the situation of implementation is quite different from policy and legislation.

State dominated systems

France by contrast has a skills formation system that is primarily state-oriented (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012, p.12) the education and training system is highly segmented and stratified. And teaching and learning processes are theoretically-oriented with low level of relevance to practice (Brockmann et al. 2011). As a response to the highly stratified education and training system, RVA legislation in France gives every individual the right to apply for RVA. In the French case, there are several other laws, such as the Law of Decentralisation accompanying the Modernisation Law of 2002, which have given stakeholders and providers particularly in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) the power to implement RVA. The Law on Lifelong Vocational Training and Social Dialogue particularly enables employees to access training outside working hours. This is an important legislative instrument, as it gave employers an important role in RVA.

In *Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rumania*, skills formation is dominated by the state, with very little responsibility shared by industry. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a need for more communication and cooperation among the education sector, government entities/district/cantons and the labour market. In Rumania, one of the main challenges is to link structures and stakeholders from Vocational Education and Training (VET), higher education and the labour market in a more comprehensive framework.

Individualised skill formation systems in developed countries

The dominant issue in skills formation and recognition in *Australia* is the separation of general and vocational education and the low status of vocational training. To respond to this situation, the government established the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), whose key features have been the standardisation and integration of trade qualifications centred on workplace competency with other VET qualifications and higher education qualifications. The development of flexible progression pathways was also a key objective. This would support mobility between higher education and VET sectors and the labour market by providing a basis for RVA (Cedefop, ETF, UIL, UNESCO, 2017). The recognition of non-formal and informal learning plays an important part in these efforts, particularly because the increases in certification serves the aim of ensuring a better integration of vocational education and training into higher education and better collaboration with key stakeholders to encourage improved transition to work arrangements. Closing the gap between educational opportunities for different groups in society is an important goal for New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa particularly those of indigenous groups raising the skill potential of workers who can and want to work or are currently excluded from the labour force (see New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2008, and Australian Government, Social Inclusion Unit 2009).

Within the *USA*, skills formation is seen as having a liberal approach with a low level of State and company influence and high level of individual influence (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012, pp. 12-149). The widespread model of skills formation and skills recognition in the workplace is given priority (Barabasch and Rauner 2012). In line with the latter, in the US, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (Public Law 105–220) was instrumental in establishing a fund for Adult Basic Education (ABE) services, which encourages the development of RVA pathways for low-skilled adults to increase their educational attainment and obtain higher skilled jobs. The fund targets at-risk youth, under-educated and/or unemployed/underemployed adults, youth and adults with disabilities, and English language learners (ELL). The skills formation system in *Canada* is more or less the same as in USA (see Pilz, 2017). This is the case even though college programmes have a strong skills development component than in the USA. USA and Canada do not have legal frameworks for RVA. A significant level of RVA activity is undertaken in the USA and Canada, for instance, despite a lack of relevant government policies or legislation. In the USA, the governing structure of higher education is locally controlled within each individual

state, although financial support is delivered through a combination of individual, local, state and federal funding. In Canada, the certification bodies for regulated professions have developed RVA practices for their jurisdictions and the Canadian Sector Councils have sponsored a range of initiatives to promote RVA at the workplace.

Individualised skill formation systems in less developed countries and emerging economies

The dominant context in *India* is one of low levels of State and company influence in skills development, even if some industrial training institutes exist (Mehrotra, 2014). Stratification is high in particular because of the strict separation between general and vocation training. Vocational training has a low status. Skill formation in the Indian system is dominated by informal structures and processes, with vocational education and training institutions, certifications and formal curricula playing only a minor part. However, as a result of the informal system of the economy, the learning processes tend to be directly linked to practice. The potential for recognizing unrecognized skills in the informal sector is therefore exceedingly high.

In *Mexico*, the education and training system is highly stratified with general and academic education strictly separated from the vocational track. The vocational training is unorganized and follows a 'learning by doing approach', mostly on the basis of private motivation. (Kis et al. 2009). Given the highly stratified system, and small formal VET system, the main issue is the social and economic pressure for young people to enter the workforce without completing their formal education and this trend is set to continue. Through accreditation, Mexico is aiming to promote the recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and encourage the development of small enterprises. In Mexico, the conception and development of Agreement 286 of the Ministry of Education (issued on 30 October 2000) (and associated Agreements) is designed to give both workers and learners access to all levels of the education system by offering an alternative pathway to that provided by the formal system.

In *Portugal* skill recognition is associated with efforts to reverse the historical trend towards of an increasingly poorly educated workforce. Seeking to overcome this situation, stakeholders in Portugal have initiated a major drive for investment in adult education and training courses, including the establishment of the RVCC and a national qualifications framework.

Turkey faces the challenge of educational bottlenecks that hinder access to the current tertiary education system for young people, as a result of which many are compelled to join post-secondary vocational schools (MYOs), which are not sufficiently labour market-oriented.

Governance: roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the organization of RVA

This section looks at the governance of RVA and the roles of responsibilities of stakeholders in the organization of RVA. The successful organization of RVA is dependent on the extent to which various partnerships drive the coordination of the

RVA process. Information gathered from numerous countries on their policies and practices indicates that partnerships with various stakeholders differ significantly. We refer to three models of implementation and coordination that emerge from the country cases. The elaboration of examples does not aim to be exhaustive but rather illustrative.

Table 3. Governance in RVA

Governance	
Social partnership model	France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Netherlands
Stakeholders in the adult and community learning sector	USA and Canada
NQFs coordinating RVA	Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Mexico, South Africa, Philippines, Pakistan Namibia, Mauritius

Source: author

The social partnership model

In *Germany, Switzerland and Austria* multiple social partners and stakeholders treat implementing RVA as a shared responsibility, coordinating their work in accordance with laws, regulations and guidelines. This ensures legitimacy within a decentralised education. In Austria (Schneeberger, Petanovitsch and Schögl 2008), the responsibilities for regulation, provision, financing and support of learning activities are divided between the national and provincial levels. Social partners play a role in the design of the legal, economic and social framework conditions. Educational institutions organize or provide preparatory courses for exams and design other procedures to validate prior learning, based on their respective quality assurance. In Germany, there is neither a central institution nor a standardised institutional framework in place for validation. Instead, a variety of approaches exist. The chambers of crafts, industry, commerce and agriculture regulate admission to the external students' examination. With respect to access to higher education, the German Rectors' Conference has defined a framework for recognition, but specific regulations and procedures are established by the respective university. The ProfilPASS system is managed by a national service centre which supports 55 local dialogue centres (Otero et al. 2010). The responsibility for continuing education falls across a number of areas. Continuing education in Germany experiences less regulation at the national level than other areas of education and as a result it features a high degree of pluralism and competition among providers. Voluntary participation in continuing education is one of the guiding principles (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008).

National institutes such as Skills *Norway*, the Knowledge Centres in the *Netherlands* and *Denmark* respectively are established under their respective ministries of

education, which in turn co-operate with trade unions, enterprises, national labour agencies, national educational associations, organisations, universities and colleges, public and private educators, and social partners. Skills Norway is the body designated by the Ministry of Education to work on RVA at the national level. It is responsible for developing guidelines for validation towards enrolment in tertiary vocational education and towards exemption in higher education. In addition, in 2013, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training developed national guidelines for RVA in lower and upper secondary education. Skills Norway cooperates with NGOs and social partners in order to further adult learning in working life.

In the Netherlands, the Knowledge Centre VPL ('Kenniscentrum EVC -Erkenning Verworven Competenties') worked in cooperation with a network of RVA regional offices. These regional offices serve as one-stop offices where individuals can walk in and access multiple services appropriate to their specific needs. In 2006, stakeholders agreed to a quality framework for RVA that while voluntary, promotes transparency and articulates minimum standards (Maes 2008). Individuals working through the available RVA structures are granted a Certificate of Experience to submit to educational institutions. The certificate has the status of an advisory document and the "autonomous institutions decide for themselves how to use the results of EVC procedures" (Duvekot 2010).

Finland has a clear division of responsibilities at different levels. The responsibilities for competence-based qualifications relevant here, such as the development of the qualifications, quality assurance, and the actual provision of examinations and training are divided among various actors:

- The Ministry of Education and Culture decides which qualifications are admitted to the national qualification structure.
- The Finnish National Board of Education draws up qualification requirements for each competence-based qualification.
- Sector-specific Qualification Committees supervise the organisation of competence tests and issue the qualification certificates.
- Education providers that have signed agreements with the respective sector specific
- Qualification Committees arrange competence tests and provide preparatory training for candidates.
- A Qualification Committee is appointed for each qualification.

The Qualification Committees consist of representatives of employers and employees, teachers and sometimes also entrepreneurs. The committees oversee the implementation of competence-based qualifications, ensure the consistent quality of qualifications, and issue the certificates to successful candidates. If necessary, certificates can also be awarded for individual modules, for instance if the candidate does not intend to complete the whole qualification (Blomqvist and Louko 2013).

Stakeholders in the adult and community learning sector

The high influence of individualization in skills formation and skills recognition in the *USA* can be seen in the fact that, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is not governed by legislation (Travers 2011). PLA is conducted in many colleges and universities. PLA policies and practices play an important role in a number of higher education institutions that have been serving the adult learner population RVA. These institutions gave birth to work on how outcomes from adult non-formal and informal learning could be assessed at an individual level. Funding for the PLA services is generally the responsibility of individual educational institutions. Assessment fees are normally charged to the individuals undertaking assessment. PLA programmes. The quality of higher education remains a top priority. Some of the six regional accreditation commissions located across the country have issued policies and guidelines on PLA that allow for varying degrees of institutional flexibility. For example, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (2005) restricts individualised PLA to the undergraduate level, but allows flexibility in programme structure. The policy and practice for accepting Prior Leaning assessment credits, established by individual institutions, much reflect local faculty agreements (Travers 2011, p. 251) and are responsible for monitoring the quality of higher education through a formal accreditation process. PLA development has been facilitated by the American Council on Education (ACE) which is the national body responsible for coordinating higher education institutions across the country. CAEL is a national, non-profit organisation that works with educational institutions, employers, labour organisations and other stakeholders to promote creative, effective adult learning strategies. Networks and structures like CAEL aim to bring greater coherence to RVA at the level of higher education.

In *Canada*, PLAR is a highly decentralised process with the responsibility for assessment and validation distributed across the various provincial/territorial governments, educational institutions and professional bodies. Both policy development and the way that PLAR is used in practice vary in different parts of Canada. In Canada, adult educators have been at the forefront of RVA. It was the community of Canadian adult educators who became acquainted with the work of CAEL in the USA and began to promote RVA in Canadian post-secondary education, as highlighted in an article by Joy Van Kleef (2011). Their reasons for promoting RVA lay in the nature of adult education, which is that adult education is community-based and encourages the development of knowledge and skills within a framework of lifelong learning. Three groups of adult educators – institutional practitioners, community-based practitioners and academic researchers – have been the primary sources of PLAR research in Canada.

At the national level, it is important to highlight that the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) has responsibility for the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, which provides information on formal credentials assessment services, provincial/territorial education systems, post-secondary institutions, regulated and unregulated occupations and how to connect with

provincial/territorial regulatory bodies that have responsibility for issuing licences to practice in each jurisdiction. In addition, stakeholder engagement at the national level includes CAPLA's yearly conference that attracts a wide range of RVA stakeholders from across Canada and abroad.

NQFs coordinating RVA

In countries with first generation NQFs, RVA is subsumed under acts passed under the establishment of their NQFs. In South Africa the recognition of prior learning in the post-apartheid era takes place in the context of the South African Qualifications Framework (SAQF) that came into effect with the passing of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995. The SAQF is a single integrated system comprising three co-ordinated qualifications sub-frameworks for the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications, overseen by the Council on General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework, overseen by the Council on Higher Education (HEC) and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework, overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). These players are also key players in assuring quality in RVA procedures and processes. SAQA is the main coordinating body for RVA and is engaged in a number of RVA projects, facilitating and implementing a variety of RVA models and practices across various sectors. SAQA has the responsibility for the quality assurance of RVA

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) facilitates the progression of students through qualifications by giving credit for learning outcomes they have already achieved. Credit outcomes may allow for entry into a qualification or provide credit towards the qualification. Credit given may reduce the time required for a student to achieve the qualification. The organization issuing RVA determines the extent, to which previous learning is equivalent to the learning outcomes of the components of the destination qualification, takes into account the likelihood of the student successfully achieving the qualification outcomes and ensures that the integrity of the qualification is maintained. The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy establishes the principle that pathways are clear and transparent to students and can facilitate credit for entry into, as well as credit towards, AQF qualifications.

Countries with new generation of NQFs also show a trend towards subsuming RVA under their NQFs. The Mexican Qualifications Framework (MQF) is a comprehensive framework developed by the General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation and Revalidation (Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación; DGAIR), within the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). Stakeholders from all sectors (industry, education and civil society) have participated in the development of the MQF. CONOCER has been active specifically on issues related to the National System of Competency Standards (NSCS) and on equivalencies with formal educational degrees. Additionally, in October 2012, the Ministry of Education announced the new Mexican Bank of Academic Credits (announcement published by DGAIR on the official Mexican Government Diary of October the 4th 2012, article 8), which allows

certificates of competence from CONOCER and from other recognised private and public training / certification centres to be accredited as part of formal education programmes at lower and upper secondary levels.

3. Meso-level: standardisation, regulatory frameworks, quality assurance

Standardisation is a useful term to understand the structures, processes and outputs underpinning the organization and quality of RVA systems. Standardisation and quality assurance of RVA is about the role of regulatory agencies, inter-institutional arrangements, and establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Inter-institutional arrangements that link academic, vocational and continuing education programmes/institutions provide potential for awards/credits or generic awards across levels, subjects, and sectors. Partnerships across sectors between stakeholders from education, industry, and community adult learning sectors are important to make recognition processes relevant and transparent. These aspects of quality and standardisation at the meso-level need attention.

Regulatory agencies such as national qualifications authorities and accreditation bodies must be able to harmonize in relation to minimum standards for accreditation of qualifications obtained through all learning – formal, non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, registration for educational providers and training institutions as well as systems for the assessment of learning, and issuance of qualifications and certifications is important components of a quality lifelong learning system.

Evidence from *Mauritius, Seychelles, Ghana, Botswana, and South Africa* reveals that Qualifications Authorities, as models of shared responsibility between stakeholders, are prime movers behind the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning. In these countries, for all qualifications that are being validated by the Qualifications Authority and placed on the NQFs, there is now a requirement that recognition, as an alternative route to gaining qualification should be possible. In most cases, the Qualifications Authorities elicit/engage the support of professional organizations and employment agencies to take forward the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and in possibly garnering financial support for recognition initiatives.

One of the landmarks in the standardisation and quality assurance of RVA systems has been the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). NQFs are an important development in education and training reforms in developed, transitioning and developing countries (Singh and Deij, 2017). Their number seems to have reached a saturation point, with developments deepening within some countries and not much progress happening in other counters. But NQFs will remain very important tools to support education and training, skills development, and lifelong learning. Many countries consider that the existence of a qualifications framework may help to promote systems for recognizing non-formal and informal

learning outcomes, especially in the case of recognition procedures formalized to the extent of awarding qualifications. NQFs provide a central reference point for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Written record of qualifications available through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes would confer a status and form of legitimacy by associating them more closely with qualifications obtained via formal channels. Where recognition of non-formal and informal learning can lead to the award of a qualification, these qualifications should be included in the national qualifications directory. Incorporating the qualifications available through recognizing non-formal and informal learning in a qualifications register is necessary for securing social recognition and legitimacy. In addition, the standard should be accepted by all stakeholders and in particular by the various ministries that award qualifications, such as the ministries of labour and ministries of education.

The use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes have had an important impact on how levels and qualification standards have been defined. The use of learning outcomes can promote clarity and thus enhance participation through emphasizing the relevance of programmes. However, learning outcomes require attention in several respects. At the level of policy, they need to be overarching, at the level of qualifications standards, they need to deal with intended learning outcomes and at the level of learning programmes they need to deal with specific learning outcomes that are related to inputs and have a more pedagogical purposes. Learning outcomes should not be formulated in narrow and restricted ways which could limit rather than broaden the expectation of learners. From a lifelong learning perspective, learning outcomes need to reflect all contexts from life-wide, life-deep and life-long learning perspectives.

Even in countries such as the *USA* and *Canada* without national qualifications frameworks, there is already a trend in some institutions to design degree programmes around student learning outcomes, or competences, rather than college credits. Evaluative frameworks are being developed in increasing numbers for competency- based prior learning assessment programmes in order to equate their effectiveness to other programme evaluation processes within institutions of higher education. Thus, instead of reinventing the wheel, CAEL standards for competency-based PLA are being interrelated with quality criteria used in the evaluation of college academic programmes with the aim of developing overarching evaluative frameworks that embed the effectiveness of PLA programmes as well. In Canada also, measures for the assessment of educational quality (e.g., CAEL standards for PLA) are applied to the assessment of prior learning in competency-based education and assessment, for example in professional registration.

Countries in the *European Union* are gradually beginning to grant non-formal learning contexts the same value as formal learning process. However, many institutions awarding non-formal qualifications need further assistance in describing

their qualifications in terms of learning outcomes in order to comply with the NQF requirements.

Linking NQF and RVA: Utilisation of agreed standards in RVA

In *New Zealand* and *Australia* the trend is to structure non-formal learning such as workplace learning to meet formal objectives resulting in credits and qualifications. Traditionally, assessment has been based on requirements of, and expected performance in formal education and training. This process however, is not suitable in a lifelong learning system that recognizes outcomes from a diversification of learning paths. New Zealand, for example, assesses outcomes from prior non-formal and informal learning (RVA) and in general against designated current learning outcomes or standards, which make up the qualifications. In Australia, workplace-learning assessment includes assessment of formal, non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer arrangements exist even for workplace learning. In other words, non-formal learning is structured to meet formal objectives and results in credits and qualifications and falls under the jurisdiction of formal quality assurance processes.

The utilisation of agreed standards in RVA of non-formal and informal learning is an important feature of alternative recognition routes or and credit transfers leading to a qualification. Utilisation of agreed standards, puts outcomes from non-formal and informal learning on an equal footing with formal learning. Agreed standards orient either to: (1) standards in existing formal curricula; (2) learning outcomes-based qualifications standards; or (3) occupational standards.

Reference standards, regardless of whether they are formal curricula or learning outcomes-based qualifications, or occupational standards, do not necessarily have to lead to a full qualification; they can also lead to a partial qualification such as credits, which individuals transfer and accumulate towards the attainment of a qualification. *Hong Kong SAR China* has provision for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) in its assessment systems, and to see the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as an assessment and credit process.

In **Indonesia**, a credit transfer scheme is a part of bridging programmes, which aims to boost the performance of individuals who fail to meet the minimum requirements of the institution conferring their credits. In the Republic of Korea, the Lifelong Learning Account (LLA) system, implemented since 2008, allows individual's diverse learning experiences to be accumulated and managed within an online learning account, and learning results are recognized as educational credits or qualifications so that each individual has opportunities to find a better job. The national education system comprises formal and non-formal learning, which has equivalencies at all levels of the education and training system.

In *New Zealand*, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is part of the credit system. Education providers in New Zealand (including employing organizations, industry and professional bodies and educational organizations, and a number of institutes

of technology and polytechnics) are required to have their own administrative and practical arrangements in place for the RPL and credit recognition and transfer.

RVA as an alternative route to the attainment of a full qualification or a partial qualification thus provides people who have learned on the job an important second chance pathway to retraining and up-skilling opportunities. Qualifications frameworks help to clarify the formal demands in qualifications rendering them better understandable and transparent for youth and young adults to manage transitions. In this way, NQFs increase the sense of security among youth and young adults that the outcomes of their learning process will at least be of quality and equal to a national standard and at the same time. At the same time, adults and youth have the quality and relevant skills demanded by employers and other stakeholders (Cedefop, 2009). Locally defined qualifications, on the other hand, may only give this security to those who have access to good educational institutions and receive a certificate issued by an accredited training provider. NQFs as communication tools are therefore important and should inform transition and lifelong learning policies concerning youth and young adults.

4. The micro-level: the pedagogy of RVA

At micro-level, we concentrate on six core factors or initial indicators to be taken into consideration in organizing RVA at the local level, with the end-user in the centre of RVA. The core factors do not indicate at the operational level how RVA should be implemented, but make up the framework for organizing RVA at the local level.

Ownership and acceptance of stakeholders at the local level

The first core factor emphasizes the ownership and acceptance of local stakeholders. The specific requirements of an RVA system in a country can be identified not only from a recognition policy perspective but also, and in particular, by taking into account the roles of those involved at the local level - learners, employers, employees, learners, training providers, trainers, educational institutions, NGOs, public and private organizations, representatives of trade unions, small, medium and micro enterprises, adult associations and youth organizations. Local level needs should be compared against macro level needs as well as related with the existing education and training and other parts of the lifelong learning system. This process enables local needs to be identified but also aims at securing substantial acceptance and ownership through the participation of those involved.

In **India**, training providers and staff of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) are directly involved in serving underprivileged and low-educated groups in society who have not completed eight years of school (eight years' schooling is the minimum to gain entry into a vocational training institute) and who lacked the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to enter the lowest level of the Indian skills qualifications framework. This target group is being given access to competency-

based courses at the pre-vocational levels in the qualifications framework through the NIOS. In *the Netherlands*, local stakeholders apply validation as a tool to tackle the economic crisis and targets young unemployed persons lacking Level 2 vocational qualifications, those who are at risk of losing their jobs, or those who need to achieve mobility on the labour market. In *Botswana* and *South Africa* recognition serves to allow adults to participate in adult basic education and training (ABET) upon becoming literate.

RVA without stakeholder input will not be trusted. In the US having at least one agency in the region supporting or encouraging the adoption and use of RVA methods has been highlighted in a CAEL study (Klein-Collins, 2010). According to the purposes of RVA, representation from the world of work, youth and adult organizations as well as the labour market is required in developing RVA processes, methodologies and assessment criteria.

In many countries, local stakeholders need to be made aware of the recognition schemes and their benefits among potential users, including citizens, businesses, and their employees, education and training providers, voluntary associations and social partners organization in the labour market. *Mauritius* is focusing on communication strategy to expose major stakeholders to international RVA best practice.

An evaluation study from *Denmark* shows that the spread of RVA varied from institution to institution. A large number of institutions (education) are with no RVA activity. Some of the barriers are lack of awareness of RVA; others deal with financing and connecting skills development to formal education. Raising awareness for making the transition from system level to the user level or training provider level is an important quality issue.

For quality assurance, institutions and training providers must develop transparent guidelines to ensure validity and reliability. In New Zealand and Australia, only registered training organizations that fall under the quality assurance framework of their NQFs are also those that undertake the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) has a policy that education providers use.

Recognition must gain the acceptance of all stakeholders at the local level. For instance, in *Mauritius* RVA has been accepted by employers since it provides them with qualified and well-motivated personnel. On the other hand, in *Hong Kong SAR*, China, it appears that the government overestimated workers' interest in further education, at least as presented by the labour union representatives, and underestimated their insistence on using the qualifications frameworks for job security and improving wage levels. It also lacked foresight in anticipating employers' strong opposition to the use of potentially unverified work experience rather than assessed skills and competences. However, just like Australia and New Zealand and other countries, *Hong Kong* sees RVA not as a stand-alone practice but in relation to other instruments such as Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) which takes into account the total time likely to be required by an average learner in all modes of learning, including attendance in classes, self-study, on-line learning

practical learning, examination, etc. The development of NQFs is expected to facilitate CAT arrangements between sectors and training providers by providing a unified platform and common benchmarks.

Resources and time
Since the end user and recognition processes at the local level form the focus of our approach, RVA must be underpinned with appropriate resources. This is the only way to address both qualitative and quantitative needs of RVA in relation to the target groups. The necessary resources include rooms for the dissemination of information, guidance and counselling, identification and documentation of evidence, assessment centres, target group specific tools and materials, and appropriately trained RVA staff. *Norway* shows that specific assessment tools at the upper secondary level for adults include dialogue-based methods, portfolio assessment and vocational testing. Attention is paid to ensure capacities of assessors and guiders to interpret standards of relevant qualifications, curricula, objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question, or workplace-specific competence demands. The Nordic model for quality in validation (Krunnet and Dahler 2013) includes three perspectives on quality resources: (1) Organisation quality; (2) assessment quality; and (3) procedural. In addition, the Nordic model is linked to eight factors in relation to which practitioners are free to decide how to use them and moderate them in their own contexts. These eight factors consist of: information, preconditions (or regulatory framework), documentation, coordination, guidance, mapping, assessment and follow-up.

In many countries while national qualifications authorities are prime movers of RVA, the challenge, however, is how to equip education providers and training institutions with resources for them to initiate the RVA exercise and start offering opportunities to potential candidates on a continuous basis. The planning process will need to incorporate issues such as industry needs, initial training of assessors, procedures for the registration of providers; maintenance of a central register of qualifications, audit and moderation functions, and portfolio development.

In *South Africa*, the take-up is limited by staff and resource shortages, and projects have been developed in only a few sectors. Costs to individuals and education systems for information and guidance, assessors and awarding bodies are a further challenge. In *Sweden*, getting resources for conducting RVA processes often depends on getting a commission from the public employment office (PEO), which in turn depends on procurement processes where different validation institutions compete to be a provider for PEO (Aagaard, et. al 2017).

Assessment and expertise
The assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning should usually be a quality assured process as it results in the recognition of individual's knowledge and skills. The underlying principles of recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) according to the UNESCO guidelines include: equity; the equal value of

outcomes from all learning; and quality in the assessment and validation through procedures that are reliable, fair, transparent and relevant (UIL, 2012). Basically quality is a matter of validity and reliability in the RVA practice. Aagaard, Andersson, Halttunen, Hansen and Nistrup (2017) argue that questions of what 'quality' in RVA entails, should not be taken for granted. Rather basic questions such "does the validation 'measure' or 'assess 'what is intended." or the question: "how is this intention negotiated and decided?" need to be addressed. Reliability and validity must not be taken for granted, rather but is rather a matter of negotiation of meaning, which could result in different situation-context-dependent conceptions of quality. These conceptions could include varying ideas on what knowledge and skills should be assessed, and how this could be done in the best way. Countries highlight a series of distinctive quality criteria for ensuring quality of assessment and validation processes for certificating learning outside the formal system:

First, the evidence of learning needs to be carried out with more attention paid to assessing the *validity and authenticity of the evidence*. The individual competences should be recognized irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality/standard of the education and training programme. The aim should be to assess the theoretical and the practical side of the trade. Evidence of learning is essential to assess credit worthiness over and above the experience that shaped that learning (Wilbur et al. 2012). An example from Norway shows that methods of assessment at the upper secondary level for adults include dialogue-based methods, portfolio assessment and vocational testing. The latter combines interviews and practice, for charting the learner's background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives, and to observe his/her skills in practice. The methods used need to ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome.

Second, quality assurance concerns the standards to which the evidence of learning is compared. These *standards should be directly comparable*, preferably identical, to the standards applied in the formal settings for the qualification. Care needs to be paid to ensuring these standards have been fairly interpreted. In France assessment procedures help candidates organize learning outcomes in a way that suits the standards of the relevant qualification, and prepare the candidates to meet the jury under the best conditions. In Scotland, learning outcomes and skills gained through informal learning are mapped against the appropriate level of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). In Denmark, an important principle is that competence assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question.

Third, quality that is distinct for certificating learning outside the formal sector concerns *taking account of the candidates' circumstances* and the access they should have to *reliable information, advice and guidance throughout the assessment process*. The standards they must meet, the ways their learning is evidenced, the assessment process and the way assessed evidence is validated should all be clear to the candidate if the outcome of the process is to be fair and trusted. At the same

time, Aagaard et al. (2017) emphasize of acknowledging the two faces quality in RVA: 'On the one hand flexibility, individualization, and judgement are central concepts. This perspective begins from an intention to give recognition to individual knowledge and skills that have been developed in varying ways, and in different contexts, thus probably situated in specific practices. ……. On the other hand, standardisation, reliability, and measurement are central concepts. This is important where the results have to be comparable, for example, as a basis for fair selection processes in relation to higher education or recruitment for apposition in the labour market (Ibid. p. 2).

Fourth, quality needs to be seen in relation to the outcomes-based qualifications. *The use of learning outcomes* enables teaching and learning to be separated from assessment, allowing learners to be assessed differently according to their learning pathways – formal, non-formal or informal. For example, an increasing number of learners undertake adult education, on-line or through work-based learning to acquire the competences needed to gain a qualification, and *these routes require different assessment methods and tools*. These need to depart from the traditional final exam to encompass new forms of assessment that include practice-based assessment tasks requiring observation within a simulated or real context, evidence-accumulation (portfolio), evaluation of real life practice and so on. Furthermore, because these more varied assessment methods are now being used in relation to outcomes-based qualifications, more attention is being paid to assessment standards – including assessment criteria, procedures, guidelines and minimum requirements - in order to ensure the validity and reliability of assessments.

Fifth, *the result of the assessment should be documented* by issuing a full qualification (or a certificate of education) or a part qualification (or credits, or a certificate of competence). Results of an evaluation study in Denmark has shown that RPL is applied typically because participants need a certificate of competence. In Denmark, RPL is primarily used to give access to the education programmes that institutions provide rather than the recognition of competences to replace teaching and education, for direct use in the labour market (Andersson and Fejes, 2012).

Sixth, *different kinds of expertise and resources* will be needed to develop an effective assessment and recognition system. Recognition practitioners include individuals delivering information, guidance and counselling; those who carry out assessments; the teachers and managers of educational institutions; workplace instructors; employers, and a range of other stakeholders with important but less direct roles in the recognition process. Guiders/Facilitators are those who offer information, guidance and counselling services to refugees with the aim of clarifying procedures for the assessment so that individuals become more aware of their own competences and are more motivated to learning further and to have their learning outcomes recognized.

The role of RVA personnel is underestimated in many cases. Only well-trained RVA personnel can manage meaningful recognition processes and communicate clearly about what the recognition of non-formal and informal learning really means. Nor

can such skilled personnel be replaced by technology or online learning packages. Such materials need guidance from RVA staff in using them. It is necessary therefore for adequate trained RVA personnel to be trained and employed in assessment centres and educational institutions, social enterprises, workplaces and public employment centres. Existing RVA staff would need to have experience in workplaces as well as didactical and pedagogical training as an integral part of their training.

It is important that expertise is able to contribute to broadening understanding of assessment and evaluation, increasing knowledge of recognition processes through professional development opportunities, using a variety of assessment methods and tools and reviewing non-formal learning programmes and courses for continuous improvement. RVA personnel should also have the task of communicating the vocabulary and concepts of recognition so as to make RVA part of a commonly accepted practice.

Developing certificate courses for practitioners working in the field of non-formal learning and in the area of the recognition of individual competences could help to improve the quality of teaching, guidance and counselling as well as help managers to coordinate non-formal learning and recognition processes (Austria). The certificates need to be positioned at a certain level of the qualifications framework and modules can be prepared for the formal diploma programme offered either in colleges, or in continuing education departments of universities. In Portugal, professionalization is sought through the sharing of practices, knowledge and experiences among teachers and trainers who carry out adult learning programmes and undertake validation assessments. Good practices from Denmark show that arrangements for the collaboration of assessors across institutions provide good opportunities to discuss which tools are relevant. This collaboration ensures some alignment in the tools institutions used in an RVA. In addition to knowledge sharing and collaboration, there could be great benefit of a common material database and a manual for conducting RVA. A common language to describe the subject matter of RVA and tools is necessary to reach significant numbers of individuals.

Progression

Many RVA candidates are those whose knowledge, skills and competences are still in the process of being developed. So, RVA should be conducted in a way so that it forms part of an education and training programme or a preparatory bridge course. It is crucial to make participation in education and training or preparatory courses as attractive to them as possible (Finland). All RVA processes should, therefore centre on an assessment in terms of an extent to which they motivate participation in a further education and training measure. It is important that when educational and training programmes are being put in place, the state focuses particularly on progression. State bodies should ensure that that learning

processes ends in an assessment of knowledge, skills and competences that are then recognized and certified according to agreed procedures.

This is the only way of ensuring transparency with respect to the standard achieved by individual participation in RVA. The certification should ensure both transitions into the labour market for individuals and groups of individuals who are not yet integrated into the employment system, as well as ensure access to general education. In Denmark, an evaluation study (Andersen and Laugesen, 2012) showed that while RVA is primarily used to give access to the education programmes that institutions provide, most candidates apply for RVA in order to gain recognition of competences to replace teaching and education, for direct use in the labour market.

In developing countries where vocational education and training are of low status, it is crucial that more substantial training courses are certified in a way that also ensures access to general education for the trainee concerned. This will be important to boost the status of vocational education and training and cater to a greater parity of esteem between formal and non-formal learning. Access to broader skills through general education is particularly important in the context of rapid economic and societal changes. These changes increase the importance of personal development, while reducing the importance of task-specific and narrowly defined instrumental knowledge and skills (New Zealand). Progression pathways in the US are called "certification crosswalks". These include: College Credit for What You Already Know: a project developed by CAEL designed to bring prior learning assessments to scale, and increase the number of adults who would benefit from access to college education programmes.(Ganzglass, Bird and Prince, 2011).

In Canada progression through access to formal qualifications remains the key aspect of prior learning assessment and recognition. However, opening access and progress in skilled and professional occupations is now reported as the key issue across Canada.

Encouraging employers and training providers to be involved in RVA

Employers, who ultimately, are the users of skilled staff, need to be consistently encouraged to become involved in training /recognition processes as this is a way of ensuring that skills development builds on the recognition of actual practice and that skills that need to be learned need to reflect the real world. Employers should be involved in shaping the recognition processes and the courses of training. Employers may find it helpful to use recognition to become more familiar with the stock of knowledge, skills and competences available in their enterprise. In Mexico, workers obtaining certification of competences is consider to be a good proxy for increasing in productivity of workers and the firms and reducing the turnover of workers in firms (García-Bullé 2013). In Mauritius, employers are encouraged to invest in the training of those with very low skills, who need to be brought into the productive economy. Mauritius is making concerted efforts

through the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) to implement RVA to support workforce development in certain industry sectors (specifically tourism, financial services, real estate, information and communication technology (ICT) and seafood). Employers understand the role of RVA in supporting a highly skilled workforce and they contribute to the MQA's fees for this exercise. Moreover, well-established companies are also sponsoring RVA candidates. Currently, 19 Industry Training Advisory Committees are generating NQF qualifications in all TVET sectors of the Mauritian economy. While such qualifications are offered by both public and private providers, there is a centralized awarding body that awards the NQF qualifications. In Mauritius, RVA and the NQF co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, where the former is directly linked to the outcomes of NQF qualifications and a smooth transition of many learners is possible to the NQF (Allgoo 2013). However, the concerns and needs of companies need to be taken into account in RVA. They must receive a return on their investment. Moreover, in-company training and recognition initiatives should be designed in such a way that this a clear advantage to companies in terms of their cost/benefit of engaging in such activities.

RVA-benefits for the individual, worker and learner
RVA must also have real benefits for low-skilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers who are already in employment. In certain sectors of the labour market, the demand for workers with the requisite knowledge, skills and competences is growing faster than the supply, often because the formal system of education and training is not sufficiently responsive. However, recognition practices must also gain the acceptance of all employees. In Hong Kong SAR, China, it appears that the government overestimated workers' interest in further education, at least as presented by the labour union representatives, and underestimated their insistence on using the qualifications frameworks for job security and improving wage levels. It also lacked foresight in anticipating employers' strong opposition to the use of potentially unverified work experience rather than assessed skills and competences. As of today, RVA and its pace of implementation is a matter to be solely determined by the industries concerned (so far 22 industries have joined the QF, covering about 53 per cent of the total labour force in Hong Kong SAR China), and there is currently in-depth discussion to reach a consensus before proceeding with its implementation.
How skilled workers can be appropriately deployed should be considered so that their competences can be used meaningfully. Factors playing a role here include not only technical skills but also skills related to computers, to health, safety at work, etc. Even more important, however, is increase in their payment. Demand for training, and the likelihood that training activities will bring success depends on there being a long-term monetary advantage to the individual employee in acquiring skills. State agencies and social partners should therefore, work towards a regulatory framework that prevents discrimination and market distortions. In Germany, RVA features in collective agreements, giving greater security to

individuals who have acquired skills through informal and non-formal learning in recognized apprenticeship trades. Similarly, provisions exist within the German public sector for scaled remuneration on the basis of work experience and length of service. Individuals can enrol in training programmes provided that they have a minimum of practical experience, with industry training agencies providing leadership in the design and development of RVA processes.

5. Summary

This paper provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the conditions for organizing structures, processes and output of RVA in different countries, by means of a typology of countries and an analysis of initial indicators at the local level, keeping in mind that the end-user is at the centre of the RVA process. Taken together, these elements can be usefully used for understanding the organization of RVA-systems at the national, regional and local level.

At macro-level the paper showed that usually the constellation of stakeholders involved in RVA and its governance depends to a large extent on country-specific skill formation systems and how these interact with the existing education and training and employment systems. Often existing education and training systems are differentiated in terms of access routes, selection and transition mechanisms.

At meso-level, standardisation is key to understand the quality of structures, processes and outputs underpinning the organization of RVA-systems. On the input side the utilisation of agreed standards or benchmarks is an important feature of RVA. Assessment based on learning outcomes has become an important quality issue in RVA. Quality assurance of policies, procedures and processes is vital for gaining trust among users. For this, there must be regulatory agencies, inter-institutional arrangement and multi-stakeholder partnerships to harmonize in relation to minimum standards for accreditation of qualifications obtained through all learning.

At micro-level, the paper highlighted the demand side of RVA. While countries have invested in the financing of RVA and other measures designed to remove or reduce the disincentives for providers and other bodies to award RVA, less attention has been given to the demand aspect, for example how companies and individuals can be encouraged to access RVA. What actual benefits will it hold for employers and low-skilled workers. Aligning RVA to career and skills development requires a huge cultural shift in employing organizations. At the same time employing organizations need to align with the educational systems if true parity of esteem between formal and non-formal learning outcomes is to be achieved. Linking the efforts of all stakeholders and national authorities is essential for delivering access to education and recognition of all competences.

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Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe

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Validation of non-formal and informal learning, or the effort to make visible and value the learning taking place outside formal education, has grown in importance and visibility over the last few decades. Stakeholders at national as well as European level have argued consistently that validation can play a key role in opening up education and training systems to the learning taking place at work and during leisure time. In recent years validation is increasingly being related to the needs of groups at risk, arguing that validation can support integration into the labour market and society at large (see Souto-Otero and Villalba, 2015). The transformation of these general objectives into concrete practises relevant to individuals is a different issue. This article[2] will look into the development of validation in Europe during the last few decades and discuss to what extent the fundamental values underpinning validation have been accepted and internalised. This approach also allows us to reflect on the interaction between national and European policies in this area[3].

1. Validation - an issue of values

The acceptance of validation of non-formal and informal learning into national qualification and skill formation systems implies the acceptance of two main values:
- All learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the individual and for society.
- Formal learning needs to be supplemented by validation to make visible and value the rich learning of individuals.

These two values are closely interlinked and constitute what we will refer to in this article as 'the validation norm'. Actively promoting this norm means that the strong position of formal education and training systems is challenged; in effect, the 'exclusive' right of formal education and training to value (and certify) learning is questioned. For these two values to be generally accepted, and for validation to become an integral and effective part of national policies and practises, three main

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2   A version of this paper is published in the Global Monitoring Inventory on NQFs, published by Cedefop, ETF and UNESCO 2017 (forthcoming).

3   The authors thank Hanne Christensen for valuable comments and contributions to the paper

conditions have to be fulfilled. The first condition refers to the institutional setting of validation. Are adequate laws and institutions put in place, allowing for long-term and legitimate implementation of policies? The second condition refers to resources and whether policy objectives are translated into concrete arrangements on the ground, giving citizens access to validation. The third condition refers to methodology. Validation requires that the methodologies use for validation guarantee reliability and validity of the learning outcomes acquired. A lack of trust in any of these three conditions undermines the principle that all learnings are equal and that formal learning needs to be supplemented with validation of non-formal and informal learning. The key questions we address in this paper are the following:

- Have the values underpinning the promotion of validation been internalised?
- Have the associated conditions for implementing validation at national and European level been addressed?

The paper borrows from the theory on 'diffusion of norms of actions between nation states' as used by Helgøy and Homme (2013) based on Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). For them, there are three stages in the policy process: 'norm emergence', 'norm cascade' and 'norm internalisation'. Helgøy and Homme use this framework to explain the implementation process of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in three European countries. 'Norm emergence' is characterised by the development of the norm and the role played by frontrunners; countries acting as 'entrepreneurs. The second stage, the 'norm cascade', takes place after a 'tipping point' has been reached, meaning that a critical number of countries have accepted and adapted the norm. Once the tipping point has been reached, the norm that comes from outside has more importance than the local norms. The internalisation stage refers to the point at which the norm has been fully accepted and is no longer part of the public debate.

The above analytical approach is highly relevant for validation, given the fact that developments to a large extent have been based on an interaction of national and European initiatives and stakeholders. We will discuss the acceptance and internalisation of the 'validation norm'. This contribution starts with reviewing the recent history of validation in Europe from its emergence in the 1980s and 1990s. A second stage is presented from 2002 to the adoption of the 2012 Recommendation on validation. The third part of the paper discusses the current situation and the extent to which we can speak of an acceptance of the basic norm or not at this stage. The assessment of this third stage is based on the data collected for the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2. The early days (1980-2002) – emergence of a norm?

Validation, as a separate policy field, emerged during the late 1980s. This does not mean that countries started without prior experience in this area. Several countries

already operated with arrangements allowing individuals with relevant work experience to sit for exams, in effect awarding a qualification without attending classes. The so called 'Article 20' arrangement in Norway, in existence since 1952, illustrates this. These arrangements, however, were mostly seen as technical arrangements ensuring the flexibility of (mainly) formal training, and not as policy initiatives in their own right.

National developments

The emergence of the 'validation norm' – or the acknowledgement that all learning, irrespective of the context in which it takes place, should be recognised – is closely linked to the introduction of learning outcomes and/or competences based education standards and curricula in the 1980s and 1990s. The shift to learning outcomes, focusing on what learners are expected to know, be able to do and understand, states that the same outcomes can be reached in different ways and by following a variety of pathways (including learning at work and during leisure time). The introduction of national vocational qualifications in the UK in the 1980s and the development of competence based education in Finland in the 1990s both illustrate how national learning outcomes based approaches trigger the development and introduction of validation arrangements. In the UK the combination of learning outcomes (and modularised qualifications) resulted in arrangements like Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). In 1991, the National Council for vocational qualifications required that 'accreditation of prior learning should be available for all qualifications accredited by these bodies' (Davidson, 2008).

The extent to which this shift to learning outcomes facilitated the introduction of validation arrangements varies. While the Finnish competence-based system has developed into a strong and integrated part of the national system, and is still serving a high number of individuals, the NVQ system has only to a limited extent been able to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning. The relative lack of progress in the UK may come down to lack of policy priorities, but may also be linked to the controversy around the quality and the relevance of the NVQ system. Some of the criticism currently raised against the learning outcomes approach (and implicitly validation) seems to be linked to the particular ('narrow') way learning outcomes were defined for NVQs (Allais 2016). So, while learning outcomes based standards and curricula are important to promote validation, they cannot do so alone.

As indicated above, a limited number of countries stand out as pioneers in implementing validation arrangements. In addition to the UK and Finland mentioned above, France stands out as an important frontrunner. The *bilan de competence* was established in 1985, supporting employers and employees in identifying (making visible) competences acquired at work. From 1992 vocational certificates (Certificate d'aptitude professionelle) could be achieved (to various degrees) on the basis of

assessment of non-formal and prior learning, and in 2002 legislation was adopted establishing a comprehensive national framework for validation (VAE). Nordic countries increasingly focused on developing legislation and institutional solutions allowing for validation. Norway, as a part of the 1999 Competence Reform, carried out an extensive three-year experimental scheme to develop and test the various elements necessary for an operational national system on validation (VOX, 2002). This led to the setting-up of operational validation schemes from the early 2000s, addressing vocational education and training in particular. Denmark and Sweden, addressing validation as an integrated part of lifelong learning policies, also exemplify this. In the Netherlands, the commission on Erkenning Verwoven Kwalificaties (EVK) developed recommendations to establish a system for validation that was then tested in some sectors (construction industry and childcare). Also in Switzerland, the association CH-Q Swiss Qualification Programme for Job Careers started to developed methodologies for assessing learning acquired outside the formal system in 1999. All these countries can be considered as 'entrepreneurs' in the sense that Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) use the term. They 'pave the way' for turning validation into a visible policy priority, stressing the values underpinning the 'validation norm'.

The European level
Bjørnåvold (2000) and Duvekot, Schuur and Paulusse (2005) point to the 1995 Commission White Paper on Teaching and Learning (European Commission 1995) as the first explicit effort to promote validation at European level. The White Paper emphasised the importance of recognising competences acquired outside formal education and paved the way for extensive testing and experimentation to be financed through European programmes (for example Adapt, Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, Equal). This experimentation, also supported by the work of Cedefop (Bjørnåvold 1999 and 2000), focused on the development of methodologies for validation in particular, testing the practical feasibility of the approach. While only in a few cases leading to permanent arrangements for validation being set up, the European programmes played a key role in disseminating 'the validation norm' to countries, institutions and experts previously not involved in this area.

The 2001 publication of the European Commission 'Memorandum on lifelong learning' ('Making the European area of lifelong learning a reality') gave further impetus to the role of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Rooted in the Delors' (1996) declaration, UNESCO's 1972 publication "Learning to be" (Fraure, 1972) and the subsequent changes to the concept of lifelong learning (see e.g. Rubensson 2001, Jarvis 2002, Villalba 2006), the 2001 Communication emphasised the importance of learning throughout one's life and across the life span (in formal, non-formal and informal settings). Rubensson (2003) has argued that the Communication clearly places a major emphasis on informal learning and gives the individual significant responsibility in the management of their learning history. Thus, validation became a central element in the implementation of lifelong learning

policies. Around the same time, the European Union started developing transparency tools that would allow for better portability of skills and qualifications. The Copenhagen Declaration of 29-30 November 2002 launched the European strategy for enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET). The Copenhagen Declaration established the need for '*developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries*' (European Ministers …., 2002, 2).

3. Expansion of validation (2002-2012) – towards a 'tipping point'?

National developments
At national level, the 'entrepreneur' countries France, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands stabilised their validation approaches during this period, notably by integrating validation arrangements into their national education and training systems and by increasing the number of persons being validated. A number of new countries acknowledged the potential importance of validation and initiated systematic processes during this period. Portugal is a remarkable example of this. The 'New Opportunities initiative' (2005) defined a national strategy, largely based on validation, to raise the qualification level of low-qualified individuals. Including a National System for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC), the new opportunities initiative established more than 400 centres at local and regional level and led to the award of more than 300,000 certificates. Denmark established legislation in 2007 on the development of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning across all sectors of education and launched several initiatives with the aim of increasing its use. In Germany, the introduction of the ProfilPass (a tool to document people's skills) in 2005 can be considered a first move towards a broader validation approach. The 2005 reform of the Vocational training act (BBiG)[4], including the 'external student examinations' that allowed individuals not enroled in formal education to obtain apprenticeships certificates proving professional experience, is also an indication of a certain movement towards accepting validation. In Spain, the Royal Decree 1224/2009 on the recognition of professional competencies acquired through work experience established the mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET qualifications. Belgium, Estonia, Luxembourg Ireland, Iceland and Slovenia also exemplify the introduction of legislation and administrative procedures for validation, although the degree of practical implementation varies. Other countries, such as the Czech Republic and Lithuania, also started developments during this period.

The European level
As in the first period, the European programmes play a key role in testing solutions and disseminating experiences (and attitudes to) validation. In the decade from

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4   https://www.bmbf.de/pub/The_2005_Vocational_Training_Act.pdf

2002-2012 in particular the European Social Funds play a critical role in supporting the setting up of validation arrangements in 'new' countries, exemplified by the new opportunities programme in Portugal. Programmes like Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Socrates (later; the lifelong learning programme) continues support to testing and piloting, overall supporting several hundred projects. These projects were to a large extent triggered by the policy objectives on validation included in the lifelong learning initiatives, the Copenhagen process as well as Bologna. This interaction between European policy initiatives, European programmes and national developments is of key importance to understand developments during this period. Furthermore, the adoption of instruments like the EQF and the increased attention to the learning outcomes principle can be seen as an indirect (and important) support to 'the validation norm'. The broad implementation of learning outcomes in all sectors of education and training and in most European countries during the decade (Cedefop 2009, 2016) means that the conditions for opening up qualifications to a wider range of learning pathways were being addressed.

In 2004, the Council adopted a set of conclusions regarding 'Common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning' (Council of the European Union, 2004). These principles were formulated at a high level of abstraction and identify issues and conditions critical to the implementation of validation (Cedefop 2009). This was followed up by the first European inventory on validation (Colardyn and Bjørnåvold, 2005), providing an overview over national developments and arrangements (followed by other editions (Souto Otero, McCoshan, Junge, 2005; Otero, Hawley and Nevala, 2007, Hawley, Otero and Duchemin, 2010). Work on the first set of European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning was also started (Cedefop 2009). Both the Inventory and the Guidelines support national implementation of validation in Europe and have been widely disseminated and used. The 2004 Council Decision on a single Community Framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences in Europe (Europass) (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2004) can be said to support the 'validation norm' also. In particular, the Europass CV is explicitly focused on the identification and documentation of learning outcomes in different contexts, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The 2008 adoption of the European Qualification framework (EQF AG) is of key importance to validation. The establishment of the EQF triggered the introduction of learning outcomes based national qualifications frameworks across the continent. The long-term effect of this, directly influencing validation, is the more systematic promotion of learning outcomes at national level. When countries are referencing their NQFs to the EQF, the role of validation is explicitly addressed.

While initially largely focusing on vocational education and training, other areas and sectors were gradually being included in the policy discourse. In higher education, the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve on 28 and 29 April 2009 expanded

the Bologna process and recognition convention to include also recognition of prior learning. In 2011, the Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education also called Member States to develop clear routes into higher education from vocational and other types of education, as well as mechanisms for recognising prior learning and experience gained outside formal education and training.

In 2006, a resolution of the Council invited Member States to enable the identification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field. The resulting Youthpass (as the Europass) supports the documentation of all forms of learning and promotes transfer of learning as well as transparency of qualifications (European Parliament and the Council in Decision No 1719/2006/EC). This was followed up in 2009 by the renewed framework for EU cooperation in the youth field that places non-formal learning and its validation at the core of youth initiatives.

Towards a tipping point?
In this second phase we can observe a gradual expansion of validation objectives from the pioneering countries to an increasing number of 'newcomers'. In the pioneering countries, validation was becoming more institutionalised, and although not necessarily always fully developed, the arrangements were becoming increasingly established within the institutional network. In other countries, new legislation was developed to try to boost validation practices, in many cases within the development of national qualifications frameworks. However, initiatives were still limited to specific sectors and in many cases lacking full-scale implementation. While European initiatives, and in particular the programmes, helped to promote the issue, a "tipping point", as referred by Helgøy and Homme (2013), was not reached during this decade. While the number of countries working with validation increased, full scale, comprehensive implementation was largely lacking. Validation was furthermore taken forward in a fragmented way, lacking overall coordination. Practices remained confined to specific sectors with no relationship to other practices. It is important to note, however, that some critical conditions for developments were created, notably through the intensified role of NQFs and the more systematic focus on the implementation of learning outcomes.

4. The current situation – norm-cascade and internalisation?

In 2012, following an open consultation, the European Council adopted the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning[5]. Differently from previous initiatives, where validation was treated as a part of broader initiatives, the 2012 Recommendation establishes validation as an independent policy instrument, relevant for policy development in a number of areas. The public consultation preceding the Recommendation demonstrated that validation was

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

considered increasingly relevant and important by most EU countries. The timing of the 2012 Recommendation is important: Following the financial crisis in 2008-2009 a majority of EU countries faced serious problems linked to unemployment, re-direction of people's careers, marginalisation of social groups and a general rise in poverty and social exclusion. Seen from this perspective, the perception of validation at national level underwent a change. While previously seen by many as an instrument to increase the flexibility of formal education and training (open up qualifications to non-formal and informal learning), countries now increasingly started to see validation as a way to (for example) support integration of groups at risk and 're-skill' unemployed workers. Validation changed from being a tool relevant to the education and training sector to becoming an instrument of interest to labour market and social policies. The adoption of the Recommendation is thus not an isolated initiative at European level, but reflects a changing political and economic reality requiring responses at national level.

The 2012 recommendation on validation – confirming 'the validation norm'?
The following aspects of the recommendation illustrate this change of emphasis and the changed position of validation in the overall policy landscape: First, the Recommendation clarifies the concept of validation, establishing a common understanding of what validation is. The concept of validation had remained difficult to define, with different terms used in different countries and contexts: Validation of non-formal and informal learning, prior learning assessment, recognition of prior learning, certification of learning, accreditation and validation of experiential learning, etc. All these terms are related, but address slightly different ideas. The Recommendation provides a definition that can serve as an umbrella for all these existing, related terms. It defines validation as a process of confirmation, and it consists of 4 different phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The four stages permit a much needed flexibilisation of the validation concept. They make it easier for countries to adapt and accept the norm as well as to articulate the concept to represent the complex different realities in which it operates. The definition also indicates that the process of confirmation is carried out by an authorising body that checks the learning outcomes an individual has acquired, measured against relevant standards. The inclusion of an authorising body means that certain institutional structures have to be in place to allow for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This addresses one of the three basic critical conditions referred at the beginning of the chapter, namely the necessary institutional setting for validation. Secondly, the Recommendation gives a clear time frame for the establishment of national arrangements. It states that Member states should establish, no later than 2018, validation arrangements that allow for awarding qualifications (or parts of them). Although initially the aim was to put in place 2015 as the cut-off date, member states considered that more time was needed, as in many instances, the national structures were not ready.
A third important aspect of the Recommendation is that it draws up a series of principles in these validation arrangements. These principles build on the 2004

principles, but are more concrete and further integrated into existing policy actions established by the Union during the previous stage. Validation arrangements need to provide information, advice and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures. This means that guidance and counselling must be in place during the process of validation. The Recommendation also asked Member States to link validation to NQFs, which are referenced to the EQF, as well as establish synergies with existing credit systems. Member States are also asked to make use of existing transparency tools, especially Europass and Youthpass. The standards used for validation are meant to be the same or equivalent to those of formally acquired qualifications. In here, the shift to learning outcomes described above becomes especially relevant as standards for validation cannot rely on time or place of learning, but on learning outcomes irrespective of how they have been acquired. Other principles relate to the transparency of quality assurance and the provision for professional development in order to guarantee trust and reliability.

The Recommendation also establishes a body that oversees and is responsible for the implementation of the Recommendation: The European Qualification Framework Advisory Group. This gives Member States a forum for discussion and exchange of views as well as a place for the norm to be further internalised. Giving responsibility to a specific body assures a certain degree of commitment and peer pressure for the implementation of validation initiatives.

Finally, the Recommendation gives an important role to the European guidelines[6] and the inventory on validation as tools to support the implementation of the Recommendation, providing an extra platform for discussion and common understanding. The guidelines seek to clarify the conditions for the implementation of validation arrangements. The guidelines can be considered the text in which the 'validation norm' is defined and shared, providing a blueprint for adoption, acceptance and adaptation of the values and principles included in the norm. While the guidelines provide the principles and conditions to consider when implementing validation, the inventory provides an overview of how validation is being implemented in the European countries. The next section presents data from the 2016 inventory to illustrate to what extent the 'validation norm' is being adopted.

National level developments – confirming 'the validation norm'?
The recent edition of the European Inventory on validation[7] shows that in 2016, all countries have validation arrangements in place or are in an advanced stage of development. All countries except Croatia have at least one functioning system that allows individuals to obtain a qualification through validation of their non-formal or

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6   The European guidelines were the result of a process of consultation with Member States and stakeholders. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073.

7   The 2016 European inventory consists of 33 country reports, thematic reports as well as a synthesis report summarising main results. There are three reports for the UK (England and Northern Ireland; Scotland; Ireland) and two for Belgium (French Community and Flemish Community). These regions are referred and counted as 'countries' in the inventory. Countries include the 28 Member States, the EFTA countries and Turkey. Available at: www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation/inventory.

informal learning. Validation allows individuals to gain full or parts of a formal qualification, in at least one sector of education, in 30 countries, in many instances in the form of credits or modules. In addition, a range of other possibilities based on validation are provided, such as access, exemptions or provision of training specifications (see table 1).

Table 1.   Possible outcomes of validation in one or more sectors of education

Award of partial/full formal qualification	
AT, BE-fl, BG, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, TR, UK (E&NI), UK (S), UK (W)	
Award of other non-formal qualification/certificate	**Award of credits**
AT, BE-fr, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, IE, IS, LU, NL, PL, SI, UK (S)	AT, BE-fl, CH, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SI, SE, UK (E&NI), UK (S), UK (W)
Award of modules	**Exemptions**
AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, DK, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, SI, UK (E&NI), UK (S), UK (W)	AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CZ, DK, EE, ES,FI, HU, IE, IS, LI, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SI, UK (E&NI), UK (S), UK (W)
Access to formal programmes	**Training specifications**
AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, BG, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, IS, IE, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, SE, SI, UK (E&NI), UK (S), UK (W)	AT, CH, DK, ES, FI, IE, IS, LI, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, SI, UK (E&NI)

N.B.: Multiple responses possible   *Source*: 2016 European inventory.

Validation arrangements, however, might not be available in all sectors of education and training. Figure 1 shows that validation is more common in CVET, IVET and Higher Education, while general education and systems of adult education tend to be less inclined to accept validation.

Around 60% of the countries under review have or are developing comprehensive systems for validation, while the other 40% have opted for a sectoral approach, in which the legal frameworks, strategies and policies are developed separately in the different sectors. The pioneers, France, Norway, Denmark and Finland now have comprehensive systems internalised into their skills formation systems with relatively high levels of uptake. Also in UK (Scotland, especially), the sectoral approach has permeated all sectors. Other countries might have arrangements with a comprehensive approach but their systems are less established. This is the case in Spain, Poland, Italy and Romania. Portugal, Iceland, Belgium (FL), Ireland, Austria and Slovenia can be seen as countries that are re-formulating existing validation arrangements to assure coherence across sectors, framing the existing practices built during the first decade of the 21st century. Finally, a few countries have more

limited systems of validation, such as Greece, Slovakia or the Czech Republic that have validation practices only pertaining to initial VET.

Figure 1: Number of countries reporting validation arrangements by sector
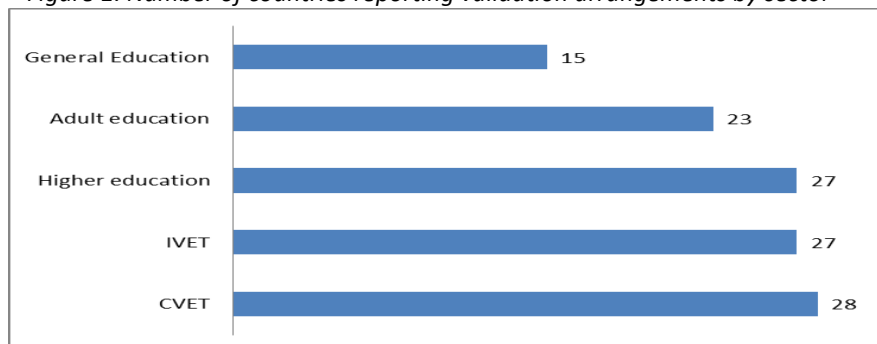
Irrespective of the approach chosen to implement validation, there is certain tendency towards creating a coherent institutional context in which validation can operate across different sectors. 20 countries reported having established mechanisms to coordinate validation across sectors.

Figure 2: National validation approaches
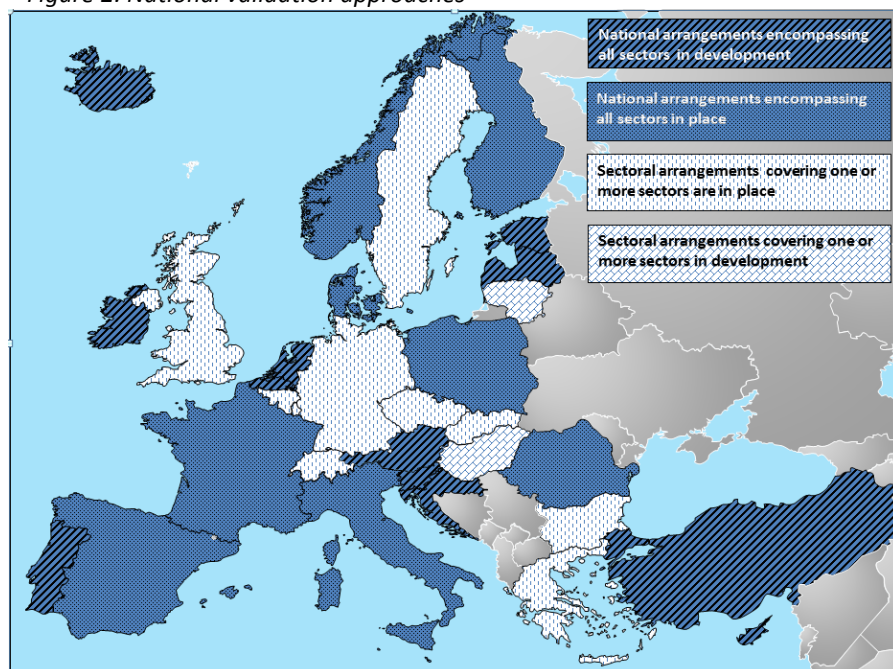
In several countries this has been done through the development of the NQFs. In Poland, the Ministry of education was given the role of coordinating the implementation of the integrated qualification system (IQS), adopted in 2015. The IQS act describes all qualifications awarded in Poland by authorised entities, and it has two key elements: the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR). The act also introduces a formal definition of validation.

Table 2: Links between validation and NQFs

	2010	**2014**	**2016**
Possible to Access/ acquire NQF qualifications	12	20	28
Link under discussion	18	16	9
No discussion to establish link	4	0	1

Source: 2016 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

This connection to the developments of NQFs is a sign of the increasing institutionalisation of validation. In 2010 the number of countries that reported allowing access or acquisition of parts or full qualifications registered in their NQFs was 12. In 2016, the number has gone up to 28.

Table 2 shows that the discussion to establish the links between NQF and validation was already present in most countries in 2010. This has to do also with the development of NQF in Europe, with countries moving towards an operational phase. Within this operational phase, validation, as argued in the previous section, is one explicit aspect to be implemented. The validation of non-formal and informal learning to gain access to NQF qualifications as well as the acquisition of credits is most common in higher education. 56% of the countries that have validation systems in place permit individuals access through validation, and 48% acquisition of credits for higher education. This is probably related to the implementation of the Bologna process and the extended use of ECTS. In IVET and CVET the connection with NQF is also strong. In these sectors, it is more common to be able to obtain a partial qualification/modules, while gaining access is less common.

The inventory also explores the extent to which qualifications obtained through validation use the same standards as formal qualifications and if they could be in any way differentiated by looking at the diploma received. This pertains to the idea that all learning is equally valuable, irrespective of the way that it has been acquired. The 2016 data shows that in three quarters of the countries (26 of the 35), the qualifications obtained through validation use the same or equivalent standards to formal qualifications in at least one sector of education. This is the case in 96% of the IVET systems that permit obtaining a qualification, and less common in adult education where just above 60% of the initiatives for validation use the same

standards. Similarly, 23 countries have at least one sector of education where certificates obtained through validation are exactly the same as those of formal education and cannot be differentiated. However, only in nine countries this is the case in all sectors of education in which validation is possible. Thus, there are several countries in which validation arrangements provide differentiated qualifications. In total, in 22 countries is possible to find at least one sector in which the diplomas obtained through validation can be differentiated, usually by the way the grades or the time for completion are presented. This means that in several countries validation arrangements in which it is possible to differentiate cohabits with arrangements in which it is not possible. In higher education, most of the certificates obtained cannot be differentiated. In the other sectors, it is more or less 50% of the existing validation arrangements.

Concerning methodological issues, the four stages of validation were used in 31 systems of the 36 under study. Although it is not possible to fully compare to previous inventories, due to the difference in the way the data collection was carried out, the number indicates a considerable increase from the 21 and 23 registered in 2010 and 2014 as responding positively to the question: "Are all four stages of the validation process used in the process of validation?". Most validation arrangements use a combination of methods when following the four stages. The use of portfolios has been spreading in the later years, but it is normally combined with standard methodology use in formal education such as tests and examinations or declarative methods. Standardised tools are not common and ICT can be considered to be under-utilised.

5. Conclusions

The 2016 data shows that majority of European countries now have accepted and internalised the 'validation norm' as defined at the start of this paper. Almost all countries have put in place arrangements that allow for the acquisition of full or partial qualifications through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Several countries are now working towards comprehensive systems offering validation opportunities where people live, work and/or study. The development of NQFs, as well as the general acceptance of the learning outcome approach, has been an important driver promoting validation. As regards national policy formulation it can be argued that we have reached a 'tipping point'. Validation is now an explicit and visible part of lifelong learning and (to some extent and importantly) employment and integration policies. This 'tipping point' has been reached through an intense interaction between stakeholders at national and European level. In this sense validation serves as an example of 'the open method of coordination' promoted by the EU during the last few decades.

It is, however, more difficult to determine whether acceptance and integration at the level of national policy formulation is translated into acceptance and internalisation at the level of practical implementation. Policy documents and plans do not necessarily trigger adequate resourcing and financing for implementation at local and regional level. Only developments during the next decade(s) will show whether the acceptance of validation at national policy level will be translated into acceptance and internalisation also at the level of practitioners and among the end-users themselves.

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The Dawn of a New Era for Learners **3**

James Rickabaugh

> *We stand at the dawn of a new day in learning.*
> *Like the beginning of any new day, at first it can*
> *be difficult to see, only a few rays penetrate the*
> *darkness of the night. But soon the rays begin to*
> *stretch longer and connect with each other. Then*
> *quickly, the full glory of a new day is upon us.*

For the past century, schools have been designed and operated much like early industrial assembly lines. Students have been grouped by age and processed through the system with little regard to the ways in which they learn best and the variations in time they may need to learn. They are asked to learn on demand, driven by a preset schedule and pre-planned lessons, delivered at a pre-defined pace. When students fail to comply with the expectations of the system, either in their behaviour or learning, they are treated as problems and are identified as needing remediation. There is rarely consideration given to whether other factors may be at play - the instructional approach used, the readiness of the learner for the content presented, or a mismatch between what the learner needs and the system expects.

This education system rests on the premise that the work of educators and schools is to transfer information, knowledge and skills from the heads of adults to the heads of students; often referred to as the "empty vessel" theory of teaching and learning. This approach had some merit at a time when information was difficult to access and engaging people with the knowledge and skills needed to support learning on demand was nearly impossible. Today, information is ubiquitous and technology offers the potential to learn almost anything at any time, any place, in any way and at any age. We can no longer afford to have schools be driven by instruction, assuming learning will occur on demand. Schools of today and tomorrow must be driven by learning, with instruction as a crucial, but flexible, resource to support learners throughout their educational journey.

During the last quarter of the 20th century there was growing realization that the industrial era design of schools was not producing the results needed for the knowledge era. The National Commission on Educational Excellence was formed in the United States during the early 1980's to study this problem. While the

information reviewed at the time made it clear that the current design of schools was not producing adequate results, the commission concluded that the problem was lack of effort by and accountability of those within the system. (NCEE, 1983) Sadly, as a result of the report, most education reform efforts over the past three decades in the United States have focused on improving the legacy system by demanding more accountability for educators and students, offering a wider array of programs for students who do not fit well into the system, and blaming and shaming those in the system when expected results do not materialize.

However, recently there is growing understanding that the problem is not primarily the people within the educational system. The problem is the system itself and the way in which it was designed and operates. As the pace of change accelerates and the need for highly skilled learners and workers is at a crucial point, the design and capacity of the current system is beginning to receive the scrutiny and study it deserves. It is becoming increasingly clear that we need to redesign the system, not continue to blame those within it.

1. Today's Challenge

Students in school today face a different future than their great grandparents, grandparents and even their parents faced. Most people in previous generations could learn a skill or occupation and expect to enjoy a lifelong career. Change was measured and largely predictable. The emergence of new industries and work opportunities was at a pace where most needs could be predicted and preparations could be made. Further, there typically were more appropriately skilled people available to engage in the work than jobs available.

But the situation is changing. Projections are that today's students will have multiple careers. In fact, the life cycle of careers will be more in line with today's product life cycles than historical careers (Turnipseed, 2016). Young people must be prepared to engage in new careers repeatedly throughout their work lives. Meanwhile, as "baby boomers" leave the work force in many developed countries, there are barely enough workers to replace them. We also face a crisis as we work to grow our economies since a significant portion of those entering the work force do not possess the skills necessary to do the jobs available now, and are not prepared to learn and adjust as the work continues to change and new skills are required.

The challenge facing the education system is to prepare today's students for jobs that do not yet exist, requiring skills that have yet to be defined, in a context of rapid and often unpredictable change. It is impossible to give students the technical knowledge necessary to perform these roles with what we know today. The very best we can do is prepare them with the skills and dispositions to learn in a variety of ways, under a variety of circumstances, in a wide range of contexts.

2. A New Design for Learning

A fundamental principle to guide the design of such a system is an obvious and long understood fact: *all learning is personal*. (Sinatra, 2000) Even though the industrial era system treated learning as though it is uniform - think the early moving assembly line - this is not how rich, purposeful learning occurs. Nor does this approach adequately prepare students to be successful learners in a variety of circumstances and situations.

Today's students need an education system designed to meet the expectations of an era of learning and innovation. We must invest in the capacity of students to learn independently. This challenge argues for a different approach to nurturing learning.

3. Personalized Learning defined

A number of definitions of personalized learning are in popular use. *The Institute for Personalized Learning* defines this approach as:

> Personalized learning is an approach to *learning* and instruction that is designed around *individual learner readiness, strengths, needs and interests*.
> *Learners are active participants* in setting goals, planning learning paths, tracking progress and determining how learning will be demonstrated.
> At any point in time, learning objectives, content, method and pacing are likely to *vary from learner to learner* as they pursue proficiency relative to established standards.
> A fully personalized environment moves beyond both differentiation and individualization. (Rickabaugh, 2016)

The power of this approach resides in its ability to reposition learners to be co-designers, co-investors and take co-responsibility for their learning. Learners still have standards and competencies to guide the direction of their learning, but they are active partners in building and following a unique learning path. This approach focuses on building the skills necessary to become powerful learners, not just good students.

Personalized learning engages learners early in the process of learning and skill development and builds their capacity to be strong, flexible, independent learners over time. The following section presents this continuum toward learning independence and describes how each stage builds on those that come before it.

4. Learning Independence Continuum

Educators often think about motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, ownership and independence in learning as separate efforts. What may not be clear are the

relationships among these learner characteristics and the power they hold to create highly proficient, lifetime learners. Consequently, we can find ourselves focusing on each characteristic in isolation, hoping that somehow they will lead to learners who are persistent, independent problem-solvers. (Rickabaugh, 2012)

Learning Continuum

Educator Driven ⟷ **Learner Driven**

Personalized *to* the learner   Personalized *with* the learner   Personalized *by* the learner

Motivation   Engagement   Efficacy   Ownership   Independence

The Institute for Personalized Learning   July 2015
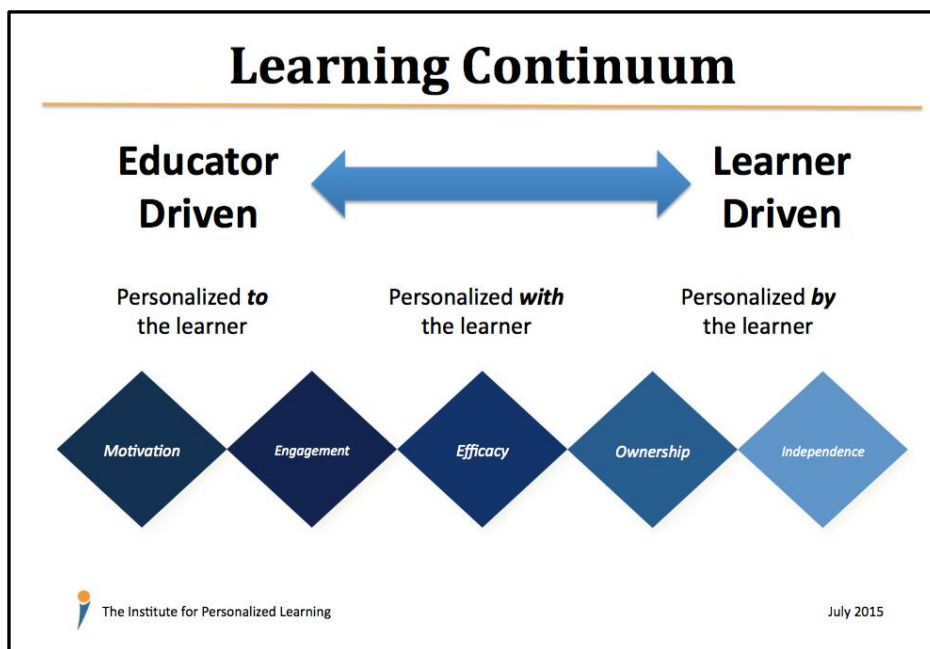
Much has been written about how to engage learners. While engagement is important, efforts must go beyond engagement to nurturing learners who can learn independently. The desired outcome is learners who want to learn and can drive their own learning. There is a continuum that builds from motivation to independence and includes strategies to support each of these elements. Parallel to building these characteristics is another continuum regarding who drives learning and activities – the educator or the learner. Early stages of learning, particularly involving inexperienced and immature learners, generally need to be more educator-driven, and designed to motivate, engage and support learners. On the other end of the spectrum, activities that nurture independence in more experienced and mature learners will generally be driven more by learners themselves. In personalized learning environments, learning activities will fall all along this continuum – at times it's more important for the educator to drive the work, at others, the learner will take the driver's seat. However, in order for this to happen, all of the characteristics along the continuum must be developed and nurtured in each learner.

Motivation

The first element in the learning continuum is motivation. Motivation can be described as an emotional or psychological state that is indicated by interest, curiosity, and/or the desire to understand. (Bomia, et al. in Brewster and Fager, 2000, p.4) Learners demonstrate motivation by a desire to participate and be successful in the learning process.

Motivation can occur intrinsically (from within) or extrinsically (from external sources). Intrinsic sources have been shown to be more successful in the long term to motivate students. They also aid in retention and understanding of content. (Lumsden, 1994; Voke 2002)

The best way to stimulate intrinsic motivation is to design learning activities that are interesting, valuable and purposeful to students. (Ames, 1992) Providing feedback to students on short-term goals and providing autonomy and learner choice are also strategies that have been shown to be successful in motivating students intrinsically.

Engagement

Engagement is motivation in action. Engaged learners are curious, committed and learn with purpose. Learners who are engaged better retain what they learn, exhibit fewer behavior problems, and are more willing to participate in learning activities. (Ames, 1992)

Educators can engage learners by designing tasks that are challenging – at the leading edge of the learner's current skills. Learners who constantly face debilitating frustration and failure find it difficult to believe that they can be successful. Conversely, when learners are able to undertake these challenging tasks and accomplish them (because it is personalized and calibrated to their specific needs and readiness for learning), they will begin to believe they can succeed with effort, good strategies and the correct resources. (Wigfield and Wagner, 2005)

Yet, engagement is not the end point. It is a worthy effort, and one that requires time and attention. But it is one marker on the road to independence. As students experience meaningful and extended engagement, they are likely to become aware of the relationship between their actions and the results they see. This connection leads students toward the next element in the continuum: self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy

Efficacy is the belief that one is capable of producing a result, meeting a challenge or accomplishing a task. For students, efficacy or self-efficacy is the belief that they can succeed and learn. The challenge it is to engage students in ways that help them to examine and change their thinking and build the confidence and strategies necessary to increase the probability of success. (Bandura, 1986)

Students who are efficacious persist in the face of challenge, learn from failure rather than becoming trapped in it, try different approaches and strategies, and do what it takes to succeed. Rich learning often occurs from significant struggle; the

presence of a strong sense of self-efficacy is important for learners to continue to stretch and grow and to move beyond present levels of skill and knowledge.

Strategies include setting attainable, close-at-hand goals that will give the learner a sense of accomplishment to build upon. Additionally, some learners will benefit from assistance in identifying and using learning strategies instead of being left to their own devices. Explicit feedback on the effort, strategy, and resources the learner uses also can be helpful. (Schunk, 1991; Dweck, 2006)

Helping learners to see that effort, persistence, strategy, and good use of resources can increase their learning and control can make a key difference in the level of effort learners will give. This approach can also build learner willingness to persist, identify and try alternative approaches.

Learners with strong self-efficacy understand the connection between their efforts and actions and the learning results they experience. This understanding can build ownership for learning – they are more likely to understand that the success they achieve is theirs to keep.

Ownership
Ownership implies that learners have a sense of control over their learning and leads them to view learning as something of value that cannot be taken from them. Ownership of learning transfers responsibility for success from educators and other adults to the learner. As a result, learners tend to place greater value on and take greater pride in their learning. (Kohn, 1993)

A growing sense of ownership often leads learners to shift from a compliance orientation to commitment. The question in their minds moves from "How much am I asked I do?" to "What do I need to do to learn this concept or skill?" While the traditional model of schooling depends heavily on compliance, unleashing a sense of ownership for learning can dramatically improve learner performance, even within the legacy education system. (Pink, 2009)

Unsurprisingly, one of the key methods to build ownership for learning is a strategy also employed to build motivation, engagement, and efficacy. This method offers learners choice and control related to their learning in areas valued by the learner. Additionally, when educators work with learners to develop learning goals and select approaches they can effectively build ownership.

Ownership for learning positions the learner to make decisions, allocate energy, and develop meaning and insight unique to the learner. By devolving key portions of the responsibility for learning to learners and allowing them to participate as co-workers in the learning process, educators position learners to become more independent.

Independence
Independent learners take responsibility for their motivation and growth, and are led by curiosity and the drive to build their knowledge and skills. Independent learners treat their learning as a prized possession that they must take care of,

maintain, and cultivate. Independent learners understand when they need to learn more and seek out the best methods and resources to accomplish this goal.

It makes sense that the end goal for education is a person who is proactive and able to anticipate their learning needs relative to a challenge or task. We need citizens and workers who problem-solve, take initiative, are flexible and continue to learn. As long as learners are dependent on others to tell them when, what, and how to learn, they will never completely take charge of their learning fate and future.

To change this situation and build learner independence, the previously discussed strategies must be leveraged. We should also give learners increasing opportunities to work with their peers; gradually shifting the attention, focus and source of knowledge away from adults and educators. We can also create space and opportunity for learners to participate in goal setting, reflect on and evaluate their learning, and participate in planning what they will learn.

Regardless of the specific strategy, we need to give learners opportunities to learn independently, first with our coaching and guidance and later without our immediate support. When learners understand how to channel their interest and curiosity, they gain the ability to motivate themselves. When learners act on their interests and motivation, they come to understand the power they possess and how they can use resources to meet learning challenges — they gain the power to control what they learn.

5. In practice

Students can take many paths to develop the skills and experiences necessary to become confident, independent learners. The Learning Independence Continuum provides a framework for constructing such paths. However, specific examples of how these concepts can be implemented in practice can be helpful.

Many educators are finding that a useful, low risk place to tap motivation is through providing students with a wider array of choices in their learning. Early on the choices might be narrow and provided by the educator. Later, as experience grows, the choices can broaden to include choice options suggested by the student. Gradually and under some circumstances, students might be allowed a full range of choices in what they will learn and how they will learn it, with or without specific approval from educators.

Closely related, and also a relatively low risk way to tap motivation, is providing students with more frequent and important opportunities to have a voice in their learning. Here, students need to be able to speak without fear of rejection or ridicule. Their perspectives must be taken seriously and respected. Further, their thoughts and suggestions must be considered without deference to the status and academic performance of the student. Providing opportunities for voice also can build a sense of belonging and significance.

Offering opportunities for students to experience greater choice and more significance to their voice typically leads to greater commitment, the entry gate for engagement. As students begin to make greater commitment to learning, a next step is to move from what they are offered, to what they want to accomplish. Here, supporting students to set goals for their learning transfers learning from what students do for adults to what they are doing for themselves. (Hattie, 2012) Goal setting and accomplishment also build confidence, help students learn to persist and utilize good learning strategies and resources — key components of academic self-efficacy (Wigfield and Wagner, 2005). This transition to learner efficacy and ownership can be enhanced by engaging learners as co-constructors of the learning path that will lead to successful goal completion. While educators can provide expert guidance in this process, it is also important for learners to contribute and commit to the plan. Doing so typically leads learners to invest and persist to make the plan successful.

Once students have set goals and developed plans to attain them, educators can begin to coach and support learners to collect and analyse information to monitor their progress. At this stage it is important to give students opportunities to build the skills necessary to self-assess and make decisions about the next steps in their learning. Obviously, educators remain engaged in tracking progress, modifying strategies and selecting appropriate support and resources with learners, but the goal is to build these competencies in learners. Students gradually become good consumers and skilled users of formative assessment data, an important competency for independent learners. It also supports them to become skilled in assessing their learning and performance rather than depending exclusively on others to perform this task for them.

Goal setting, action planning and progress monitoring are key skills learners and workers in the future will need to become and remain successful. It is important for educators and schools to provide experiences, support and recognition for this aspect of learning now so that today's students are ready for their futures.

6. Synergy with Validating Prior Learning

The potential connections between personalized learning (PL) and Validating Prior Learning (VPL) are important and in some cases obvious. Nevertheless, pointing them out appears important at this crucial time in the transition from legacy systems of education to flexible, future-focused redesigns for learning.

First, PL and VPL share a common value. Both approaches share the perspective that learning itself is more important than how it was gained and where the learning occurred. Learning gained anywhere needs to be valued and respected. Looking to the future, it is likely that most adult learning will occur in informal settings, away from formal classrooms and instruction. We must prepare today's students to learn regardless of context and instill in them the drive to do so.

Second, in PL and VPL the focus is on building competency through learning, not the completion of a course or satisfaction of a teacher. The shared focus is on recognizing and valuing experience, knowledge and skills regardless of the path leading to their acquisition. In a rapidly changing workplace and world, we cannot afford to confine our recognition of learning to traditional contexts, methods and measures.

Third, PL and VPL share an interest in measurement of learning, regardless of whether the content or skill was taught to the learner. Again, the source and path of learning are less important than whether and what learning occurs. Experience can be, but is not always, a good teacher. Instruction often is a good source for learning, but it is not the only source. Reflection almost always is a good source for learning, but it is not dependent on the source or context of the experience.

Fourth, PL and VPL share the perspective that the capacity to learn is crucial for future success in most work and life contexts. Instruction will remain an important dimension of formal learning environments. However, the focus of instruction and support for learning must increasingly be on the development of the capacity of students to learn regardless of context, not just on whether they have learned what they have been taught. In short, students need to become their own best teachers.

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VPL for personalised learning

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The added value of integrating the two concepts

Ruud Duvekot

In a 'learning society' learning throughout life is important for everyone, whether individuals, organisations, schools or institutions. Linking education or, to be more precise, learning to social participation, inclusion and career-opportunities, and the changes in prevailing attitudes on learning, are important themes that allow us to understand the current transition towards such a learning society. By characterising this as the *transition from diploma to portfolio*, the emphasis is on the growing importance of learning of, by and for the individual, while at the same time the distribution of roles and responsibilities between the learning system[8], social system[9] and individual (or learner) is changing. The *diploma* represents the more traditional, top-down hierarchical approach to learning, while the *portfolio* represents a more bottom-up approach, partly because the learning process can be steered (more) personally by the individual learner.

This article[10] focuses on two key phenomena that can be distinguished as change-makers in this transition: the processes of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) and of personalised learning. The main questions to be answered are how and to what extent are VPL and personalised learning interlinked processes and what is the impact of this interlinkage on 'the learning society'? Both phenomena are presented in their process-oriented framework, covering the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in achieving their goals in 'a learning triangle' where the learning needs of the individual, the facilities from the learning system and the demand for competent people from the prevailing social system are negotiated. After all, learning is supposed to be established in general in an open dialogue between teachers, employers and learners. The aim of the framework is to show the potential of VPL in dealing with a diversity of learning goals as a matchmaker between these main stakeholders in lifelong learning processes. This will help in demonstrating how and where to set up

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8   The learning system – or 'school' - is the collection of providers and facilitators of formal learning, education and training.

9   The social system is the collection of organisations that fill-in social, regulatory, profit, not-for-profit, voluntary and citizenship activities.

10 This contribution is based on the thesis: Duvekot, R.C. (2016) *Leren Waarderen. Een studie van EVC en gepersonaliseerd leren [Valuing Learning. A study of VPL and personalised learning].* http://cl3s.com/leren-waarderen-download/

interventions for strengthening VPL as a matchmaker for the sake of creating time- and money-effective and - above all – efficient, tailor-made, applied and enjoyable lifelong learning-strategies on a win-win-win-basis for all stakeholders. Isn't it after all – as stated by Paolo Freire in the 1970s – that learning above all is a personal ánd social process that makes sense '*because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing — of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't.*' (Freire, 2004, p. 15).

1. VPL and personalised learning

The phenomena of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) and Personalised Learning are set against the background of the transition from the industrial age to 'the learning society' (UNESCO, 1996; WRR, 2013). In this transition, the function of education and training and the role of learning is a critical success factor for supporting and guiding the transformation of the social and political life into a participatory society in which the dissemination of knowledge and the provision of learning opportunities are important pillars (Gelpi, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1994; Delors, 2013). Such a 'learning society' can be defined as a society in which learning is considered important or valuable, where people are encouraged to continue to learn throughout their lives, and where the opportunity to participate in education and training is available to all.[11] The UNESCO International Commission on the Development of Education already in 1971 perceived the making of such a society as a major challenge:

> *If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future.* (Faure, *et al.*, 1972, xxxiii).

In answering this challenge, it seems logical to step up to the role that VPL can play in creating the participation of all people, as VPL can provide access to learning and help shaping the learning that enhances people's opportunities. VPL is a process that, independent of the type of learning programme, focuses on recognising, valuing, validating and capitalising on further developing the competences that someone has learned in any type of learning environment. Personalised learning is the dynamic learning concept focused on the individual learner, which can initiate (or help initiate) and establish tailored individual learning programmes in a learning culture based on self-driven, reflective, flexible and forward-looking lifelong learning.

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11 www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues

While VPL identifies the potential value of a person's learning, personalised learning presupposes that VPL can support somebody's contribution to the dialogue on further learning with other actors on the meaning, form and content of learning. As a result, an important distinction between these two phenomena arises from the management of learning and the links which can be made between actors during learning:

- VPL mainly functions as a context-driven process, and is geared to connecting actors during learning (acquisition), and formulating the contributions of the actors involved in this process (participation). *Acquisition in participation* is key to VPL.
- Personalised learning can be better viewed as a process driven by an individual. It focuses on making a personal contribution to achieve development goals. *Participating in acquisition* is key to personalised learning.

VPL and personalised learning therewith both concern learning processes which allow citizens or individual learners to allocate themselves an active role within the 'learning society' when it comes to achieving personal, civil and/or social effects. Civil effect means achieving a learning outcome in the context of a qualification standard within the education system. Social effect is focused on results which are relevant to job profiles, targets, participation goals, or assignments. Personal impact may mean achieving empowerment, career and study orientation or personal development.

2. The VPL-process

Validation of Prior Learning as an organising principle of lifelong learning reflects the change towards a learning society in which the individual learner has ánd can take more responsibilities for her[12] own, personal learning process (OECD, 2004; Duvekot, 2014). It also means that the individual learner changes the existing 'balance of power' in learning processes because she will be steering lifelong learning too with her portfolio. In this portfolio, the learning outcomes that she has achieved are documented together with the relevant evidence. In many cases the portfolio even encompasses an action plan for personal development. Such portfolios create a new balance within learning as a process and contribute to the individual's social identity; above all, they show the road-map for personal development in the context of the organisation and the society.

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) (CEC, 2006a, 2006b). Thus, Validation of Prior Learning as such contributes to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour between countries and between

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12 The reader may interpret words like 'her' and 'she', also as 'his, 'him' and 'he'.

sectors. At national levels, learning outcomes are made a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks to innovate Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE), to stimulate economic development and to promote social cohesion and citizenship. These goals of 'Valuation of Prior Learning' are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Goals of 'Validation of Prior Learning'

Individual	Stimulating self-investment in learning; showing learning outcomes; building up a learning biography or portfolio
Organisation	Building up competence management and facilitating employees' self-investment and articulation of competences; designing lifelong learning strategies in Human Resource Management
VET/HE	Matching learning to real learning needs; offering learning-made-to-measure; focus on learning outcomes; facilitating lifelong learning strategies
Civil Society	Activating citizenship; transparency of learning outcomes in the civil society; linkages with other perspectives (qualification, careers)
Macro-level	Concerns policies of governments and social partners and their responsibilities for creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning through laws and regulations

Source: Duvekot et al, 2007

Important preconditions for creating a learning society in which these benefits come to full bloom, are:
1. A transparent, output-oriented knowledge infrastructure.
2. Creating trust by (a) focusing on the already available quality-system based on the judgement of the existing assessment processes used by schools, colleges and universities and (b) prospective quality-management by introducing external peer-reviews on quality-issues for the future.
3. 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.
4. Universal, transparent and interchangeable procedures and reports on the competences that have been valued.
5. Close relations between educational institutions and their associates/partners (enterprises, government institutions, institutions in the field of (re)integration of unemployed into the labour market).
6. Creating possibilities for developing and executing individual tailor made learning paths.
7. Facilities for financing flexible tailor made individual learning routes, such as an individual learning account.

8. Clear communication to citizens about the technical and financial arrangements for education and 'Validation of Prior Learning'.
9. Development of an individual right for portfolio-assessment and career-advice.

The starting point of VPL is that initial training for a career no longer suffices. It is important to acknowledge that competences (knowledge, skills, attitude, aspirations) are constantly developing. This means recognizing that someone always and everywhere - consciously and unconsciously – learns through (Cedefop, 2009):

- *formal learning*, which occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to qualification or certification.
- *non-formal learning*, which is learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) but with an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.
- *informal learning*, which results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

VPL is a process that strengthens the role of the individual in shaping her lifelong learning. It can demonstrate the outcomes of learning in terms of profit (status, money), efficiency (time, customisation), and enjoyment. The learning-programme-independent nature of the assessment enhances the effects that VPL can create for personal objectives in terms of qualifications, career development and personal meaning. In general, VPL consists of five sequential phases (also see figure 2):

1. **Engagement** focuses on being aware that someone has already acquired many formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences that might be valuable. A person can exploit these competences through self-management. A wide range of aspirations may be achievable thanks to a person's experience, and can therefore be deployed to determine an individual learning objective. Such learning objectives range from activation in the person's private life, empowerment, personal development and career development in education and occupation to creating flexibility and mobility in order to access or move up the job market.

2. **Recognition and documentation** are focused on identifying and organising actual individual learning experience and translating these into personal competences. The description of these competences is then recorded in a portfolio. In addition to this description of the competences acquired through paid and voluntary work, qualifications, leisure activities, etc., the portfolio is supplemented with evidence backing this up, such as certificates, job reviews, references,

documents, videos or pictures which substantiate the claim of possessing certain competences.

3. Under **assessment**, the contents of the portfolio are assessed and evaluated. Assessors compare the competences of an individual with a selected yardstick that is used as a reference for the intended learning objective. Depending on the yardstick used, this comparison is used to draw up an advisory opinion on possible validation at personal, organisational, sectoral or national level in the form of certification, career advice or personal valuation. The advice is based on the output or learning outcomes to be validated, and presented by the individual at the assessment. This output is used as a basis for drawing up advice on how somebody can cash in on her development, and subsequent steps.

4. **The impact of VPL** is focused on validating the assessment advice in terms of cashing in (direct impact), possibly in combination with designing specific learning packages and/or work packages (indirect impact). In the context of 'learning', a benefit could be the formal acquisition of exemptions or an entire qualification. In the context of 'work', it might involve being allocated a particular job, a promotion or a horizontal (same job level) or vertical (another job level) move. Finally, the benefit may also be something more personal, such as creating a personal profile, self-empowerment, or a vision on personal development. Benefits may create direct or indirect effects. The difference can be described as a cashing-in effect or development-orientated effect.

5. The last phase of the VPL process is **anchoring VPL**, or structural implementation, of VPL in all areas of the individual's life. The results of an VPL approach may have a structural effect on the personal and social organisation and orientation of all actors. At an individual level, the anchoring of VPL is strongly related to the relevant context. Anchoring is also possible at an organisational level, especially if the organisation wants to be able to use VPL structurally for specific purposes in the context of human resources and learning strategies.

Figure 2. The phases of the VPL-process
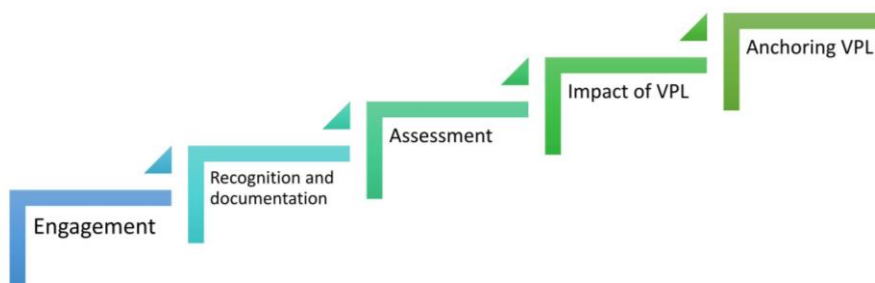
Source: Duvekot, 2016.

Making optimal use of the process requires going through the first three steps to reach direct impact in the 4th phase. For structurally anchoring the impact in the learner's context it is essential that VPL is embedded in the processes of the learning and social systems (see the introduction). After completing a VPL-process a learner might set-up an new VPL-process with new learning objectives. This is how VPL support lifelong learning strategies that essentially are recurrent and enriching a person's experiences and activities in the learning society.

3. The pillars of personalised learning

The concept of 'personalised learning' was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2003 by David Milliband:

The goal is clear. It is what the prime minister described in his party conference speech as 'personalised learning': an education system where assessment, curriculum, teaching style and out of hours provision are all designed to discover and nurture the unique talents of every single pupil … the most effective teaching depends on really knowing the needs, strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils. (Wilmot, 2006, p. 3).

This conceptualisation envisioned that personalised learning should provide flexible learning, taking into account people's experiences, expertise, responsibilities and autonomy, and provide learners with enriching and durable management and support of their individual developing power in a situation of joint control and ownership. This could be understood as creating an open dialogue between the learner, the teacher, the employer and possibly other actors. These notions were further developed by Hopkins and Hargreaves. Their work aimed at creating synergy between top-down and bottom-up approaches in school-centred learning processes. David Hopkins stated that the education-system and its pedagogical-didactic methods should focus more on matching learning needs and student talents. In his opinion, the focus on individual talents was crucial for linking learners with tailor-made education (Hopkins, n.y.). David Hargreaves went a step further. He assumed that personalising learning would create new educational practices. He based this assumption on the historical evidence of the developmental process of education as a socially embedded system since the nineteenth century (Hargreaves, 2004-2006). He outlined it as a process moving from an initial, school-centred and impersonal education system with fixed structures and standard settings for different levels and occupations, towards a learning system that is receptive to learning inside and outside the school, lifelong provided, level and standard traversing and learner-driven. Personalising learning was an exponent of the transitional nature of the learning paradigm in which the objective of learning was transforming from a top-down process in accordance with established standards and generalized initial learning contexts with no participation of the learner, to a bottom-

up process in which learning is more and more adapted to personal contexts and learning styles and, moreover, enables the learner's voice in the learning process.

While the debate in England continued to be based on the redevelopment of the education-system as such and not so much on learner's needs, further enrichment of the concept of personalised learning came from the United States. James Rickabaugh (2012) and Barbara Bray & Kathleen McClaskey (2013, 2015) argued that the question whether personalized learning as such could be realized was irrelevant since the learning paradigm is already shifting towards positioning 'the self' as a co-maker of the lifelong learning process. In line with this, tools, technology and facilities to afford this shift are available. The question 'how' therefore is deemed more relevant, from the point of view that the learner is at the heart of the learning process and schools need to be able to tune in to this learner's centrality by affording effectively personalised learning provision. This co-making of learning fits well into social development as one of the so-called instrumental freedoms that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the overall freedom that people have to be able to live the way they would like to live. Therefore, it is vital for people to have access to all forms and phases of learning in order to shape their own destiny (Sen, 1999). Sen acknowledged the relevance of the permanent education principle. Between learners and their access to learning stands a variety of organisations, institutes and relationships, all acting as 'partners in learning'. Democratisation of learning is a vital strategy for realizing the concept of 'the learning society', even when all 'partners' are having different images of what this democratization entails. The bottom-line is that "without democratisation of all actors, the learning society will continue to generate ever greater inequity and exclusion, and become ever more unstable" (Field, 2006, p. 171).

Rickabaugh's model of 'The Learning Independence Continuum' (2012) forms the backbone of the American approach to personalized learning[13]. In his model, he challenges the dominant division of responsibilities in the learning domain and sets out a developmental path for the learner to become an independent learner, supported by learner-centred facilities. The role of 'independence in learning' is described as:

> *As long as learners are dependent on others to tell them when, what, and how to learn, they will never completely take charge of their learning fate and future. They never gain the advantages that accompany proactive learning and anticipating needs and opportunities to gain new knowledge that will serve them well in life and career. Conversely, learners who have reached a level of independence that allows them to anticipate the need to learn and choose the learning path that fits best for them to gain knowledge and skills, possess greater chances for success.* (Rickabaugh, 2012, p. 8)

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13   Take notice that 'personalised' is UK-English and 'personalized' is USA-English.

He addresses the objectives and process of personalized learning from the individual learner's perspective. Essential in this is the acknowledgement that every learner is unique in her learning style, level and needs. The model focuses on the individual's autonomous learning and brings the extent to which learners can get hold of this autonomy, together in one model (see figure 3) with five characteristics:

- *Motivation* refers to the learner's willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process.
- *Engagement* occurs when learners make a psychological investment in learning and take pride in learning and understanding for their own benefit, not just for grades. Engagement is motivation in action.
- *Efficacy* is described as a set of beliefs about the learner's capacity to marshal and maintain the efforts necessary to achieve a selected goal.
- *Ownership* of learning transfers responsibility for success from others to the learner. Consequently, the learner values the experience and the result of effort.
- *Independence* starts at the other end of the development continuum with motivation. When learners understand how to channel their interest and curiosity, they gain the ability to motivate themselves. When learners act on their interests and motivation, they begin to understand the power they possess to support their learning. When learners understand the relationship between effort, strategy, persistence and use of resources to meet learning challenges, they gain the power to control what they learn. And when learners begin to own their learning, they gain a prized possession to protect, build, and maintain for a lifetime.

Figure 3. The Learning Independence Continuum

Source: Rickabaugh, 2012

These characteristics are unique to everyone and generate a unique or personal input in the preparation and execution of learning processes. Interlinked, these five characteristics form a model or step-by-step plan for personalized learning. The extent to which the learner can acquire and shape her ownership of learning determines the extent to which the status of independent learning can be achieved. This is how he envisages the reshaping of the learning process by changing it from an instruction-driven to a learning-driven process. Therefore, when speaking about personalized learning, Rickabaugh states that …

… we need to give learners opportunities to learn independently, first with our coaching and guidance and later without our immediate presence and support.

[….] In the end, if we have nurtured each of the precursor skills and dispositions, we will have prepared them well for a world that is rapidly changing and largely unpredictable. Our greatest gift to learners is to give them the tools, insights, and understanding necessary to be in charge of their own learning and lives. (Rickabaugh, 2012, p. 9)

According to Bray and McClaskey (2015) personalized learning entails that the learner manages the learning process and knows how to link this process to personal interests and ambitions. Such a learner is engaged in and owns her own learning process. The desired learning situation is designed on the basis of learner's engagement and not on compulsory curricula.

The learner creates a network in which she is surrounded by experts in the different areas in which she wishes to strengthen herself. She operates in a learning system based on competencies and not on general, normative qualification-standards. The teacher she is in dialogue with, operates as an expert within the learner's network and is the supervisor or coach of the personalized learning process. Assessment is primarily used to support the personally setting of learning goals (assessment *for* learning) and to monitor their progress and reflect on their own learning process (assessment *as* learning). Assessment *of* learning, designed to provide evidence of achievement related to pre-set standards takes place as little as possible. In their counselling practice, they help schools in a three-step-plan to transform from a school with *teacher-centred pedagogics with learner voice and choice,* through *learner-centred pedagogics with teacher and learner as co-designers* towards a school with *learner-driven pedagogics with the teacher as partner in learning*. This transformation model is based on the reality that there is already a strongly individualised education system in which differentiation of learning strategies is enhanced by technological possibilities. Personalized learning is perceived as the next developmental phase in the changing learning paradigm, based on the engaged, self-reflective learner. The function of VPL in their model is that the learner can design and manage her own learning pathway if she has insight into their learning style and their learning history. The learning experiences already acquired are documented and recorded in a portfolio in unison with the articulation of the learning experiences to be acquired. The portfolio and its structured (self)valuation are the management mechanisms that the learner has at her disposal.

The main exponents of the paradigm shift pointed out in the contributions to personalized learning, are the commitment and enhanced participation or self-management of the learner as owner and co-designer of her learning process, the willingness of 'the school' to embrace personalized learning and adapt the learning situation, the involvement of the extracurricular environment as a 'partner in learning' and the flexibility in the assessment of, for and as learning. This reflection results in distinguishing five pillars on which personalised learning is based:

1.   *Agency* is about the way people communicate and negotiate with each other when learning. *Agency* concerns the engagement of the learner in terms of

awareness of 'personal power' and the motivation to learn. *Agency* covers the aspects of awareness and personal meaning of personalised learning within the given context.

2.   *Affordance* means both affording or allowing learning processes of individuals by an organisation and/or school, as well as facilitating these processes. *Affordance* is focused on creating a stimulating learning environment, organising the partnership in learning, facilitating the individual learner by assistance and advice in the learning process, creating an innovative approach to learning within the organisation, and financing personalised learning. Through *affordance*, organisations can both recognise the importance of learning to their organisation, and facilitate the learning of 'their people'.

3.   *Assessment,* in the context of personalised learning, deals with different forms of assessment which all focus on the personal assessment of a person's learning experiences, whether acquired informally, formally, or non-formally. In all forms of assessment, the personal norm of valuation is always leading, while the social norms of valuation from qualification systems and job systems may possibly be used as frames of reference. Such an *assessment* firstly includes all types of self-assessment, such as self-examination and self-valuation. The next priority is linking what has been learned personally to the normative framework of an organisation or qualification, or a personally-set objective. Assessment acquires the significance of assessment *of, for* or *as* learning: there is either a direct effect (cashing in on the outcome of the assessment) or a prospective effect, or continuity of learning through further development of a person in terms of set learning objectives:

> *Assessment **of** Learning measures learner performance. Assessment **for** Learning provides feedback throughout the process. Assessment **as** Learning encompasses Assessment **for** Learning where the learner monitors their progress and reflects on their own learning.* (Bray & McClaskey, 2013, p.11)

4.   *Ownership* refers to the autonomy of the individual learner and her personal sense of owning her learning process. This includes both the preparation and implementation of this learning process, as well as achieving milestones in this process: these might be summative (qualifications, partial qualifications, formal validation of informal work, etc.), formative (shaping learning and career opportunities, etc.) or reflective (empowerment, shaping identity and becoming aware of personal values).

5.   *Co-design* defines the true nature of personalised learning. Without an element of *co-design*, an individual can neither be a 'partner in learning', nor can there be any personalised learning. This is because unless the individual can participate in shaping and implementing the learning process, learning cannot be partially tailored to the input and learning needs of the individual learner concerned. In this sense, *co-design* is the activating agent in personalised learning. Moreover, where *ownership* principally focuses on creating a sense of ownership of personal values and learning experiences, *co-design* creates a 'learning action plan' from

these values and learning experiences, allowing the overall design to be made in close consultation with the other partners involved in the selected learning process.

In figure 4 this process of personalised learning is visualised with on the one hand 'agency' and affordance are interlinked and on the other hand 'ownership' and 'co-design' as well. The role of 'assessment' is to link the two pairs of interlinked pillars.

Figure 4. The process of personalised learning
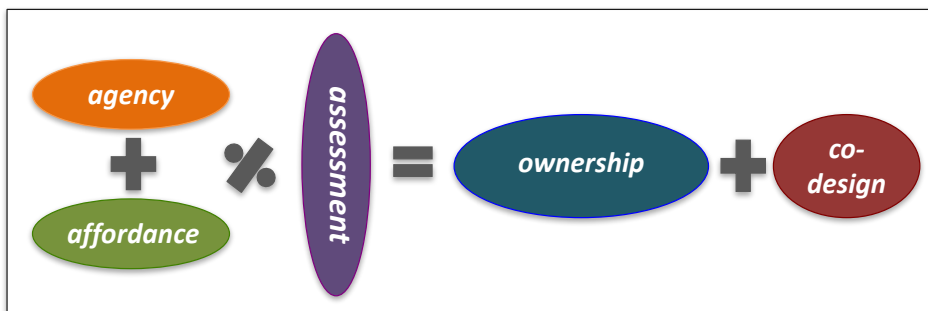
Source: Duvekot, 2016

4. Linking VPL and personalised learning

The assumptions underlying this article on the interlinkage of VPL and personalised learning and their impact on 'the learning society' are that:

1. VPL can be pivotal in integrating the concept of *personalised learning* in people's daily lives.
2. VPL puts people into a position where they realise that they already possess valuable learning experiences, which they can exploit to shape personalised learning.
3. Learning usually takes place in a variety of contexts, but is ultimately carried out by the learners themselves, in consciously or unconsciously created learning situations.
4. Personalised learning is about ownership of the value of one's learning experiences and the further development steps a learner can (co-)design for a variety of learning purposes: employability. Social inclusion and participation, empowerment, mobility, qualification, enjoyability, etc. VPL supports this ownership by demonstrating personal value and ambition to the learner and by capacitating the experts in the learning and social systems to be able to facilitate and support the learners in their ambitions.
5. There is more to learning than just education, which implies, among other things, that schools should be better prepared to accept learner's extracurricular learning experiences. This means there is a step before learning starts, namely individual awareness of the value of what has already been learned and what is about to be learned. This awareness is based on the

acquisition of learning and participation in learning. Ideally, awareness, acquisition and participation are the successive stages that a person should go through to undergo personalised learning.

The context of personalised learning is made up of the dialogue or dialogues in a 'learning triangle' with three actors, composed of 'the learner' as *competence bearer with a Personal Competence Profile (PCP) or portfolio*, 'the organisation' as *competence requester with occupational standards (CS)* and 'the school' as *competence enricher with qualification standards (QS)*. See figure 5 for these interlinked positions in the triangle. The last two actors might also fulfil each other's roles as 'requester' and 'enricher'. The connection between these actors when managing learner's demand for learning creates a dialogue or dialogues on how to match learning demand by making transparent which learning outcomes – with respect to the articulated learning objective of the learner - have already been achieved, what learning is still needed/demanded and how to fill-in a personalised learning strategy.

Figure 5: The learning triangle, managed by VPL
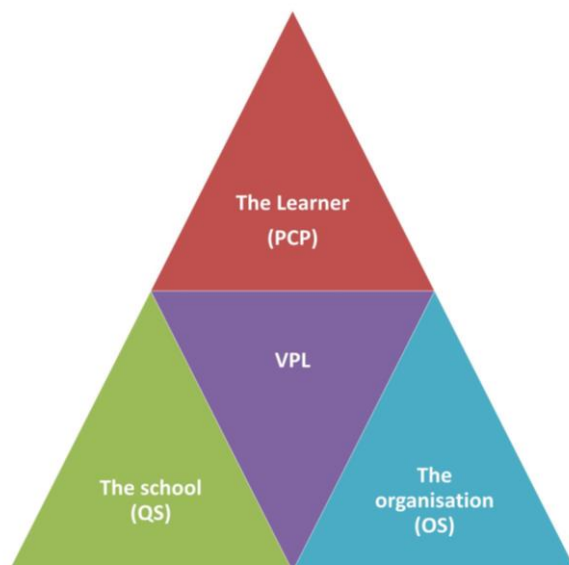
Source: Duvekot, 2016.

A learner's agency articulates the possibilities which, in principle, exist between the actors in this 'learning triangle'. This basically means that linking the actors by VPL for the sake of a personalized learning road, obliges everyone to be aware of the value of various stepping-stones in this process:

1. *Raising awareness* of the necessity and opportunities of lifelong learning for learners in any given context is at the heart of the process of validating personal (prior) learning experiences. Without this, learning will remain school- or company-steered and cannot effectively be based on individual talents and ambition.

2. *The portfolio* is introduced as the red thread in the process. After learning objectives have been set, the portfolio is designed and filled with personal 'value'; its content is assessed and an advice is added on how to reach out to possible qualification- and career-opportunities; it is subsequently enriched by blended learning options, tailored to personal learning needs, style and context. Finally, after successfully finalising the personalised learning trajectory, the entire process of validation, then, can become recurrent since the new learning or development results will be added to the original portfolio. This enriched portfolio might be the basis for new development steps and start a new VPL process. This can be called the "portfolio-loop" (Duvekot, 2016).

3. *Self-assessment* is crucial because without this a learner can only partially become co-designer of personal development. She needs to focus on her prior learning before linking to a pre-set standard in learning or social processes. Self-assessment or -reflection aims at personal development, career-planning and/or creating flexibility and mobility of the learner. It creates added value by:
- Providing the basis for learner-steered development and career-planning.
- Stimulating self-reflection on personal development.
- Supporting self-managed learning and acting.
- Stimulating learners to document continuously their professional- and personal development.

4. *The role of the assessor* is vital for starting up personal development. Reliable assessment is the *bridge-builder in the learning triangle* between the PCP of the learner and specific development steps linked to QS's or OS's, advised by the assessor. In any given context, an assessor has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively. Assessment is the judgement of evidence submitted for a specific purpose; it is therefore an act of measurement. It requires two things: evidence and a standard scale. (Ecclestone, 1994; Singh & Duvekot, 2013). Evidence is provided with the portfolio of the learner. The standard that will be met, depends on the specific learning objective. This means that the role of the assessor is crucial because she has to be flexible with regard to the diversity of learning objectives in order to be able to provide learner-oriented validation and/or valuation. On top of that the assessor should be able to use dialogue-based assessment forms. Good quality and a high success-ratio of further development steps depend on a good assessor.

5. Regarding the *development-steps* one might say that, when following the personalised path of VPL, lifelong learning is extended to a wider range of objectives, not only from learning to certification/qualification but also from learning to empowerment and employability. This calls for a strong involvement of the different

stakeholders[14]. Stakeholders that are involved in establishing systems for validation should not only be 'educationalists' and ministries but also employers and trade unions. VPL calls for a clear responsibility of not only qualification-frameworks but also from human resource systems.

6. Proper *evaluation and feedback* is necessary to structurally embed the process into personal behaviour and organisations human resources management in learning and social systems.

5. Case studies

The different responsibilities, perspectives and learner-steered approaches in VPL processes are specified and indicated, but in practice have only been realised to a limited extent. The same applies to the phenomenon of personalised learning. It has been the subject of plenty of analysis and policy initiatives, but only fragmented practiced. It is against this background that the central question of this article is *how and to what extent does VPL contribute to personalised learning in real practices?* For this purpose, four cases have been examined in the Dutch context (Duvekot, 2016). These four cases were clearly distinguishable from each other in terms of objective, context, target group and method. However, they did all use the VPL approach, and made it possible to focus on the role of the learner in the validation and learning process.

The first case comes from the process-industry. 'Rockwool' is a multinational with a big plant in Roermond, the Netherlands. They are world leader in stone wool solutions, from building insulation to horticultural solutions. In the 'Rockwool' case study, it became clear that VPL is highly efficient when used in a work-orientated approach to learning that, in terms of design and content of job profiles within the company, is linked to vocational education qualification profiles. This put two of the positions in the learning triangle in a clear context, and also answered the question 'why VPL?' VPL was consciously used by the company as one of the methods to be able to maximise, or continue to maximise, the links between employees and jobs within the career policy of the company. With the help of VPL, employees could exploit the experiences which they had acquired both inside and outside the company and inside and outside of school. This allowed them to grow in terms of civil effect (obtaining a qualification) and employability (meeting a job standard with or without an immediate career opportunity). Regarding the awareness of the value and depth of their personal learning experience and development opportunities, there was reference to an *employee who rocks*. However, the under-utilisation of this potential offered to employee and company by VPL was a result of the company not implementing VPL on a larger scale, and that, in the VPL process, the employee

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14 A stakeholder is a development partner and facilitator of the process. An actor is active in the process. A stakeholder is having an interest in the process while an actor is the one who acts in the process. Stakeholders and actors in a process are not necessarily the same people.

concentrated only slightly on autonomous personal growth (empowerment, broad career awareness), but strongly on personal development within Rockwool.

The second case covers the public services sector. In a 'fire service' organisation case study, the job structure was also linked to qualification levels. The employees had more freedom in determining their career plan. They had a fairly free choice of development projects, and even access to the organisation's unallocated development budget. The workers interviewed had all chosen a development path at a college which first facilitated VPL prior to the courses, then later integrated it into the course itself. In this sense, there was already a certain extent of fire service employee participation in the learning triangle, and the issue of whether VPL allowed the 'the voice of the learner' to be heard was already largely answered by the college. For the fire service, it boiled down to a matter of necessity to have a career policy which gave employees freedom and flexibility within their own careers, partly because of the age-related retirement policy.

Although the firefighter in this case study was quite free to determine the objective and direction of learning within the learning triangle, including the manner in which previously acquired personal learning could play a role, the organisation itself was rather less generous in embracing learning experiences acquired outside the fire service; even subjects in formal learning programmes such as senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) were barely recognised in the job structure.

The third case concerned lateral entry into the teaching profession. VPL also showed its uniqueness here and its linkage to personalised learning solutions. The question 'why VPL?' was clearly answered: a publicly-funded system for lateral entry into the teaching profession was established, where the aptitude test could be rightly described as a VPL approach. All the respondents confirmed that this aptitude test had a strong impact on a personal level, in particular in compiling the portfolio. However, the degree to which they were given space to use this awareness of the value of their prior learning experiences to create their own personal learning programmes within the learning triangle went too far. Neither university-teachers nor employers (the directors of the schools where these learners were working competently yet unqualified!) could cope with the personalised learning programme; the trainer could barely offer any customised learning, and employers were generally more interested in how they could meet the requirement to work with 'responsible' teachers as efficiently as possible. The lateral entrants themselves matched the profile of 'the dream teacher for the learning society' in many ways: the teacher as a creative and dynamic innovator of learning and inspiration of learning at school. Nevertheless, the school organisation and the university teacher training department either do not yet permit this role at all, or only marginally.

In the case study of a target group of immigrant women at the International Women's Centre (IVC) in Den Helder, VPL was used as a tool for self-reflection with

the aim of compiling a broad, personal portfolio. The women then used this portfolio to design their own personal action plan which would give them the most appropriate opportunities for social participation in their 'new' country. Combining self-reflection and a broad portfolio, and using the result to determine learning objectives and direction for achieving personal results, turned out to have positive results for most respondents. Self-assessment and group assessment of their own values put them in a position to connect with concrete further development steps in the spheres of work and training. The women concerned, followed the training course at the IVC to compile their own portfolios and action plans. It made them increasingly aware of their own value, and they also concluded that compiling a personal portfolio was a meaningful activity, strengthening their empowerment and self-value for the sake of taking motivating steps in their further development for successfully integrating in the Dutch society.

6. Cross-case analysis

The cross-case analysis of the four case-studies yielded more detailed information on policymaking, the theoretical framework, and using VPL and personalised learning in practice. In summary, this analysis showed:
- in every situation, VPL resulted in a perspective on further learning.
- In the three organisation case studies, under-utilisation of individual potential occurred due to the failure of fully implementing the VPL process, or allowing it to be personalised.
- The target group case study showed that individual learners who took time to reflect on their own learning experiences strengthened their position in the dialogue on further learning. In this case study, the dialogue, in accordance with Paolo Freire's humanising vision, operated as a 'gap-closer' between the trainees themselves and between the trainees and trainer; in this way, they managed to build a bridge to a personalised follow-up programme in one or more areas of life.
- The characteristics of policy development not only showed the slowness of implementation of policies in practice, but also that an open dialogue is conducive to the activation of the individual learner.
- Competences fill and colour the dialogue in the learning triangle involved.
- The portfolio is the carrier of the entire VPL process, especially if the *portfolio-loop* can be established.
- The dialogue between learner, organisation and 'school' is essential for both VPL and personalised learning. This is particularly true for an open dialogue, but less applicable to a limited dialogue.
- Assessment helps to connect the actors in the learning triangle. This effect occurs in all forms of assessment are analysed in the cases: *assessment of*, *for* and *as* learning, respectively summative, formative and reflective assessment.

- There is a dynamic space between the system and the process, but depending on the intended learning objective, results are always obtained for different actors. If the system is in control, due to an *inside-out approach*, it is mainly the organisation and 'the school' who benefit from it; in the case of the process being prioritised in an *outside-in approach*, then the learner benefits.

Looking at both phenomena from every perspective, it's evident the VPL process comes into its own and enables personalised learning if there is an open dialogue and individual ownership of learning is permitted. In the cases, such a situation was best created at the IVC; in the other cases, organisations and schools/universities concerned were only prepared to create it to a limited extent. In all case studies, however, VPL had its impact on the design and implementation of lifelong learning and, moreover, a genuine impact on personalising the learning taking place after the VPL process. After all, individual ownership of learning was enhanced by VPL through (1) raising the awareness of the value of prior, personal learning experiences and (2) grounding further (lifelong) learning on personal design and meaning.

Least of all, this analysis gives credits to Paolo Freire's statement in the 1970s that learning needs to be addressed as a developmental and dialogical process of 'action-reflection-praxis' of ánd by people (i.e. teachers ánd learners). It should be an anti-depository process, contrasting the traditional 'banking-system' (Freire, 1970). With 'banking' he meant a process in which knowledge is directly transferred to learners with the teacher as the sole distributor of knowledge and the learner as the passive receiver of this knowledge. Instead of 'banking' the ground floor for learning can better be 'portfolio-ing', in which learning is based on personal, prior learning experiences and the self-management of recurring learning processes. Moreover, the role of the teacher can also be filled in by a manager or team leader on the work floor. In this way VPL adds value by making the learning process the object of learning, with the learner and teacher (or manager) as 'partners in learning', openly debating the design and implementation of the learning needed or desired on the level of the learner, teacher and manager.

7. VPL for personalised learning

Personalised learning is strongly connected with VPL because it also takes two preparatory steps (agency and affordance) that precede the search for the best option for learning. In both processes, it is the assessment that acts as the bridge between learning objective and the filling-in of a personalised learning trajectory based on ownership of one's learning experiences and the active co-design of the tailored learning. Where *VPL* is used to anchor the process within the learning culture of actors and stakeholders as such, is *VPL for personalized learning* more used for activating the actual learning within the learning triangle where the learner is steering the learning process as much as she can/wants.

An integrated model

In figure 6 the utilisation of VPL for personalised learning is shown. The linking function of the assessment for both processes is visible in the purple section. In both phenomena, the dialogue between the actors is necessary for the preparation and the outcome of the assessment. This collaboration between the actors is more explicitly defined both in the preparatory steps and in the *learning steps* after the assessment, as both agency and affordance as well as ownership and co-design are mutually reinforcing pillars that require participation of all actors.

Figure 6. Integrated model of VPL for personalized learning
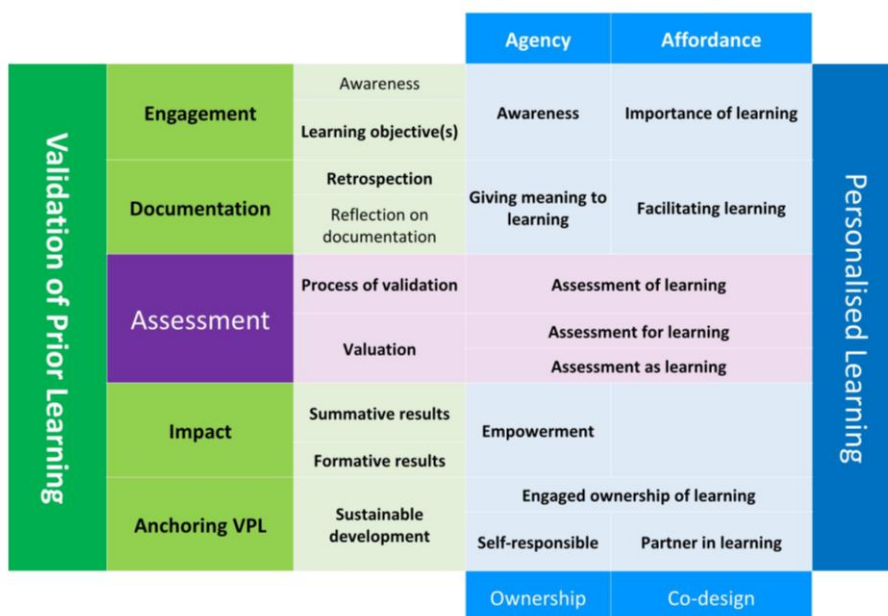
Acquiring learning and participating in learning are a mutually reinforcing unit in this figure. For VPL, the different phases involve active involvement of the actors. This involvement is integrated into each topic of VPL. For personalized learning, the individual's commitment is more important. However, this commitment always focuses on the dialogue with other actors in each pillar to find a meaningful destination for learning goals to be achieved. Where *acquisition in participation* is key to VPL, the opposite of *participation in acquisition* is true for personalised learning. This entails that the primary role of VPL of contextualising and linking the partners in learning is blended with the primary focus in personalised learning on the independent learner. The figure demonstrates these two processes are strongly interlinked and even reinforcing each other's dialogues.

Outcomes

The case studies showed that VPL for personalised learning can be valuable for all actors as long as they can, and indeed want to, switch between each other's objectives, approach and identity. Bray and McClaskey (2015) see such personalised learning as the next development in the changing learning model based on the engaged, self-managing, learning individual operating in a supportive network, all within the modern, learning society. In the analysis of their model, I have already indicated that VPL's function therein is to allow learners to design or co-design and manage their own learning programmes if they have a broad understanding of their learning experiences and are able to reflect upon them in help their further learning. Previously acquired learning experiences can be recorded in a portfolio. The portfolio and the resulting reflexive valuation and self-evaluation are the control mechanisms available to the learner.

This brings me to a few conclusions regarding the use of VPL for personalised learning, derived from the case studies in this study. These conclusions relate to all components of both processes, and answer the question of how and to what extent VPL contributes to personalised learning:

1. **Awareness and support**
   The awareness of a VPL approach focused on the learner needs consensus from all actors in 'the learning triangle'. Consensus can be initiated by any of the actors. Stakeholders can support awareness and consensus and can initiate legislation, resources and regulations.
2. **Breadth of competences**
   Competences and learning can best be interpreted in the 'broadest' sense, to promote accessibility and innovation in learning and social systems.
3. **Equivalence of competences**
   Equivalence of personal learning outcomes can be established in comparison with formal standards and normative frameworks in learning and working if all standards are expressed in terms of competences.
4. **Open dialogue**
   Listening to each other in the dialogue between actors is essential in creating an effective balance between learning objectives, requirements and opportunities. It means having the time and space to be able to determine the personal contribution to the VPL process. Personal contribution is both retrospective and forward-looking: '*Where did I come from and where am I going*?' In such an open dialogue, each actor bears her own responsibilities.
5. **Portfolio as a carrier of the process**
   The portfolio is the carrier of the VPL process as such, and of VPL for personalised learning.
6. **Assessment (as learning)**
   There are four main types of assessment: self-assessment, assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning. The first form

can be exploited by the learning individual; the other three forms can be integrated into the policy of the organisation and 'school', and enrich the creation of a valuable link between the actors in the 'learning triangle'.

7. **Tailored learning**
In terms of tailored learning after the assessment, not only the content but also the form in which learning will take place is important. This includes (1) blended learning for the form and (2) flexible, individualised learning programmes for the content. Form and content are based on learning outcomes.

8. **The portfolio-loop integrates both VPL and personalised learning**
Linking learning objectives, requirements and opportunities is based on the validation of personal learning outcomes, and using this as the starting point for organising a learning cycle based on the portfolio-loop.

9. **Ownership of learning**
If a learner owns her learning history, it means she reflects on and values this history. She creates opportunities for participation or even co-design of her own learning and development process.

10. **Professionalism**
The expertise of guides, counsellors, advisors and assessors is very important in achieving maximum awareness of the value of personal learning, and creating motivation and ambition for VPL and personalised learning.

11. **Quality assurance**
Quality assurance of the VPL system is more a matter of trust in the process and the VPL- and learning-professionals than of control.

12. **Anchoring VPL**
VPL can be anchored in learning and human resource management systems and in people's self-management (or –reflection) of learning experiences.

13. **Research**
Further research into the approach, methodology and effects of VPL and personalised learning is necessary to be able to use them, both in combination and as separate processes, in the context of lifelong learning strategies.

Final comments

More visibility and insight into the use of *VPL for personalised learning* enhances and widens the dialogue in the learning triangle, because VPL offers challenges and opportunities for all stakeholders and actors. The integrative concept of *VPL for personalised learning* is principally based on experiences in practice. After all, as Paolo Freire wrote: *'Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other*.' (Freire 1970, p. 53). It is this knowledge on which the acceptance and practical application of *VPL for personalised learning* rests. It is after all the human being who learns, not the organisation, 'school', or system, driven by the concept of Valuing Learning.

Building on Freire, the promise of *VPL for personalised learning* is interchangeable if we can redesign the learning system and social system into *outside-in* orientated

systems that really are capable of hearing and understanding 'the voice of the learner'. It is then up to the learner herself to decide, in dialogue, on the extent to which her voice should be heard, and the degree of ownership or co-design which suits her lifelong learning strategy. Learning then moves from the realm of 'learning as a banking-concept' (ibidem) into a collective concept of personalised learning. The 'banking-system' is then no longer required, only a portfolio. That is exactly what VPL is meant for, and why personalised learning suits VPL.

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Quality in VPL **5**

Experiences in researching the practice of the Nordic Model for Quality in Validation of Prior Learning

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Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) has been at the Nordic agenda for the past 15–20 years, and validation is well established in the Nordic countries. Validation in these contexts encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning.

One of the historical reasons for this development is the tradition of strong adult education, strong labour unions and involvement of the social partners in development of education and lifelong learning initiatives. 'The Nordic countries' are vastly different with regard to their way of organizing and embedding the validation work, and also in their way of handling each individual prior learning assessment. The Nordic countries, however, show a mutual interest in assuring the quality of the validation work' (Grunnet and Dahler 2013, p. 4). This interest in quality in validation was the background for the development of a Nordic Model for quality in validation, which took place from 2012 to 2013. Experts from Island, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark decided to develop a common quality model. The development of the model was funded by Nordplus (*www.nordplusonline.org*/). The quality model was primarily developed for use in the educational institutions, however it can also be used by other stakeholders responsible for parts of the validation processes.

In this article, a study is presented of the Nordic quality model for VPL. The quality concept is introduced in the context of VPL as well as the Nordic model for quality. Our study of quality work employs an interactive approach, which is described briefly. Preliminary results from on-going processes in cases from Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are also presented. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

1. The quality concept

Quality assurance of validation is about many factors among which are legislation, policy, financing, and co-operation between institutions and stakeholders. It is also a question about competence development for the practitioners working

professionally with validation. Quality in validation has been defined by the Joy Van Kleef as:

> *… the establishment of an environment and the implementation of policies, processes and assessment practices that maximize individuals' opportunities to fully and accurately demonstrate relevant knowledge, skills and competencies.* (Van Kleef, 2014, p. 208)

If we go deeper into the quality concept, it should be acknowledged that the variation in how validation is organized in different contexts influences what could be seen as 'quality'. Firstly, there are a number of factors in the context that are important. For example, the educational system is organized in different ways in different countries, and the responsibilities of different actors in the labour market also vary between countries. Important are also the concrete stakeholders in different contexts. Furthermore, the way of defining quality depends on the purpose of a specific validation activity,

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

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

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

On top of this distinction, yet another perspective must be added. In this perspective, a shared understanding is needed to develop quality in validation

without confusion or misunderstanding between involved actors. Van Kleef (2014) thus emphasizes an approach where learning is seen as situated and as a transitional process. The social nature of assessment has to be recognized, and the candidates should get help in positioning their prior learning in the new context where validation is to take place.

The goal of the specific process is also central for deciding what quality is in a certain context of VPL. A validation activity could be employed for different goals – goals that imply varying ideas of quality. We can identify four different types of goals: a formative, a summative, a predictive and a transformative. Formative validation is intended to act as a diagnosis of prior learning, forming the basis for further learning. Here, quality should mean that the validation process provides the best possible basis. Summative validation is typically performed by simply gathering together grades, certificates etc., summing up the results of prior learning in relation to certain criteria. Thus, with this goal a validation process with high quality should measure or assess in relation to those criteria. With a predictive goal, validation is employed to predict who is most likely to success in a certain position – and the main dimension in quality is consequently to what extent this prediction is fulfilled. Finally, using validation with a transformative goal aims at some sort of transformation of the candidate. In other words, the learning dimension of validation (cf. Andersson, 2017) is central, and quality means that the intended transformation has taken place. Such transformation is often more likely to be a side-effect, and possible 'side-goal', of a validation process. But there are also validation processes where the main goal in making individual's prior learning visible is to strengthen their self-confidence through making them aware of this learning, and maybe in addition 'topping up' this learning.

We also want to highlight two central concepts that should be considered in relation to quality in validation: communication, and recognition. Firstly, communication, ideally resulting in mutual understanding between candidate and assessor, is important for validity. Basically, the candidate has to understand what is required in validation, and how this knowledge is to be presented – and be able to do this presentation. The assessor (representing the responsible organisation arranging validation) has to be able to present the requirements in an understandable way, and to understand the way in which the candidate presents his/her knowledge. Thus, this is a matter of communication and mutual understanding. Secondly, recognition is important for quality not the least from the perspective of the candidate. Validation of prior learning can also be named recognition of prior learning, RPL; however, what is meant is often simply recognition of learning. But the process could and should also mean recognition of the person who has knowledge that is validated. To be admitted to an educational institution, or to be recruited and employed, would mean recognition for the person. This recognition could be important for a transformative strengthening of self-confidence.

2. The Nordic Model

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

The model includes three perspective on quality:
1. *Organisational Quality* in developing a holistic approach for institutions to work with validation of prior learning, as well as the development of evaluation cadences, feedback mechanisms and improvement initiatives on all levels.
2. *Assessment Quality* by using distinct criteria, substantiated choices of methodology, and establishment of evaluation and documentation practices.
3. *Procedural Quality* as distribution of responsibility and roles (who does what, when and for whom?). Clear information, presentations as website, brochures, professional document handling, etc.
(Grunnet and Dahler 2013, p. 14)

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

The eight factors[15]: Information, preconditions, documentation, coordination, guidance, mapping, assessment and follow-up have been selected to ensure an awareness of the entire process and essential features in the validation process including the three levels: organizational level, procedural level and guidance and assessment level. Each of the factors is connected to a number of indicators that can be used continuously in the validation process. The indicators can also be replaced if other indicators may be more relevant in the context.
The intention with both the factors and the indicators is to assure a transparent quality strategy for validation and a developing process for strengthening the quality in validation as such. It means that the validation process, by using well known factors and indicators, can be reflected, evaluated, ensured and continuously improved by the validation staff.

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15 The factors and indicators are described in detail at:
http://nvl.org/DesktopModules/DigArticle/MediaHandler.ashx?portalid=0&moduleid=3857&media id=1509&width=1250&height=1000&scale=0.

The quality model and the eight quality factors

A NORDIC MODEL
for work with quality in validation – a quality assurance model

Follow-up Information

Assessment The individual in the center Preconditions

Mapping Documentation

Guidance Coordination

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

3. Studying the quality work in validation

Starting from the Nordic model for work with quality in validation, we have initiated an on-going study of how this model could be put in practice. The study has an interactive approach (see e.g. Svensson et al., 2002), where we this far have worked in interaction with institutions in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. The interactive approach means that we, together with representatives for the selected institutions, have established a common understanding of the quality model. Building on this understanding we have also defined areas for development work within the

respective institutions. The institutions have worked on improving quality in validation within these areas. After a while we have met again, for a discussion on experiences and results that far, with an option to redefine or adjust the agreed development areas. After one more period of development work we have met again to identify and document experiences from the different institutions.

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

The three institutions with which we have interacted this far, and that are providing the cases presented below, were selected and approached for involvement in the study based on their experiences of validation work. To be able to make comparisons between the cases we have chosen to involve institutions or cases that have two things in common: they have extensive experiences of validation work, which would provide a solid basis for further development work, and the focus of the development work is validation related to vocational education and training (rather than e.g. higher education). The different national contexts provide a variation within the material, and in addition to this we get variation through a sample including validation in different vocational areas.

This presentation builds on experiences and results from the first steps in this interactive process. In the future, the process will also include seminars where we as researchers, and representatives from the involved institutions, will meet each other as well as representatives from more organisations who work with validation in the Nordic countries. In these seminars, we will present and discuss the quality model, experiences and results from the development work, as well as results from our analysis of these experiences and results. This will possibly result in a deeper understanding of quality in validation, through the interaction between participants with varying experiences of validation work.

4. Denmark - Validation in Vocational education

The Danish case is a large vocational education college located in Jutland, Denmark. It has a very wide range of training courses distributed throughout more than 20 educational programmes and business colleges (hhx) and technical colleges (htx). The school employs approximately 525 fulltime employees and educates approximately 3,350 full-time pupils/students. The school was established in 2010 as a result of a merger between two schools.

The project 'Quality in Validation' is a collaboration between the team leader of the student counselling office for technical educations, the validation coordinator and a

number of managers and trainers in 4 technical training areas. The three selected programmes have validation of adult training courses of different size or frequency. The courses are: warehouse/logistics, welding, painting and industrial operator training. In total, seven people participate in the project.

Validation refers to Validation of Prior Learning and begins with and is coordinated by the student counsellor. Prior to the start of the project, the validation coordinator had developed and described a practice for validation of the technical education programmes of the school. However, the coordinator would like to strengthen the implementation of validation and further develop the school's validation practice. Therefore, the school wanted to participate in testing whether or not the developed quality model could contribute to this.

At the first meeting -'the contract meeting' - the framework for the project was agreed. This included: a timeframe for the project, the training areas to be included as well as the contextual and procedural framework for the project.

The school also presented their current validation practices and shared various descriptions and documents to the research group so that they could get some insight into the school's validation process.

At the following meeting the focus was on the common basis for understanding and problem identification in relation to quality in validation. The school was the first to put into words their perception of what quality in validation is for them. The understanding of quality concentrated on two areas: 1) Uniformity in the school's process, procedure and assessment foundations and 2) The individual's experience of the process. An experience which should lead to the individual having an increased awareness of their own skills and to increased motivation for learning and education. Subsequently, the practice group identified problems or areas for attention in their own validation practices. This was done by using the quality model and the questions and criteria that are formulated to the model's 8 factors for quality in validation.

Although the school initially had expressed that it was particularly in relation to 1) planning and 2) assessment that there was a development need, it turned out that through dialogue and reflection on the current practice, problems and suggestions for improvement were identified within other factors of the quality model.

The school ended the first meeting by formulating the following development needs:
- Better information for the validation students through a short instructional introduction video.
- Better data management – for the whole school regarding sensitive personal data.
- Better coordination through longer-term plans for when validation is offered in the various courses.
- A clear plan for the validation process from start to finish (who does what?).
- More uniform mapping with the help of tests in the subjects: Danish, mathematics, English, social studies etc. at different levels.

    – Better assessment to be achieved through explicit criteria/markers in relation to professional goals.

The development needs from the first meeting resulted in the production of concrete products. A number of additional development needs were mentioned in the dialogue, but were not selected at the first meeting. Perhaps due to time restrictions.

The next meeting took place about a month later. At this meeting those present took stock of the selected development projects. It was established that most tasks had started or been developed and solved. At the same time, it emerged from the discussion that the work on the first development task opened the practitioner's eyes to other development needs and development tasks. These included some of the development needs which had been mentioned at the first meeting, but which had not been prioritised. The new focus areas included:
– Better conditions for the validation practitioners, - a desire for internal training of new employees in the work with validation.
– Information and further explanation of the current practice which currently exists as tacit knowledge, not least that of the coordinator.
– Better coordination through developed evaluation practices that will ensure continued and ongoing development.
– Better coordination and information through a validation network inside the school and externally with other schools and partners.
– Better coordination and sharing of the common flow.
– Better coordination through a clear management strategy for validating work.

This second meeting put much greater focus on ensuring quality through leadership and the prioritisation and organisation of validation work within the institution. The managers and school leaders involved in the project would take up these focus points with the school's senior management.

Another important discussion concerned the dilemma between quality and resources. The practitioners were very pleased to have spotted the potential for increased quality, but they also saw a problem in that the increased quality could mean the use of increased resources in the form of time and people. They could also see a competition problem if competing schools in the surrounding area could offer validation at a lower quality and in less time and therefore at a cheaper price for companies.
Validation is basically perceived as an activity that leads to poorer earnings for schools since the shortened training, which is a result of the validation process, leads to less revenue for the school by virtue of the school's taximeter system.

The last meeting will pick up on the initiatives which have been developed and also gather knowledge and data on how the school practitioners and managers have experienced using the Nordic model in quality development work.

It is also intended that the lessons learned from the vocational education college should be disseminated and discussed with a number of other vocational training schools in the local area and the rest of Denmark.

5. Finland - Validation in initial vocational education and adult education

The discussion on the Finnish case study started in NVL's national working group for validation. The focus of the research was defined to the vocational education level, which lead the national working group to identify a representative case for the research. A rather large vocational education and training provider in Southern Finland was chosen in order to test the different aspects of the Nordic model on validation in a comprehensive way. It was seen desirable to analyse the model both in the organizational level and between different branches.

The negotiations with the school started with a hearing of the school's key personnel in validation process. After initial approval to participate in the study, the benefits of a research process for the school were discussed. The vice-rector, development manager and training managers saw that a case study could give a structure for developing validation processes further in the school level. The use of a structured model could also benefit in identifying development tasks and assist in trying to harmonize some of the differences between the branches.

The college provides training in 130 vocational qualifications and in 34 fields of study in general upper secondary education level. Over 20 000 young students and adults study in the college annually. The college has units in 4 municipalities and over 700 staff members, which of 450 in teaching and 270 in other work tasks. Validation is carried out throughout the organization, but there are varied ways of implementing the policies in validation for the students. However, the college stresses the importance of going through a comprehensive process of personal study planning with each student. This process is used widely in the Finnish education system, starting from the preschool and continuing all the way to higher education and adult education. The personal study planning process is also the starting point of the validation process in the college.

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

differences in the roles and tasks of the personnel in validation within the fields of study? These questions lead the planning group to select different kind of branches to be included in the study. Health and Social Services, Wood Processing, Business and Administration, Household and Cleaning Services as well as Hotel, Restaurant and Catering fields were to be interviewed. The professions invited to the interviews were the study counsellors, teachers and training managers.

The case study in the college was carried out in two patches of interviews with the mentioned fields of study and the representatives of the professional groups. The Nordic Model for Validation was split in two groups accordingly. The first patch of interviews covered the first four dimensions of the Model: Information, Preconditions, Documentation and Coordination. The second set of interviews assessed the remaining four dimensions, Guidance, Mapping, Assessment and Follow-up. A third interview session was organized for the management of the school to get an overview on the college-level. The last mentioned covered all the eight dimensions in the same occasion.

The participants received a briefing in written form a week before the interview with the research questions and the dimensions of the Model translated in Finnish. The researcher opened the discussion by repeating the aim of the case study - testing the use of the Nordic Quality Model of Validation in a school level - to the participants and then asked them to join an introductory round with a description of their role and tasks in the validation process of the college. The dimensions were then discussed and the interview was recorded for later analysis. In the interviews there were representatives from both the educational tracks of the school, the initial vocational education for the young and the adult education track. These informants also covered the branches mentioned earlier on.

Working with the model helped the schoolmanagement and staff to identify features of their validation system. The college has a decentralized system of validation, where two important networks can be identified as a source of instruction on validation. Firstly, there is a group of study counsellors working with students in the level of initial vocational education and training. Secondly, there is a group of responsible teachers or head teachers in the level of adult education. These two networks have regular meetings where validation processes are discussed on a regular basis. Information on validation is given in a multifaceted way: in the net, handouts, brochures and study guides. Information days and guidance appointments give briefings on the policies both for external audiences and the students. The preconditions for validation are partly regulated by the National Board of Education and partly by the college. In guidance, a clear process of personal study planning is carried out in both of the mentioned forms of education. However, the branches do have different ways of documenting the validation process, mapping the learning outcomes and assessing the learning outcomes. The branches also differ on their practices on keeping a log on how the process has gone further in the

student's level. There was not a clear coordination or a follow-up procedure of the validation system in the college-level.

After gathering the interview data in the two sets of interviews with the personnel the Model dimensions were covered with the managers. Based on these the researcher then presented the managers a SWOT-analysis with preliminary findings in the college level. The informants in the branches had identified some challenges in the validation system and these were then compiled to groupings of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The researcher discussed the findings with the managers and in relation to the Danish case, a workshop was chosen to be organized in order to identify areas of development and to choose a pathway for the development process. This workshop was targeted to the planning group of the case study – the vice-rector, development manager and training managers. The study counsellors were also invited to involve the second key network in validation to the process. The workshop chose guidance in validation for the focus of development.

Regarding the Nordic Quality Model of Validation, the Finnish case highlighted the following features of the analysed dimensions:

- Information: information was shared to students, parents, employers and other stakeholders in a multifaceted way. Interviews, information days, meetings and other forms of face-to-face encounters were used in addition to information in print and over the internet.
- Pre-conditions: validation was available for all the students of the college. Validation was also seen as a key element of the educational process by all staff members.
- Documentation: electronic systems were available, but were often not used. Some branches had developed good practices and these were decided to be taken into use throughout the organization.
- Coordination: there was no clear coordination, nor clear roles and responsibilities in validation. The two networks mentioned coordinated processes in their respective tracks of education.
- Guidance: guidance was less available and needed in the adult education track, where head teachers had a heavy workload. In education for the youth the study counsellors could better meet the needs of the students.
- Mapping: validation was clearly linked to personal study planning and preparing the student for competence-based examinations. However, the practices differed between the branches.
- Assessment: the assessment was carried between the teacher, working life assessor and the student himself. Triangulation in the procedure ensured the quality of assessment.
- Follow-up: there was no evidence of an extensive procedure to review the validation system.

In conclusion, working with the Nordic Model on Quality in Validation gave the college an opportunity to see areas of improvement and structure on how to proceed in the development work. The deeper analysis of the case study is to identify whether there are differences between the branches were based on the professions itself or on the different policies and procedures chosen by the training managers and the teachers.

6. Sweden – validation in building and construction

The Swedish case is a municipal institution with long experience of validation within the sector of building and construction. The main part of their validation work is commissioned from the Public employment office (PEO), but the extent of this depends on demand and on the procurement processes where different validation institutions 'compete' to be a provider for the PEO. The main target group is presently immigrants with experiences from the building and construction sector in their home countries.

The validation model in this institution has a clear focus on quality in terms of an extensive process to identify and validate candidates' competences, including practical work-tasks, and the opportunity to 'top up' with context-specific skills that are lacking. Employability is considered an important factor that is also a matter of credibility in relation to the industry. The representatives of the institution state that an initial mapping should show that the candidates could fulfil at least half of the requirements for the more encompassing validation process to be meaningful – otherwise the main alternative is to take the full training programme. However, this is also a matter of time and resources available, which in the case of commissioned validation depends on the results of the specific procurement.

Concerning quality, the conception of quality that is expressed in this case encompass: Resources and time is a precondition for quality. A validation process should include an initial mapping and pre-assessment of who will pass the more extensive validation. Quality in the process depends on being up-to-date in relation to current technology, i.e. industry currency. Important for quality is that the assessment of skills should be made by an experienced craftsman in the specific area. When the candidates have a foreign background, it is important to understand what skills they actually have. Quality could also be identified by employers being satisfied with employees recruited from the validation institution.

Possible areas of development were identified in the initial visit at the institution:

- Information: developing information to candidates before the validation process. What do they need to know? How could information to candidates with low skills in Swedish be developed?
- Pre-conditions: Improving the continuing professional development (CPD) for those who work with validation.
- Mapping: improving the mapping for candidates who are newly arrived refugees/immigrants.

- Assessment: improving the quality of the assessment in cases where the candidate is lacking communicative skills (but possibly have the vocational skills to be assessed).
- Follow-up: developing the evaluation of the validation process to understand quality better.

The initial focus was put on the area of information, which is very important to reach the target group – those who have relevant vocational competence. The institution could identify a need for more standardised information about validation, i.e. to give a correct idea of what validation is independent of who gives the information. But also with regard to giving relevant information for the specific target group. When the target group has a foreign background, interpreters also consist a key group concerning information – and here is the specific vocational language a challenge, as it includes many vocation-specific terms that could be difficult to translate, especially when the interpreter does not know the vocation in question. The place where information is given was also identified as important. Information to potential candidates is often given at the PEO, but it will be considered if more extensive information could be given at the validation institution, including the information of not only verbal and written information but in addition to this also show the material conditions, clarify the requirements, and answer questions in that context.

The next area in focus will be the CPD of the validation staff. The validation work presently seems to be organised in a way that gives space for professional development concerning the core of the validation process. But to improve quality, the representatives of the institution can see a potential particularly concerning competence that is relevant related to the validation process. Two specific examples mentioned are counselling skills, and how to write the documentation of the validation results in a correct way.

The experiences this far concerning the quality model is that it has put focus on the quality dimension in validation. The institution representatives initially had a good confidence in the quality of their work, and our interpretation was also that they were experienced in the area and made a good job. Still, the discussion based on the quality model helped them to identify relevant areas for development, and the process that has started shows an ambition to improve the quality of validation in building and construction. However, an extensive procurement process in relation to the PEO, where it has been unclear for quite a long time what the institution will be commissioned to do in the nearest future, creates worries and makes the extent of validation work in this institution during the next year unclear.

7. Conclusion

The case-studies presented the interactive processes the researchers have undertaken with the managers and staff members in the vocational education and training institutions selected for this research. The preliminary findings reported

speak for the usefulness of the Nordic Quality Model for validation as a comprehensive structure for developing the validation system. The study is focused on the quality work and the processes related to quality of validation, not the quality itself. The research process has already shown how motivated the managers and staff members have been for the quality management of validation and to identify development areas in their policies and practices.

Even though the research is still going on, a few remarks can be said at this point:

− Systematic documentation is paramount for the individual's case
− Coordination of validation ensures the policies and practices are carried throughout the various branches and fields of study of the institution
− The follow-up dimension can be seen as a broader review of the educational processes related to validation, covering performance in the organizational level
− The eight dimensions are relevant for a holistic approach to validation
− The use of the Quality Model mediated the interaction between the researchers, the managers and the practitioners and helped to identify areas of development
− The case-studies give implications for the Model to be used also as a means for competence development in the educational institution

The Nordic Countries are known for their commitment for providing education and learning opportunities for all. The learner is at the centre of the educational process. Lifelong learning is a way for progress of the individual as well as society at large. These values are also represented in the cases selected for the research. The research may give further implications for the interplay between the Nordic Quality Model of Validation and the communities and societies where it is being tested on.

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Lifelong Learning at the centre   **6**

Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa

Heidi Bolton, Joe Samuels, Takatso Mofokeng, Omotola Akindolani and Yvonne Shapiro

In South Africa's system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) access to learning, redress, progression along learning pathways and the integration of education and training are key. This contribution analyses these key features in five parts. Firstly, it sketches the context for RPL in the country, outlining developments in the post-apartheid[16] integrated education and training system. Secondly, it articulates how RPL is understood in South Africa. Thirdly, it analyses the development of the RPL community in South Africa, and RPL achievements since 1995. Fourth, RPL data in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) are considered. The paper closes with reflections on these developments and their implications for access and redress, learning pathways, and lifelong learning. An Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) study identified islands of good practice in South Africa in 2008. Accelerated development followed the National RPL Conferences of 2010, 2011 and 2014. In 2011, a measure of stakeholder agreement was achieved, regarding barriers to a national RPL system. The establishment and work of a Ministerial Task Team for RPL, to examine the barriers, and RPL Reference Group for revision of national RPL policy, followed. Between 2010 and 2015 the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) played a coordinating role, assisting individuals and organisations with strategic RPL initiatives, opening pathways through RPL for over 200,000 potential candidates. This was however unfunded work. In 2016, policy for the national coordination and funding of RPL was published by the Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET). The way forward from the already-growing islands of good practice, to a fully operational national RPL system includes a vision and five-year implementation plan. Long-term SAQA Partnership Research into an inclusive RPL model (Cooper, et al, 2016), and other short-term research as part of the work of the Ministerial Task Team (Michelson, 2012; Naude and Malgas, 2012; Werquin, 2012) undergirded this work.

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16 Prior to 1994, public policy in South Africa was developed along racial lines, and different racial groups were segregated. There were for example, several education departments, each for a politically-defined racial group.

1. Context for RPL in South Africa

After 20 years of democracy, South Africa has arguably made progress in establishing a fairer society. It is also common knowledge however, that widespread poverty, inequality, and unemployment remain. The percentages of people in 2011 – the date of the last national census – with no schooling, or with some or all of primary school, were roughly half of what they were in 1996, the year in which an integrated education and training system was introduced (Statistics South Africa, 2012). While similar percentages of people across these years had some of secondary school, the percentages of people who had completed secondary school, or had some Higher Education increased about 1.5 times (*Ibid*.).

Currently, of the persons aged 20 years and older, around 5% have no schooling; a further 4% have some of primary school as their highest level of education; a further 4% have completed primary school; around a third have some of secondary school; a further third have completed secondary school; and around 14% have post-school education or training. Since the onset of democracy, given the lack of formal learning opportunities experienced by many adults under *apartheid* and in the context of its legacy, RPL has been viewed as being an essential part of learning and work pathways.

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995; 2008) was the mechanism chosen to integrate the education and training system that was segregated racially under *apartheid*[17]. From the start the NQF aimed to enhance access, redress, mobility (progression) within the system, and the quality and transparency of the system, for the benefit of all learners in the country (Ibid.). The impact of the NQF on understandings of, and realities in, the South African education and training system has been documented elsewhere (SAQA, 2015a; 2015b). The highlights are sketched below, all being part of the RPL implementation context in the country.

Understandings and developments regarding systemic integration in education, training, development and work

In 1994-1995 the education and training system in South Africa was divided along demographic lines. Under the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995) the NQF was associated with radical *structural* integration across the spread of sectors making up the system. Under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008) that replaced the SAQA Act, further restructuring of the main education institutions occurred, including the integration of education and training-related responsibilities through the establishment of the Departments of Basic Education (DBE), and Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2010. While the former is responsible for Basic Education, all post-school education and training now falls 'under the one roof' of Higher Education and Training.

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17   See note 1.

Currently three Quality Councils, for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Occupational Qualifications respectively, oversee three coordinated NQF Sub-Frameworks[18]. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has overarching oversight of the implementation and further development of the NQF, the communication, coordination, and collaboration between the main NQF partners, and articulation between the NQF Sub-Frameworks. The focus on 'learning pathways', 'articulation' and 'articulated pathways' within and between these sub-frameworks has intensified since 2014.

Articulation in education, training, development and work
The differing forms that articulation can take are now better-understood than was previously the case[19]. Learning pathways can involve 'linked qualifications' and work experience, where articulation possibilities exist in the 'grid of qualifications' making up the NQF, and the NQF-listed professional designations where applicable. Learning pathways can also be created via various types of inter-institutional agreements for learner progression. A third way in which learning pathways are realised is in the individual sense, where learners are supported in comprehensive and flexible ways as they follow their paths. All forms of articulation need state and stakeholder support, and it is acknowledged that learning pathways are aided by career advice as well as the quality of teaching and learning, and of learner achievements.

Relationships and collaboration in the integrated system for education, training, development and work
There are officially recognized mechanisms for collaboration between NQF role-players. In addition to a jointly-developed *System of Collaboration* (SAQA, 2011c, 2015c), the suite of NQF policies developed collaboratively (SAQA, 2012, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b)[20], the over-arching national policies for RPL and articulation (DHET, 2016, 2017), the main NQF partners serve on each other's top decision-making structures. Extensive initiatives to build 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2014) are underway[21].
Systemic quality and transparency in education and training
Education and training in *apartheid* South Africa were not transparent. The SAQA

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18 These comprise the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi.

19 Long-term SAQA-Rhodes University Partnership Research into learning pathways examined the conceptualisation of learning pathways and articulation, and explored the development of pathways in emerging sectors such as that of 'green skills' (see Lotz-Sisitka, 2015; Lotz-Sisitka and Ramsarup, 2011, 2012, 2014; Lotz-Sisitka *et al* 2012, 2013; Ramsarup, 2014 and Ramsarup and Lotz-Sisitka, 2013)

20 SAQA develops the NQF-policy suite in a democratic and evidence-based process, in and after consultation with the key NQF-stakeholders.

21 An example of current relationship-building initiatives can be seen in the work of the SAQA-Durban University of Technology (DUT) Partnership Research into Articulation between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education (Lortan *et al* 2017).

Act (RSA, 1995) ushered in the national system that included unit standards, learning outcomes, and assessment standards. While information about this system was universally available, the approach was widely criticized for *inter alia* 'fragmenting learning' and 'de-linking curriculum content from its disciplinary bases and traditions' (French, 2009, p.51). The NQF Act (RSA, 2008) acknowledged the inadequacy of this approach and led to the current devolved and decentralized national quality assurance model.

Standards development and quality assurance are now the responsibilities of each of the three Quality Councils, and the differentiated approaches of each are universally recognized. Each Quality Council is responsible for the conceptual structuring of its qualifications, and for articulation between these offerings within and across the NQF Sub-Framework contexts. SAQA's registration of the qualifications on the NQF – a process which includes assessing the extent to which the qualifications are internationally comparable – requires the benchmarking of the qualifications for quality, and the inclusion of RPL, Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and articulation possibilities. This system aligns the quality assurance system with values expressed in the Constitution of the country (RSA, 1994).

2. What is RPL in South Africa?

RPL is defined in South African national policy as "the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development" (SAQA, 2015c: Clause 26). It is multi-dimensional - including the making visible, mediation, assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning - and usually includes guidance and counselling, preparation for assessment, and where appropriate, post-RPL top-up (gap-fill) training. While assessment is an integral feature of all RPL in the country, assessment is not treated in isolation from these other steps in the RPL processes.

RPL in South Africa is multi-contextual - it differs in purpose and form across contexts. It may be developed and implemented differently for example, for the purposes of personal development; access or advanced placement in institutions of learning; or recognition in workplaces. RPL can be carried out at any NQF level, and can lead to the granting of credit towards part of, or whole, qualifications.

Forms of RPL
In SAQA's RPL policy, while there are essentially two forms of RPL - RPL for access to learning, and RPL for credits (SAQA, 2015c: Clause 34) - RPL has also been used for recognition in workplaces, and towards the granting of whole qualifications[22]. SAQA policy for recognising professional bodies and registering professional designations

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22 Although the policy has been designed to enable awarding full qualifications via RPL, this is not always implemented by institutions, who often draw on the '50% Rule' to justify their requirements that learners obtain at least 50% of the qualification concerned at the certifying institution.

in the context of the NQF (SAQA, 2012b), has also been designed to require that these bodies must provide RPL routes to obtaining their professional designations. The designations awarded by the professional bodies are traditionally on the basis of qualifications plus the required workplace experience. SAQA's policy requires that for recognition of their alignment with the National Constitution (RSA, 1994) and the NQF, they need to offer their designations via RPL. SAQA has hosted workshops to provide guidance for the 93 professional bodies recognised thus far, and several have commenced their RPL.

RPL principles in South Africa

RPL in South Africa is aligned to the main elements of the policy discourse since 1994, namely socio-economic transformation, lifelong learning, accreditation, and the NQF. It focuses on what has been learned and not on the status of the institution, organisation, place or context where the learning was obtained (SAQA, 2015c: Clause 35a). Credit is awarded for the knowledge and skills acquired through experience, and not for experience alone (*Ibid.*: Clause 35b). Prior learning, however obtained, is made explicit through assessment, but candidate guidance and support, including for the preparation of evidence for assessment, are integral to the processes. An appropriate mix of further teaching, support and mentoring, and a wide variety of assessment approaches are followed (*Ibid.*: Clause 35c-d).

Ministerial, SAQA, Quality Council, and institutional RPL policies

There is a 'funnel' of RPL policies at differing levels in South Africa, which are aligned or are in the process of being aligned. The Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET) and DHET have developed and oversee the implementation of, national policy for the *coordination* and *funding* of RPL (MHET, 2016), and collaborate with SAQA and the Quality Councils for its implementation. It is intended that the RPL Coordinating Mechanism will manage funds and information, RPL-related research, the professionalization of RPL services, advice and support for RPL providers and candidates, advocacy and collaboration with the national Career Development Services located in the DHET, and the monitoring and evaluation of RPL implementation. The establishment of the Reference Group that will guide this work has not yet been signed off by the Minister, but work towards the entity has commenced within the DHET, and amongst stakeholders thus far in the form of national workshops to build shared understanding around the requirements for the entity.

SAQA, in line with its mandate and the Ministerial RPL policy develops and oversees the implementation of, national policy for the *implementation of RPL* in the three NQF Sub-Framework contexts (RSA, 2008). SAQA first developed RPL policy in 2002; this policy was revised on the basis of experience gained and research done, in 2014 (See Section 3 of this paper). SAQA is in the process of fine-tuning its policy with the new Ministerial policy for *coordinating and funding* RPL - as SAQA's role is to support the RPL Coordinating Mechanism, conduct sector-wide and across-sector RPL research, and ensure both the uploading of RPL data in the National Learners'

Records Database (NLRD), and Quality Council certification of learning achievements in a way that does not discriminate against learners who follow an 'RPL route'[23] (MHET, 2016).

The Quality Councils develop and oversee the implementation of, NQF Sub-Framework-specific RPL policies in line with SAQA's over-arching policy (SAQA, 2015c). They ensure provider implementation and support, certify learning achievements, advocate RPL in their Sub-Framework contexts, and report to SAQA on progress made. The providers of education and training in turn develop and implement their institutional RPL policies in line with the Quality Council specifications, and report to the Quality Councils. Professional bodies are also required to provide for RPL (SAQA, 2012b).

3. The emergence of an RPL system in South Africa

Each instance of RPL provision can be seen as an activity system (Engestrom, 1987; 2001), where the RPL candidate(s) or entities are the 'subject(s)'; RPL implementation is the objective; RPL legislation, policies, procedures and instruments are the tools and the sources of the rules at play, and the RPL Coordination Mechanism, SAQA, the Quality Councils, and RPL providers and candidates, make up the 'communities of practice' involved.

RPL in South Africa 1995-2008
An Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) study of RPL across 18 countries positioned South Africa in a cluster of five countries at 'Stage 5 of 7' in terms of setting up a national RPL system - a stage which comprised 'islands of good RPL practices'. The study found four countries at 'Stage 6 of 7' or 'in the process of setting up national RPL systems', and no countries with 'Stage 7' fully-fledged national RPL systems (*Ibid.*). South Africa was described in the study as having a vision for RPL, many practices, access for people from different backgrounds, and sporadic funding. The research report also commented that 'not all levels or sectors were open' to RPL (OECD, 2009; OECD-SAQA, 2009:23).

RPL developments in South Africa 2010-2011
At the SAQA *National RPL Workshop* in 2010 blockages and needs stemming from the first years of RPL implementation in the country were identified in relation to four key areas, namely:
  a. Sharing effective delivery models for RPL.
  b. Enhancing the quality of RPL.
  c. Developing workable funding models for RPL.
  d. Addressing legislative and other barriers to the expansion of RPL nationally.

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23 Certification may not state the learning route followed, whether via traditional pathways, or RPL.

These needs were addressed at SAQA's 2011 *National RPL Conference: Building and expanding existing islands of excellent practice,* where there was a stream dedicated to addressing each of the categories of barriers identified (SAQA, 2011a). At the conference 52 presenters show-cased RPL work carried out between 1998 and 2010 (SAQA, 2011a). Some 37% of these initiatives directly addressed RPL in workplaces; 33% covered RPL in Higher Education; 4% RPL in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector; the remainder were more general. An informal scan of numbers of successful RPL candidates up to that time revealed roughly 20,000 in Higher Education and 51,000 in workplaces; RPL in eight of the then 12 scarce skills areas, and RPL in nine types of Higher Education faculties. While much had been learned about RPL in the first 15 years of South Africa's democracy, and a range of candidates had benefitted, the general view early in 2011 was that RPL had yet to deliver fully on what it promised (*Ibid*.).

One of the outputs of the conference was the *Resolution and Working Document on RPL* (SAQA, 2011b), which was endorsed by the 350 participating delegates. The ideas which it contained were then actively addressed by SAQA in its RPL policy revision process, and by the Ministerial Task Team for RPL, in its work - which is described in the next section.

RPL policy development and implementation since 2011

Several significant developments followed the *National RPL Conference* of 2011 and the dissemination of the *Working Document on RPL.* Following the SAQA recommendation, a Ministerial Task Team on RPL was appointed and conducted research into RPL legislation and policy, the status of RPL in the sub-sectors making up the NQF, funding models, and a comparison of different international RPL coordinating mechanisms (MHET, 2013a; SAQA, 2012c). SAQA played a leading role in this work. The Task Team recommended the development of a National RPL Institute, which led to the national policy for the coordination and funding of RPL (MHET, 2016).

Following SAQA's *National RPL Conference* in 2011, SAQA appointed a representative RPL Reference Group through democratic process, to assist with the revision of early RPL implementation policy (SAQA, 2002; 2004). The revised RPL policy (SAQA, 2013a; 2015c), developed by SAQA in consultation with this expert group, and including public comment, was grounded in extensive stakeholder consultation, research, and experience. This work formed part of SAQA's developmental work for the NQF policy suite, using SAQA's established participatory, collaborative, relationship-building approach. SAQA work-shopped the new policy extensively early in 2014, as part of its *National RPL Conference 2014: Tried and Tested, Tools, Templates* (SAQA, 2014c), as part of its work to drive its implementation. The main aims of this conference and workshop, and the outcomes achieved, were to strengthen common understandings and working relationships for RPL, share good RPL practices, and further RPL coordination. Over 400 delegates participated, and two SAQA Bulletin volumes of case studies followed with the aim of sharing further, successful RPL practices (SAQA 2015d).

Strategic national RPL initiatives

Between mid-2010 and mid-2015, as part of its pre-Ministerial RPL policy coordination work, SAQA undertook strategic national RPL initiatives on the basis of individuals and organisations that approached SAQA for assistance. Over 200 individuals and over 20 organisations were assisted by SAQA in this period.

The organisational (sector-wide) RPL initiatives typically commenced with clarification of the purpose of the RPL initiative, and identifying the 'matrix' of qualifications against which RPL could be conducted. Where there were gaps in the learning and work pathways making up this matrix, the necessary qualifications were developed with providers for registration on the NQF. The development of the institutional or sectoral RPL policy needed was supported. The particular RPL process required was determined, and RPL instruments developed. The initiatives were piloted before being rolled out. Some initiatives proceeded more smoothly than others; institutional politics, processes, and decision-making intervened at various points; and only some of the initiatives led to RPL candidates moving through the systems. Many of the highly successful cases have been written up (SAQA, 2015d).

The main cases are as follows:
- **Agricultural sector:** RPL for workers in the agricultural industry, especially seasonal workers (the most disenfranchised workers in the industry) – initial potential reach: 50 000 candidates.
- **Correctional Services:** RPL for offender artisans – initial potential reach: 30 000 candidates.
- **Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa (DENOSA)**: Development and implementation of RPL policy for DENOSA members – initial potential reach: 3 000 candidates.
- **Department of Defence (DoD):** RPL for Military Veterans – potential reach: 10 000 candidates.
- **Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA):** Coordination of RPL in the public services sector – potentially 10 000 candidates.
- **Department of Social Development (DSD):** RPL for the professionalisation of Community Development Practitioners – potential reach of over 100,000 candidates.
- **Department of Transport (DoT):** RPL for staff in the Department of Transport - 500 candidates.
- **Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC):** RPL for educators teaching at different levels in the system – potential reach 5 000 candidates.
- **E-TV**: RPL for E-TV staff members – potentially 500 candidates.
- **Marine Industry Association South Africa (MIASA):** RPL for artisans in the marine industry - initial potential reach 5 000 candidates.
- **National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB):** 30 RPL pilots for artisans – initial potential reach 10 000 candidates.
- **Rand Water:** RPL for 100 artisans and 20 management staff members.
- **Road Traffic Management Corporation:** RPL for Traffic Officers - 10 000

candidates.
- **State Information Technology Agency (SITA):** RPL for internal restructuring - potentially 300 candidates.
- **South African Police Services (SAPS):** RPL for musicians in the SAPS - 400 candidates.
- **South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA):** RPL for staff, potentially available for all SAQA staff members - currently 180 people.
- **South African Sports Confederation (SASCOC):** RPL pilot to set coaching standards – initial potential reach: 10 000 candidates.

SAQA's long-term partnership research into RPL

All SAQA's NQF policy development and implementation work takes into account evidence-based research. SAQA has a small Research Directorate which expands its capacity through long-term research partnerships. The purpose of these partnerships is to support SAQA's strategic and policy research, and research-based development, in the medium to long-term, in ways not possible under short-term contracts. The partnerships provide the research-base for NQF policy development and implementation, as well as developing NQF-related capacity in the system for education, training, development and work. In these partnerships, SAQA providers academic expertise linked to the NQF as well as funding; the research partners are required to bring specialised academic expertise in the area being researched, and their networks - the partnership research is conducted collaboratively. The SAQA-University of the Western Cape (SAQA-UWC) research towards developing an inclusive RPL model involved conducting and documenting action research into four existing successful RPL initiatives.

The four case studies focussed respectively on access to under-graduate study at UWC, access to post-graduate study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), access to RPL in workplaces, and access to Worker Education at the Workers' College. The institutional researchers involved documented and examined their own models, and surveyed their RPL candidate experiences. They used the findings to develop an inclusive RPL model which was theorised at a level of generality that enabled the application of the model across the four diverse contexts.

The findings of this research were fed directly into SAQA's RPL policy development work, and into SAQA's strategic national RPL initiatives. In addition to its being written up in peer-review paper form, and as case studies, the research has been captured in the peer-reviewed book *Crossing the lines: RPL as specialised pedagogy* (Cooper *et al* 2016).

4. RPL data

Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part qualifications through RPL. While it was not mandatory before 2014 to supply RPL-related data to the National Learners' Records Database

(NLRD) 'in the form of RPL data', some institutions did so. SAQA's (2015c) RPL policy now makes it mandatory to supply RPL data to the NLRD in specified ways for the purposes of analysis only, while at the same time preventing discrimination again those who obtain their qualifications via RPL by requiring that such information be kept confidential at all times. Whether learner achievements have been obtained via RPL of traditional routes may not be indicated on learner certificates or anywhere else.

Since 2014, SAQA has made systematic efforts to conscientise the NQF stakeholders in this respect, and to enable the RPL data loads into the NLRD. While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, to date nine of the 21 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); the Council on Higher Education (CHE) via fifteen Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); and two of the 93 recognised professional bodies have provided RPL data. These records have been loaded into the NLRD.

RPL data from public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

SAQA research conducted in 2012 showed that 22 of the 26 public HEIs in the country had RPL policies. Of these HEI, 12 were implementing RPL using decentralised models (RPL was implemented differently across different faculties/departments); 10 had centralised models. There was RPL in the following HEI faculties nationally: Management Science (nine); Law (nine); Economics (nine); Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences (seven); Education (six); Engineering and Technology(four); Health and Environment Sciences (two); Public Management (one); Agriculture (two).

RPL in the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) contexts

In Ministerial Task Team-related research commissioned by SAQA and made available to the Task Team as part of SAQA's support for it, the SETAs were found to be at various stages of RPL implementation, with some at policy development stage, and others having rolled out RPL for considerable numbers of candidates (Naude and Malgas, 2013). There were diverse understandings, interpretations and ways of implementing RPL across the SETAs. While weaknesses included lack of coherence and monitoring, and lack of documenting and reporting, it was clear that many SETAs had extensive knowledge and experience of RPL, and had built up strong systems, processes, implementation models and tools over the years (*Ibid*.).

RPL in the professional body contexts

It was initially not mandatory for professional bodies to provide for RPL towards professional designations under their jurisdiction. However SAQA's (2012b) Policy for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the purposes of the NQF Act requires that in order to be recognised, a professional body must *inter alia* "Include as general requirements, experiential learning, recognition of prior learning, and/ or practical experience" (*Ibid*.: Clause 42). Further, the requirement that no distinctions may be made between learning achievements

acquired via RPL and those achieved through traditional routes, and that RPL data must be submitted to the NLRD for monitoring purposes (SAQA, 2015c), apply also to Professional Bodies.

Analysis of data in the NLRD for qualifications achieved via RPL
The following analysis of RPL records in the NLRD focuses on the achievement of qualifications through RPL – a total of **31 861** records of achievement by **28 819** people. The achievement of unit standards not yet leading to a completed qualification is excluded from the analysis[24].

Figure 1: Number of Qualifications by NQF Level and NQF Field (12 April 2017)
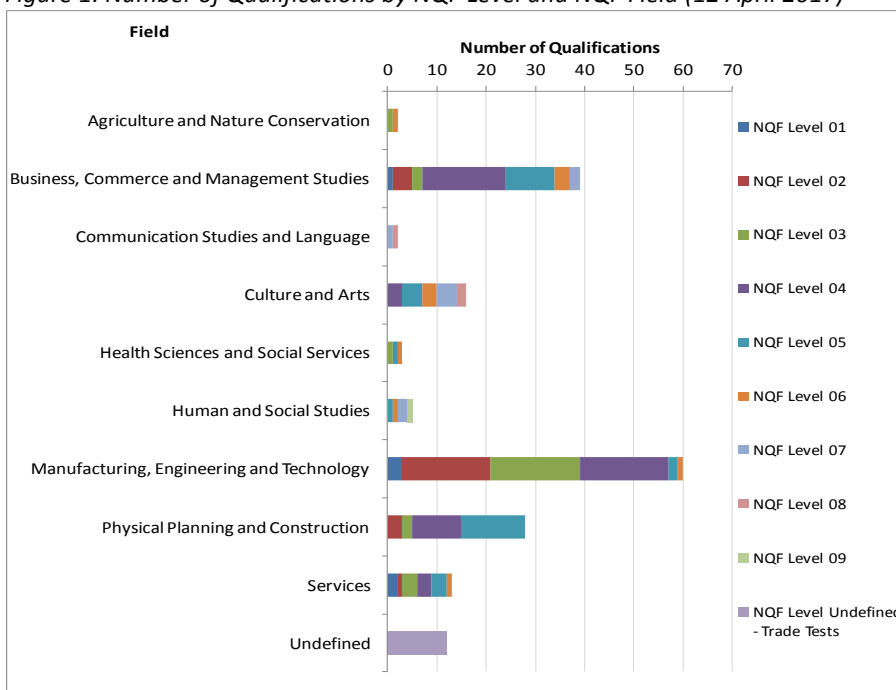
A total of **28 819** *people* on the NLRD have achieved qualifications through RPL. The total number of *records of the achievement* of qualifications through RPL is **31 861** (i.e. some learners have more than one achievement via RPL).

A total of **180** *different qualifications* have been achieved through RPL, as shown in Figure 1. Most of these (60 qualifications) are in the field of Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology, at NQF Levels 1 to 6, followed by 39 qualifications in the field Business, Commerce and Management Studies and 28 in the field of Physical Planning and Construction. The fields of Services, Culture and Arts, and

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24 There are records in the NLRD of 31 774 learners who have achieved unit standards via RPL, with a total of 871 538 learner-unit standard links (an average of 22 unit standards via RPL per learner).

Communication Studies and Language, and 12 Trade Test qualifications also have records of achievement of qualifications through RPL. Three qualifications in Health Sciences and Social Services, two in Agriculture and Nature Conversation, and five in Human and Social Studies now have small numbers of achievements through RPL. None of the other three NQF fields have records of achievement of qualifications through RPL.

Although the majority of the *qualifications* achieved were in Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology, the majority of the 31 861 *achievements* were in the field of Services, mostly at NQF Levels 1 and 4, followed by Business, Commerce and Management Studies, mostly at Levels 2 and 4, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Learner Achievements by NQF Level and NQF Field (12 April 2017)
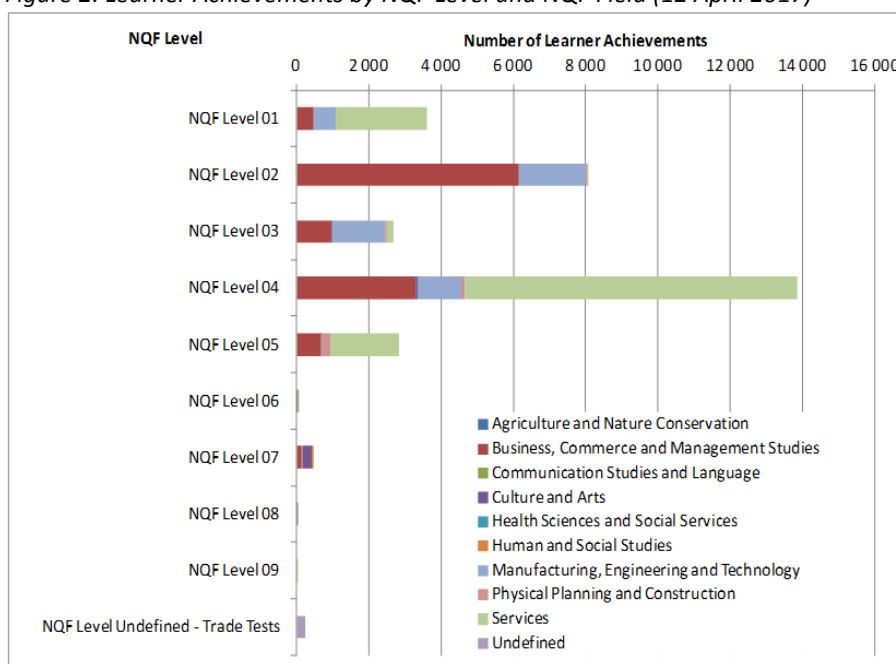
The Services Level 1 qualifications were the National Certificate: Hygiene and Cleaning and the General Education and Training Certificate: Domestic Services, while the Level 4 qualifications were the Further Education and Training Certificate: Real Estate and the National Certificate: Ladies Hairdressing. The Level 2 qualifications in Business, Commerce and Management Studies were the National Certificate: Business Administration Services, the National Certificate: new Venture Creation (SMME) and the National Certificate: Contact Centre Support, while the Level 4 qualifications were mostly Further Education and Training Certificate: Business Administration Services, National Certificate: Customer Management, Further Education and Training Certificate: Management.

The qualification with the most number of RPL achievements was the Further Education and Training Certificate: Real Estate at Level 4. The top ten qualifications that had RPL achievements against them are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Top Ten Qualifications with the Number of Achievements for each (as at 12 April 2017)
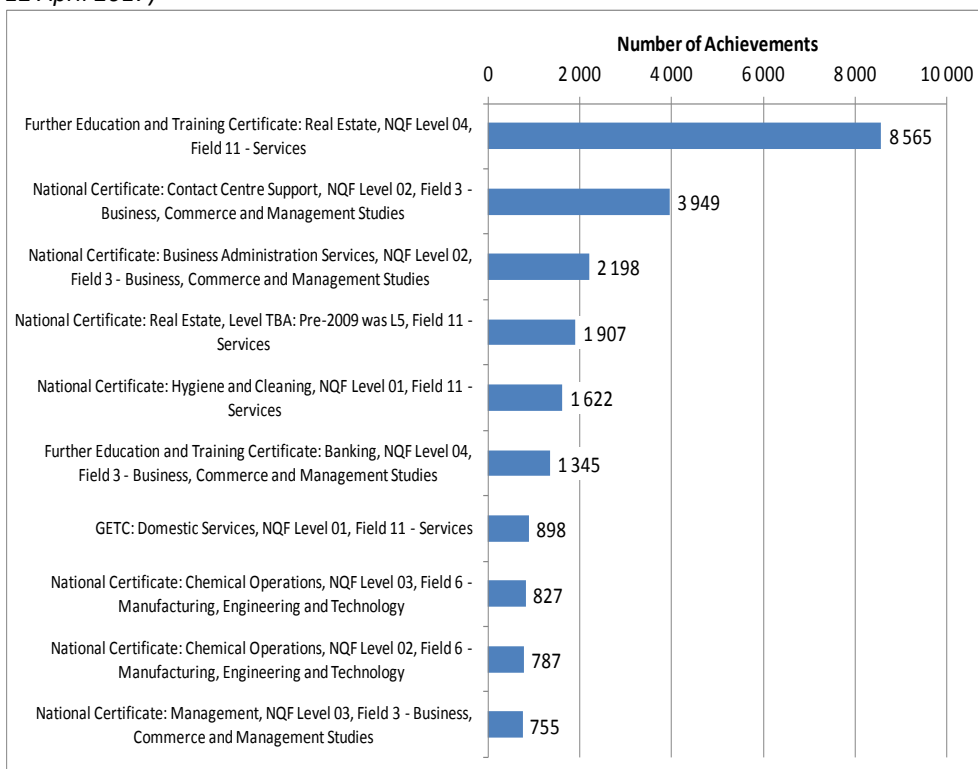
Twelve quality assurance functionaries submitted their records of qualifications achieved via RPL (see Table 1). The number of education and training providers for which they submitted these records was 245.

While it is encouraging to know that RPL is being carried out across the NQF system, and to note the slowly increasing amounts of RPL data being submitted for uploading into the NLRD, further work is being done to encourage both broader implementation of RPL, as well as the loading into the NLRD of the records that do exist but have not yet been submitted. Loading these records would show the true extent of learner achievements via RPL in the country.

Table 1: Number of Learner Achievements, and Number of associated Providers, per Quality Assurance functionary (as at 12 April 2017)

Education and Training Quality Authority	Achievement Records	Providers
Agricultural SETA (AgriSETA)	3	1
Bank SETA (BANKSETA)	1 827	2
Council on Higher Education (CHE)	577	15
Chemical Industry Education and Training Authority (CHIETA)	5 271	33
Energy and Water SETA (EWSETA)	100	12
Fibre Processing and Manufacturing SETA (FP&MSETA)	5	4
Local Government SETA (LG SETA)	1	1
Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA (MAPPP SETA)	342	95
South African Board for People Practices (SABPP)	48	4
South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC)	1	1
Services SETA	23 639	67
Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA)	47	10
Total	**31 861**	**245**

5. Reflection

Looking back at RPL policy development and implementation in South Africa after 1995, it is clear that the country followed a number of cycles of action and reflection, and has experienced extensive learning. Engestrom's (2001) idea of 'an expansive learning cycle' is but one useful concept for explaining this process.

First, 'accepted practice' was scrutinised: SAQA acknowledged that the then-used national RPL policy (SAQA, 2002; 2004) had led to 'islands of good practice' (OECD, 2009; OECD-SAQA, 2009:23) and not a 'fully-fledged national system'. Secondly, SAQA's national RPL conference in 2010 was organised to ascertain the nature of the barriers to the establishment of a national RPL system. Third, SAQA's 2011 national RPL conference attempted to 'model the new' (Engestrom, 2001) in the form of collective agreement around the principles for effective RPL delivery, and the quality assurance and funding of RPL. This agreement was visible in the form of the *RPL Working Document* (SAQA, 2011b). Fourth, the *RPL Working Document* was considered and published by SAQA, and fifth, the suggestions it contained were implemented. A Ministerial Task Team for RPL was established, and carried out an investigation into the legal barriers to an RPL system, and potential models for the coordination and funding of such a system. SAQA's policy for implementing RPL was revised in an informed way that led to wide buy-in across the system. Sixth, the Minister considered the findings in the Report of the Ministerial Task Team for RPL,

and developed over-arching policy for the national coordination and funding of RPL. The National RPL Coordinating Mechanism is in the process of being set up. While these phases of action and reflection could be described in other ways, mapping them in this way shows the upward spiral of country learning as understandings of RPL theory and practice deepened in an expansive way.

There has been a groundswell of RPL developments, implementation, and communities of practice. While 80 delegates considered country learning relating to RPL in a 2008 DHET-SAQA conference, 200 participated in the 2010 national RPL conference to identify barriers, and 350 in the 2011 conference designed to workshop how to address these barriers. The closing half-day session in which the *RPL Working Document* was addressed, was attended by the highest number of delegates in the three-day event. While SAQA was advocating assistance with individual and organisational RPL (2010-2015), the numbers of individuals approaching SAQA grew from under 10 in 2010, to over 100 per year in 2014 and 2015. A steady stream of entities approached SAQA for support with sector-wide RPL initiatives. The 2014 conference, a four-day event designed to workshop SAQA's newly-revised policy for implementing RPL, and to share successful models, was attended by well over 400 delegates.

6. Closing comments

RPL offers people previously and currently disadvantaged in South Africa, a chance to access and progress in the system for education, training, development and work - for their individual development as well as to participate in the community, civic, and economic aspects of life. The 'first wave' of RPL led to islands of good practice; it is imperative that the 'second wave' - of policy revision based on the experience gained; of national RPL initiatives and the support of individual RPL candidates, and of establishing the 'infrastructure' of the national RPL system - succeeds.

A five year period was visualised by SAQA for scaling up from islands of good practice to the national RPL system. There is now Ministerial policy for the coordination and funding of RPL, which also spells out the responsibilities of all the role-players concerned - in line with the vision articulated by SAQA at the 2011 *National RPL Conference: Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice.* Care needs to be taken however, to locate the RPL Coordinating Mechanism in an institutional position that will afford it strategic capacity. The fact that no *new* funds have been allocated for the functioning of the RPL Coordinating Mechanism, could inhibit its implementation. Speedy action in setting up the Reference Group to guide its development is needed to prevent loss of the momentum gained regarding the development of RPL in South Africa so far. The publication of the Ministerial RPL-policy in 2016 has led to an urgent need for alignment of the SAQA and Quality Council RPL policies, with it. The '50% Rule' still exists, although it has been

challenged in court. The first round of this challenge was won by the institutions, but it has been appealed.

While workshops are underway to conscientise NQF communities about the National RPL Coordinating Mechanism, it needs to be staffed and capacitated as a matter of urgency. Successful models and large-scale cases exist, where effective delivery, quality assurance, and funding are addressed in feasible ways. Existing expertise needs to be concentrated in the National RPL Coordinating Mechanism, and systematic nation-wide RPL reporting needs to commence. Analysis of this reporting will show the extent to which access and redress has been accomplished via RPL. In order to achieve the further development desired, continued political will and state resources, nationally coordinated structures, relational agency and joint work by all the stakeholders involved, are needed.

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Validation as a learning process　　**7**

Per Andersson

The object of validation is prior learning, but participation in validation could also be seen as a learning process. Three dimensions of this learning process are identified: to learn what you know – that is to develop awareness of your prior learning; to learn what is required in a validation process; and to learn how to present your knowledge to get recognition. Validation is also discussed in terms of either a separate activity, or an intertwined part of a process of validation and new learning. It is argued that seeing validation as a learning process would help in the further development of practices of validation, but also of the theoretical understanding of these practices.

The concept and practices of validation have many facets. What is discussed in this paper, mainly in terms of validation, is often also called recognition, accreditation, or assessment – of prior learning. Thus, the individual's prior learning – what has been learnt before – is normally described as the object of validation; the knowledge or competence that a validation process is intended to make 'visible' and give recognition to.

And even if we are focussing on prior learning, the questions that this article starts from are: Could validation also be seen as a learning process in itself? Could a process that mainly is about prior learning also result in new learning? Could there even be a dual focus on prior and new learning?

Another starting point of the discussion is a broad perspective on what validation is, including many facets. Basically, processes that give recognition to the results of learning independent of when, where, and how learning took place are seen as possible expressions of the idea of validation. However, one limitation should be made: A specific character of validation is that learning and validation/assessment are separate in time and/or place. That is, assessment and/of learning that takes place within the same, educational context, for example a specific course, should not be seen as validation – such a broad definition would include even all assessment in schools and other educational contexts, which would make the specific concept of validation superfluous. Rather, the separation in time/place means that the transfer of knowledge, of the outcomes of learning, from one context to another, or

from earlier to present time, is what makes processes of validation meaningful and valuable (Andersson, 2010).

It should also be noted that this paper does not include a specific definition of what learning, knowledge, or competence, actually is, more than that learning is seen as the process that results in knowledge – where the latter concept includes facts, skills, understanding, competence etc. The reason is that there are different standpoints or perspectives on learning and knowledge, perspectives that could all be related to different types of validation processes. For example, seeing learning as situated in practices (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991) could result in a focus on authentic assessment in validation, e.g. assessing vocational competence in the work place, while starting from ideas of experiential learning (e.g. Kolb, 1984) would probably result in some type of portfolio approach.

1. Prior learning – the object of validation

The intended object of validation is prior learning. But what is prior learning, and how could it be validated? We have to define if it actually is prior learning that we mean, or rather the result or outcome of this prior learning. Learning is a process that results in knowledge, skills, competence etc., which in turn could be assessed and formalised in different types of qualifications.

In the first alternative, the object of validation is the prior learning process per se. Then we need proofs of that a learning process has taken place, or in other words, that an individual has participated in a learning process. This focus in validation could be seen as validating something that is equivalent to participation in a course, i.e. taking part in an organised learning process. This is a possible approach to validation, if participation is what is meant to get recognition. But in the second alternative, the object of validation is the outcomes of prior learning. This requires a different approach when we want to see and validate that the individual has certain knowledge. And, in the third alternative, the object could also be validation of qualifications from another system. In the latter case, the validation process is rather a matter of transfer and translation of qualifications – what is this degree or this certificate worth in our current system? In this article, the main focus will be the second alternative, which is what we most often mean with validation.

2. Variation in prior learning

With this focus on validation of the outcomes of learning, we should still be aware of the certain character of validation: To make visible and give recognition to learning outcomes independent of when, where, and how learning has taken place. This openness to variation in the learning process will most likely also result in a variation in the learning outcomes, and a variation in the degree of awareness of these outcomes among learners. If you participate in an organised learning process,

like a course or a study program, you are more likely to be aware of the outcomes. But in more informal learning processes, particularly if they are unintended, it is less likely that you are aware of what you have learnt. But still you have developed knowledge that could be applied in suitable situations. This is what often is described as 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1958, 1966).

3. Three dimensions of learning in validation

We will now look closer at three different dimensions of validation as a learning process. All three dimensions concern learning that contributes to a more fair and valid assessment of prior learning.

To learn what you know – awareness of prior learning
Validation might require awareness of your knowledge, which might have been 'tacit'. Such awareness is not necessarily required – validation could be based on observations of knowledge in use, observations in an authentic practice, from which an experienced assessor could see and hear that an individual knows how to do something, or that s/he has a proper vocabulary for the certain context. But, when it comes to knowledge that is not always presented in action, observation is probably not enough. The same is true when it comes to knowledge in terms of knowing why – understanding. It could be more difficult to assess this latter type of knowledge without the candidate being aware of and able to present and discuss the topic and knowledge. It could be possible to derive understanding just from observing/listening, but a valid assessment of these dimensions of knowledge would probably require that the individual is able to present and discuss his/her knowledge, the results of prior learning. A 'valid validation' is a process that gives recognition to the individual's prior learning in a proper way!

In other words, in validation you have to know what you know. And if you do not know (are not aware of) what you know, you have to learn what you know. This is a first dimension of validation as a learning process, i.e. that it might be necessary to learn what you know if a fair and valid process of validation should be able to take place.

To learn what is required in validation
A second dimension of validation as a learning process is based on the condition that the candidate should know the requirements of the validation process. This is true for a process which goes beyond observation of what proofs of knowledge that turns up without an organised process where the candidate is involved, and without the candidate being aware of requirements. Thus, the candidate should normally be able to answer the question: What knowledge is it that I am expected to present proofs of in this specific validation situation? As such requirements normally is not part of our everyday knowledge, a validation candidate probably has to learn and develop

knowledge about these requirements. What am I expected to know, and also expected to show that I know? These questions are relevant independent of validation approach – when showing your skills in an authentic practice, in a written test, in a portfolio etc.

To learn how to present your knowledge
A third dimension of learning in relation to validation is that the process is designed in a specific way, which might require certain skills to be able to present your knowledge in ways expected by an assessor. Ideally, assessment in validation should employ various methods, adapted to the needs of the candidate, to produce the basis for a valid assessment. But in practice it is likely that the palette of methods is more restricted, due to limitations in resources, assessor's competence etc. Thus, as a candidate you need to learn how to present your knowledge in a proper way for the validation process to come.
All these three dimensions are intertwined in the learning process that might be necessary for a 'valid validation'. You have to know what you know, what is required, and how you could present your knowledge in relation to these requirements. And if your prior learning does not include these aspects, you have to develop them as part of the validation process.

4. Mutual understanding between subjects in validation

The candidate is the central, but not the only, subject in validation. There is also the assessor that has a central role together with the candidate. There might also be other actors that are important for the candidate to develop the abilities to participate in a valid validation process – e.g. supervisors – but the main relation is between candidate and assessor. Here, it is important to be aware of that making learning visible in validation is a process of developing mutual understanding between candidate and assessor (see e.g. Sandberg & Andersson, 2011).
The candidate needs the knowledge and skills discussed above. But the assessor also needs the complementary knowledge and skills – of the actual requirements, of the variation in learning processes and outcomes of everyday learning, of different ways for candidates to present their knowledge, and not the least of possible difficulties for candidates to fulfil the formal requirements of a validation process. When the candidate and the assessor have such knowledge, understand requirements, and understand each other, then a basic requirement for a valid validation is fulfilled – mutual understanding is possible.

5. validation or Validation?

Breier (2005) discusses two types of validation – Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as opposed to recognition of prior learning (rpl). In capital letters, validation (RPL) is a process with a sole or main focus on making prior learning visible, a specific activity

of validation, which has been described as a link in a chain of guidance – validation – flexible learning. What has been discussed in this article so far is learning in relation to such Validation/RPL.

On the other hand, validation/rpl means that the validation process is integrated in the learning process. In that case, validation can be seen as a strand in a rope, which consists of intertwined validation and learning processes.

Validation and learning intertwined

In practice, validation is often – more or less – of this intertwined character (see e.g. Andersson, 2007). However, the integration between the two aspects could be more explicit and organised. A process of validation/rpl should mean opportunities both for making prior learning visible and for supplementary learning, to develop one's knowledge, before assessment takes place. The object of assessment is here prior and new learning.

'Pure' Validation – which only takes account of prior learning – is difficult in practice, as if you could 'read' or measure the individual from the outside without a relation. But learning/knowledge has to be used and presented to become visible and provide a basis for assessment. This will most likely also make the candidate aware of the requirements, which means that there is an opportunity not only to learn in the three prepare-for-validation dimensions discussed above, but also to prepare and develop new learning within the subject contents that are to be assessed, before the actual validation/assessment takes place. Thus, from the organiser's perspective unintended integration between validation/learning of this subject content could take place in most validation processes. But the process could also be organised in a way that supports such integration, where there is 'space' for supplementary learning, to 'refresh' or even develop one's actual knowledge – starting from what one already knows but allowing for new learning before assessment.

Validation and adult education ideals

An even more explicitly integrated RPL process could be found in a course, which applies 'classical' characteristics or ideas found in the ideals of adult education (see e.g. Merriam & Brockett, 2007) – and particularly the idea to build upon what the participant already knows. In terms of validation, this means that initial formative validation is combined with an individually adapted study process, and an assessment process where the candidate is supported to use prior as well as new learning. Such an assessment process would also most likely to be continuous, in that all 'proofs' of candidates' learning are taken into account, independent whether these proofs were seen (or heard) in the initial, formative, assessment, or during the course, or at the end – or if there was valid proof that the candidate could have presented before the course started.

Validation of current or proved knowledge?

However, in the latter case, there is an additional aspect to consider. There should be an awareness of, and maybe also a choice made, whether the RPL process is going

to result in an assessment of actual, current competence, or if also proofs that are not current, i.e. proofs of competence presented earlier, could be included. Here we come back to the initial discussion on what we mean by prior learning – is it the learning process per se, the actual and (still) existing knowledge outcomes, or the possible, more or less formal, proofs in terms of certificates etc.? It is possible to include proofs of earlier presented/assessed knowledge as a basis for validation, but the consequence then is that the result of the validation is not a testimony of the actual, current knowledge of the individual. Rather, it is a testimony equivalent to most other types of certificates – a hopefully fair assessment and documentation of what knowledge an individual has had at some point in time.

It is not a realistic option that we as individuals always will have a current validation-based documentation of our present knowledge. On the contrary – the documentation will always be dated. The question here is rather if the result of a validation process is expected to be in all parts a current presentation of actual knowledge, at the time when the document is issued, or if different parts could have different currency dates?

6. Conclusion

We have seen how participation in a validation process, like most other experiences, even could become a learning process (see also Andersson, 2011). Validation normally requires that the candidate is aware of and able to present her or his knowledge, as well as knowledge of what knowledge that is expected to be presented. Furthermore, the assessor should be aware of these possible learning needs, but also of the variation in candidates' knowledge depending on when, where, and how, they have learnt the knowledge contents that is to be validated. Assessor and candidate should strive for mutual understanding, to make the validation process as valid as possible.

There is also the option of RPL – a process where validation of prior learning and new learning is purposefully intertwined in a process of assessment and learning. In this case, validation becomes a part of a process that comes close to adult education ideals of starting from and building upon participants' prior experiences and knowledge.

Independent of approach – with a capital V or not – there are obvious arguments for understanding validation as a learning process. Such a perspective would help in the further development of the practices of validation, but also of the theoretical understanding of these practices.

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The Spanish experience 8

Validating informal and non-formal learning outcomes with a focus on labour market perspectives

Yazid Isli

In 2004, the European Union defined common principles for the validation of informal and non-formal learning with the aim to facilitate the recognition of those competences acquired through these pathways, on the one hand, and establishing a common framework to make comparability between the different Member States easier, on the other hand. Following up on this initiative, all member states started developing their national strategies based on these principles. Spain fully entered this work with the publication of Royal Decree 1224/2009, of 17 July, on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience (RD 1224/2009). This step has been considered a real opportunity for more than 70% of the active population that does not have a recognised accreditation or qualification of their professional experience. Because of this, many groups such as women, immigrants and unemployed people face complex labour transitions and are exposed to a real risk of exclusion.

In order to understand in a very specific way the scope of RD 1224/2009, it is important to take into account the Organic Law 5/2002 on Qualifications and Vocational Training which defines the National System of Professional Qualifications and Vocational Training (*Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales y Formación Professional - SNCPyFP*) as 'the set of instruments and actions necessary to promote and develop the integration of vocational training offers, through the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications, as well as the evaluation and accreditation of the corresponding professional competences, in a way that it favours the professional and social development of people and ensures that the needs of the productive system are covered'.

1. Law 5/2002

The Organic Law 5/2002 identifies the following basic principles of the SNCPyFP:
- Vocational training will be oriented both to personal development and the exercise of the right to work, as well as to the free choice of profession or

occupation and to the satisfaction of the needs of the productive system, and of employment throughout life.
- The access, on an equal footing for all citizens, to the different forms of vocational training.
- The participation and cooperation of the social partners with the public authorities in the training policies and professional qualification.
- The adequacy of training and qualifications to the European Union criteria, in line with the objectives of the single market and free movement of workers.
- The participation and cooperation of the different Public Administrations according to their respective competences.
- The promotion of economic development and adaptation to the different territorial needs of the productive system.

Moreover, the Organic Law 5/2002 also identifies the purposes of the SNCPyFP, as detailed in its article 3:
- To qualify for the exercise of professional activities, so that the individual needs and the productive and employment systems can be satisfied.
- To promote a quality, updated and adequate training offer to the different recipients, according to the needs of the labour market qualification and the personal expectations of professional promotion.
- To provide stakeholders with adequate information and guidance on vocational training and qualifications for employment.
- To incorporate into the training offer those training actions enabling them to carry out business activities for their own account, as well as for the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives and entrepreneurship, which will include all forms of incorporation and organisation of companies, whether they are individual or collective, and especially those of the social economy.
- To evaluate and officially accredit professional qualifications whatever the form of their acquisition.
- To encourage public and private investment in the qualification of workers and the optimisation of resources dedicated to vocational training.

Therefore, the evaluation and accreditation of professional competences can only be understood if it is considered within the broader context of the National System of Professional Qualifications and Vocational Training (SNCPyFP), which is supported by four basic and complementary pillars:
- The National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNCP).
- The Procedure for Recognition, Evaluation, Accreditation and Registration of professional qualifications (PREAR).
- Information and guidance on vocational training and employment.
- The evaluation and improvement of the SNCPyFP.

It should be noted that RD 1224/2009 makes possible the accreditation by means of the PREAR procedure of the units of competence not yet included in vocational

training certificates and professional certificates. This may give rise to a cumulative partial accreditation once the corresponding educational offer is created in future. Therefore, the PREAR leads to these several possible outcomes.

2. Procedure for Recognition, Evaluation, Accreditation and Registration of professional qualifications in Spain (PREAR)

In Spain, the procedure for recognising professional competences acquired through work experience is defined as 'the set of actions aimed at evaluating and recognising these skills acquired through work experience or non-formal training pathways' (RD 1224/2009, July 17). The following purposes are conferred to this procedure:
-   To evaluate the professional competences possessed by people and acquired through work experience, and other non-formal training, through common procedures and methodologies that guarantee the validity, reliability, objectivity and technical rigor of the evaluation.
-   To officially accredit professional competences, favouring their enhancement to facilitate both the insertion and labour integration and free circulation in the labour market, as well as personal and professional progression.
-   To facilitate lifelong learning and increase their professional qualifications, by offering opportunities to obtain a cumulative partial accreditation, to complete the training aimed at obtaining the corresponding vocational training qualification or certificate of professionalism.

Since the PREAR procedure is an integral part of the SNCPyFP, RD 1224/2009 clearly establishes in article 5 the relationship of the procedure with the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNCP): the evaluation consists of a structured process that is verified if personal professional competence complies with the performance and criteria specified in the units of competence included in the CNCP. Thus, article 7 of Royal Decree 1224/2009 positions the CNCP as the "referent" for the PREAR procedure through the units of competence included in vocational training certificates and/or certificates of professionalism. In this way, and to evaluate professional competence in a unit of competence, it is necessary to consider professional achievements, criteria of realisation and the professional context that form each one of them, according to the rules fixed in the guides of evidences. In any case, the "unit of competence" is the minimum unit of accreditation.

Instruments of dissemination, information and support for the PREAR procedure
The RD 1224/2009 gives the Public Administrations (education and labour) a fundamental role in all actions of dissemination and information supporting the PREAR. They must guarantee an "open and permanent service of information and support to all those who request information about the procedure and who are interested in participating in the process of evaluation and accreditation of competences".

The PREAR procedure is based on Calls: an innovative approach

The procedure of evaluation and accreditation of competences is carried out in Spain through public calls, made by competent Public Administrations. When a call is published, it must identify the following elements:

- The units of competence as object of evaluation and the "vocational training certificates" and/or certificates of professionalism in which they are included.
- The general requirements referred to in Article 11 and, when necessary, the specific non-academic requirements agreed between the General State Administration (AGE) and the Regions (Comunidades Autónomas - CC.AA), in accordance with the established framework of the territorial cooperation.
- The places or means where applicants need to formalise their application, as well as the specific points in which the information and guidance referred to in article 8 will be provided.
- The places where the PREAR procedure will be carried out.
- The registration period and deadlines for the different phases of the evaluation and accreditation procedure.
- The procedure and deadlines for submitting appeal to the evaluation-result.
- If the number of people that can be evaluated is limited, this limit must be established in the call.
- Criteria for admission if a maximum number of people is to be evaluated.

The involved Public Administrations must hold a minimum of one annual call in order to enable persons applying to participate in the procedure to have at least a "level 1" professional qualification. One of the most outstanding characteristics of RD 1224/2009 is the connection between the PREAR procedure and the world of work, its needs and the level of professionalism of workers. The system offers different organisations (trade unions, companies, etc.) the possibility of requesting the State General Administration (AGE) or the competent administration in each CC.AA, the execution of specific calls if these can help responding to company-needs and the most disadvantaged groups suffering from lack of access to the labour market.

3. Phases of the PREAR procedure

The actual organisation of the procedure consists of three consecutive phases:

1. Advice.
2. Evaluation of professional competence.
3. Accreditation and registration of professional competence.

Phase 1: Advice

In the Spanish system, the giving of advice to applicants is mandatory and can be carried out individually or collectively, using face-to-face or technology based means. The advisor is the person who supports the applicant through a number of activities that include self-assessment of competencies and preparation of his/her

personal, professional and educational history (which we also could call "portfolio"). Based on the documentation provided, the advisor issues a report on the appropriateness of moving forward to the next phase (evaluation of professional competence). In the event that the report is favourable, all documentation submitted by the applicant together with the report drawn up by the advisor is transmitted to the corresponding evaluation committee. If, on the other hand, the report is unfavourable, the applicant is informed about the training that should be undertaken to be able to reapply in future. However, the participant can always decide to continue with the process despite the advisor´s negative report.

Phase 2: Evaluation of professional competence

The next stage of the PREAR process consists of evaluating each "unit of competence" in which the applicant has registered. At this stage, it is checked whether "the professional competence required in the professional realisations, the levels established in the criteria of realisation and in a real or simulated work situation, established from the professional context, is demonstrated".

The advisor's report is taken into account together with the documentation sent by the participant and when it is considered necessary, new evidences can be requested. The evaluator selects the appropriate methods (job observation, simulations, tests, professional interview ...) and the final result of the evaluation, for a given competence and in a specific "competency unit", will be deemed as: "Demonstrated" or "Not demonstrated ".

Phase 3: Accreditation and registration of professional competence

The final phase of the procedure is to issue accreditation for any applicant who has successfully passed the evaluation. The accreditation will be for each of the "units of competence" where the professional competence is demonstrated. If the evaluated professional competence does not completely fulfil the qualifications contained in a VET "qualification" (certificate) or "certificate of professionalism", the worker receives a "cumulative partial accreditation" that will allow him to complete his training in order to obtain the corresponding qualification (certificate).

An important aspect of the PREAR procedure is issuing the accreditation of "units of competence". This action is undertaken through the organisational structure of the procedure. This is a joint structure in which the General State Administration (AGE), the Ministry of Labour and Immigration, the Ministry of Education and the Regions (CC.AA), are all represented. The results are remitted to a state registry showing the "units of competence" accredited during the procedure.

On the other hand, the State Public Employment Service is responsible for the file of this registry, which can be accessed by both the Ministry of Education and both the education and labour administrations of the Regions.

Effect of the accreditation obtained

The direct effect of obtaining the accreditation is that the education authorities recognise the "units of competence" accredited to validate the corresponding

professional modules of each "qualification", on the one hand, and the Labour Administration recognises the accredited "units of competence", for giving exemptions on the training modules associated with the "units of competence" included in the "Professional Certificates", on the other hand.

The training plan

At the end of the PREAR procedure, the competent administrations inform all the participants about the open training paths available so that the "units of competence" for which they have applied for accreditation can be accredited in future calls. They are also informed that they can complete the relevant training leading to the obtaining of a "vocational training certificate" or, if applicable, a "certificate of professionalism".

4. Procedure and data in 2010-2013

In 2012, the National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL) prepared the first evaluation and monitoring report on the calls carried out by different regions in their respective PREAR procedures. The report informs on several aspects of the calls during the period 2010-2013. The most relevant aspects are presented here.

62 PREAR calls and more than 64.000 places convened

The first observation is that all regions have established at least one PREAR call in different professional families, qualifications and "units of competence", between 2010 and 2013. In total, 62 calls were realised during this period:
  - The AGE, through the Ministry of Education, made 1 call for Ceuta and Melilla.
  - The Regions (CC.AA) made 61 calls through their administrations:
    · Education administrations: 32 calls.
    · Labour administrations: 6 calls.
    · Agreement between the educational and labour administrations: 18 calls.
    · Educational and labour administrations in the same department: 5 calls.

7.500 Advisers, evaluators and counsellors

Article 25 of RD 1224/2009 establishes the requirements in terms of teaching and/or professional experience and of specific training which advisors, evaluators and counsellors must fulfil in order to obtain the necessary "qualification" to act as advisor and/or evaluator. These "qualifications" are valid for the calls carried out both by the General Administration of the State and by the Regions, in the "professional qualifications" or "units of competence" enabled. During the analysed period, a total of 7.500 advisors, evaluators and counsellors have been trained.

64.083 places created

According to the data available in the report, it can be observed that 64.083 places have been created from 20 professional families. It can be noticed that there is a

strong concentration around two professional families, since 72% of the places were for the professional family "Sociocultural Services and to the Community (SSC)" and 10% for the professional family "Health (SAN)".

The table below lists the different calls made during the indicated period. The data collected for each CA.AA are presented, including the number of calls made by each of them and the number of respective places associated with the calls:

Regions	Calls	2010	Calls	2011	Calls	2012	Calls	2013	Total calls	Total Places
Andalusia			1	12.000			1	7.100	2	19.100
Aragon	1	R	6	225	1	1.540	9*	1.025	17	2.790
Asturias			1	352					1	352
Balearics	1	150	2	760	1	165	1	190	5	1.265
Valencia			1	600	2	1.195	2	2.009	5	1.728
Canary Islands	1	500	2	1.200			1	300	4	2.000
Cantabria					1	250			1	250
Castilla Leon			1	2.655					1	2.655
Castilla la Mancha			1	3.626					1	3.626
Catalonia			1	8.118			1	1.712	2	9.830
Ceuta and Melilla			1	1.000					1	1.000
Estremadura			1	1.105			1	300	2	1.405
Galicia			3	3.800	3	5.236	1	1.340	7	10.376
The Rioja			1	100	1	345	1	276	3	721
Murcia	1	450			1	845	1**	50	3	1.345
Navarre	1	240	1	810	1	420	1	250	4	1.720
Basque Country			2	2.920					2	2.920
TOTAL	5	1.340	25	39.271	11	8.920	20	14.552	61	63.083

Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral.* Consejo General de Formación profesional, August 2013**.**

* Call of the SSC professional family with no limit of places.

** Call for the SSC professional family including 50 places offered in 2013. For 2014 and 2015 the places to be offered will be determine through the lists of admitted applicants to the procedure.

The high demand for these professional qualifications can be explained by the entry into force of the Spanish Law on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for dependents and the requirements included in the agreement derived from the Law on the System for Autonomy and dependent people caring (SAAD), which required

the accreditation of all its workers by 2015. The table below summarises the distribution of the places convened during the considered years, distributed per Professional family.

Professional families	Total Places	2010	2011	2012	2013
Administration & Management - ADG	100			40	60
Physical activities & Sports -AFD	1.447		500	400	547
Agriculture -–AGA	50				50
Arts & handcrafts -–ART	290				290
Electricity & Electronics -ELE	1.035		100	395	540
Energy & Water -–ENA	515		300	150	65
Building & Civil works -EOC	445		95	50	300
Mechanical manufacturing -FME	845	30	290	200	325
Catering & Tourism -HOT	3.105	30	905	895	1.275
Installation & Maintenance -IMA	705			46	659
Personal image -IMP	50				50
Food industries -INA	450			450	
Wood & furniture -MAM	243			113	130
Maritime fishing -MAP	580		330	200	50
Chemistry -QUI	250			40	210
Health -–SAN	6.536	380	3.500	980	1.676
Security & environment -SEA	550		100	200	250
Socio-cultural and community services –SSC	45.967	900	32.706	4.421	7.940
Textile, clothing and leather –TCP	40			40	
Transport & Vehicle maintenance – TMV	880		445	300	135
TOTAL	**64.083**	**1.340**	**39.271**	**8.920**	**14.552**

Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral".* Consejo General de Formación profesional, August 2013.

45% of applicants had a low level of education
According to the compiled data, the level of education of applicants was quite disparate and all levels of education were represented. The figure demonstrates the level of education of applicants.
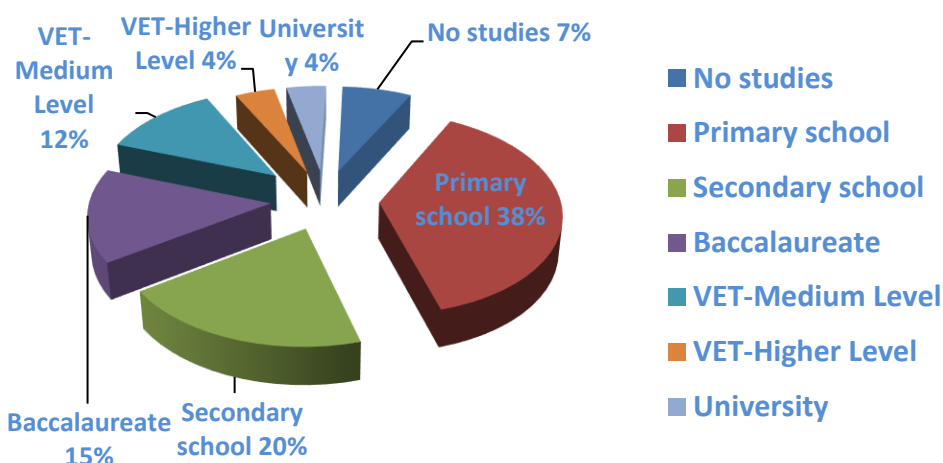
Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral.* Consejo General de Formación profesional. August 2013.

Starting from the lowest levels, it can be observed that applicants without any kind of studies (7%) and those who only completed their primary school (38%) together represent around 45% of the total number of applicants. It is a figure that indicates that this segment of applicants has a real interest in evaluating and accrediting their professional competences acquired by means of non-formal and informal learning.

Secondly, applicants who have completed secondary education (20%) and Baccalaureate (15%) account for 35% of the applicants.

Thirdly, 16% of the applicants had a vocational qualification (FP): At Medium Level (FPGM) in 12% of cases and at Higher Level (FPGS) in 4% of cases.

Finally, only 4% of the applicants possessed accredited university studies.

5. The PREAR calls in practice

Since the PREAR procedure is a structured process undertaken in three phases, it is observed through the evaluation and monitoring report that the results and the tools used to carry out the procedures were varied.

The Advice phase

According to the available data, the popular way of interacting with applicants in this phase was "face-to-face"" in 90% of cases, as follows:
- Initial face-to-face group meeting (41%)
- Individual interviews (46%)
- Review of documentation and remote support (10%)
- Final meeting in small group (3%)

The next table summarises the data obtained by each CA.AA in the advice phase:

Regions	Candidates convened	Assessors	Candidates convened /assessor	Candidates with positive report	Advising phase - hours / candidate	Cost € / Candidate
Andalusia	12.000	333	22	11.311	6	99
Aragon	3.566	217	10	3.498	4	185,50
Asturias	342	18	19	_	3	76,71
Balearics	934	139	7	808	4	75,42
Canary Islands	1.797	26	25	1.677	9	98,53
Cantabria	250	15	13	_	_	_
Castilla la Mancha	3.626	95	38	2.846	—	135,63
Castilla Leon	2.667	105	25	2.623	8	77
Catalonia	11.939	300	26	7.179	6	_
Ceuta	160	8	20	70	7	80
Estremadura	1.087	31	35	963	5	62,32
Galicia	3.054	204	15	3.054	4	109,83
The Rioja	414	27	15	410	8	127,80
Melilla	371	17	22	_	_	_
Murcia	450	30	18	400	8	167,55
Navarre	995	66	15	995	6	113,50
Basque Country	4.054	121	33	4.054	7	74
Valencia	730	59	13	730	_	118
Total	**48.436**	**1.888**	**_**	**40.548**	**_**	**_**
Average	**_**	**_**	**22**	**_**	**7**	**110**

 Source: Personal adaptación from the survey "*Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral*" .*Consejo General de Formación profesional, 08- 2013.*

Firstly, it is observed that a total of 48.436 applicants went through this phase and have been served by 1.888 advisors, in all Regions. The Applicant/Advisor ratio was therefore 22:1.

Secondly, 84% (40.548) of the applicants have received a positive report from the advisor and therefore could to go ahead to the second phase of the PREAR procedure.

Thirdly, the average time spent on each applicant during the advice phase is a very valuable data as it has a direct impact on the average cost per applicant. The average time dedication to each application was around 7 hours per applicant, during the first phase. The calculated average cost was estimated at € 110 per applicant.

For the future, there is an important margin to increase the efficiency of the procedures, by reducing the costs generated and the time spent. This could be achieved by using more distance/electronic means.

As for the tools used, the data collected indicate a widespread use and a high level of satisfaction of the following ones:
- The guide for the applicant.
- The evidence guide of the "units of competence".
- The adviser's guide.
- The self-assessment questionnaires.

The evaluation phase

In the evaluation phase, the following tools have been used to evaluate the professional competences of the applicants:
  - Structured professional interview.
  - Standardised tests through case study.
  - Simulations of professional activities based on the reference of the Professional Evaluation Situation, indicated in the evidence guide.
  - Methods of direct observation in the workplace.

As for the instruments of support in this phase, the following have been used:
  - The guides of evidences of the competence Units (GEC).
  - The evaluator's guide.

Data collected from the evaluation phase

Given the nature of the PREAR procedure according to which the advisor´s report is not considered to be binding, it is interesting to note that several applicants who have received a negative report by the advisor have decided to avail themselves of their right to continue in the process and move further to the second phase. In fact, there were 981 applicants who submitted to the evaluation phase. However, this range of applicants represented only 2,28 % of the total 42.940 applicants evaluated. It should be noted that 2.248 evaluators have participated in the evaluation phase. This represents an average of 1 evaluator for every 16 applicants evaluated. The average time spent and the average cost generated by each applicant were respectively 7,5 hours and 172 € per applicant. For a better appreciation of the disparity of data between the Regions, it is important to note that the time spent on each applicant depends to a large extent on the tests selected by the Evaluation Committee as well as on the nature of the "units of competence" and their respective levels.

From the point of view of the final results obtained by the applicants who participated in the evaluation phase, it is estimated that 91,5% of them have "demonstrated" their professional competence. It is worth noting that:
  - 82% of these applicants have demonstrated their professional competence in a complete "qualification".
  - 9.5% of these applicants have demonstrated their competence in one or more "units of competence", without completing all the professional qualification.

The accreditation phase

The last phase of the PREAR procedure consists of registering and accrediting the evaluated competences. For this purpose and in accordance with RD 1224/2009 in its article 18, the issuing of the accreditation of the "competence units" corresponds to the General State Administration and that "the competent administration transfers the results to a register, state, nominal and by accredited units of competence". According to this provision, and in relation to the period under review, it is noted that until the date of the INCUAL's evaluation and monitoring report, the registered professional competences were still being registered in the Regions.

It is observed, on the one hand, that the number of accredited applicants reached 35.087 for a complete qualification and 4.093 for one or some "units of competence". It should also be noted that 353 applicants from Ceuta and Melilla have accredited a complete qualification or one/some "unit (s) of competence". On the other hand, the average time needed by the Regions to register the accreditations issued was 81 days. The detail of the data shows that this period of registration has oscillated between 10 days and 12 months.

Accreditation and post-PREAR training

There is no doubt that the procedure for the accreditation of full competences or "units of competences" is an asset of great value for the applicants. However, it is not an end in itself. It opens a path to excellence through training or the "Certificates of Professionalism" available, or the vocational training system. Available data from some Regions show that of all accredited persons, 21.841 have requested complete "professional certificates" and 1.386 have applied for the validation of professional modules of professional qualifications.

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Overcoming language barriers   9

Competence Cards **help reveal migrants' skills**

Martin Noack and Kathrin Ehmann

Determining the skills of refugees and immigrants as part of educational and professional guidance is key to their integration into the workforce and society. However, language deficits often stand in the way of learners communicating their relevant experience. The development of *Competence Cards* by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany offers a flexible, low-threshold introduction to competence assessment. The cards are based on tried-and-tested competence terms. The visualisation of the individual competencies, together with the competence term translations in seven languages, is helpful in overcoming language barriers and establishing a common terminology for social, personal and methodological skills between the guide and client. In addition to the information for the clients (on the front), the cards also contain valuable information and instructions for the guide (on the back). They have the potential to contribute toward the development of a more comprehensive validation system in Germany and have triggered further projects, both analogue and digital, regarding multilingual picture-based skills assessment. In this chapter, the *Competence Cards* are described and analysed within the existing frameworks of competence- and skills-tests. The objective is to identify an innovative approach toward linking the competences of refugees and immigrants to the competences and skills needed on the German labour market.

1. Utilising potential – promoting integration

Andrea Nahles, Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in Germany, remarked, in light of the debate on the new integration law on June 3, 2016, that the best path to integration is the path toward work (Nahles, 2016). This should, however, not be just any work. A sustainable pathway to integration should provide a job that corresponds to the skills and qualifications of the individual migrant. But which skills do refugees and immigrants bring with them and how can we make their path to adequate work as efficient and fair as possible?

1.3 million people sought asylum in Europe in both 2015 and 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). A large portion of them in Germany. Considering the continuing critical situation in the countries of origin, we need to face the challenge of integrating the refugees

into our society. Teaching language skills is not enough to meet this challenge. The identification and formal recognition of refugees' existing skills are of utmost importance to facilitate their access to the labour market.

The European Commission acknowledged this and is currently setting up a repository for approaches for identifying skills. Their "New Skills Agenda", introduced in June 2016, also highlights the importance of the assessment, development and formal recognition of skills in both migrants and the so-called low skilled, who in fact lack formal qualifications. Consequently, the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals (European Commission, 2017) a beta version[25] of which was launched on June 20, 2017 addresses this need, by providing a documentation tool for qualifications, skills, and interests of migrants and refugees. This useful tool, however, does not provide a method for identifying the skills that are to be documented in the first place.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung and seven non-statutory welfare organisations, responsible for immigration counselling for adult immigrants in Germany have been collaborating on the topic of analysis of potential (Potenzialanalyse) for several years. We developed the Competence Cards together, and with the support of the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb). Before describing the instrument, we will introduce the context of educational consulting and skills assessment in Germany.

Figure 1: Competence Cards Box
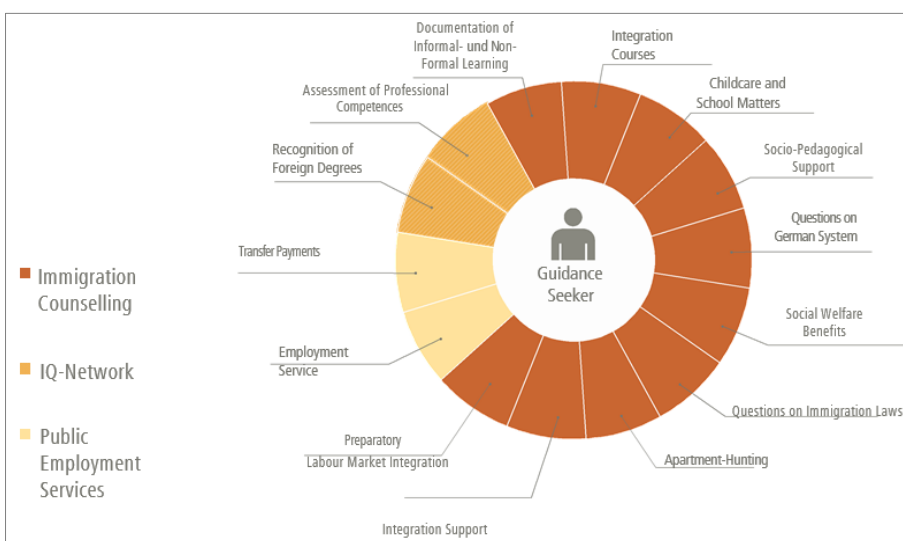

Photo: Bertelsmann Stiftung

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25   See: http://skpt-test.eu-west-1.elasticbeanstalk.com/#/ [Accessed: 23.06.2017].

2. The German migration guidance system

In Germany, three institutions share the responsibility of providing adult migrants with guidance and support. The first is the *immigration counselling* provided by the seven welfare organisations, like Caritas, Diakonie and German Red Cross. This system provides guidance on many issues, from accommodation to childcare, including the documentation of non-formal and informal learning. The second is the *IQ-Network*, which is in charge of recognising formal qualifications acquired abroad. The third is the *Public Employment Service*, which provides assistance in finding a job and executing oversees transfer payments (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of German guidance system for migrants

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung

For the development of the Competence Cards, we focused on the first system, because immigration counselling is most engaged in the identification of non-formal and informal learning and has the most holistic approach to the individual learner. However, representatives of both the IQ-Network and the Public Employment Service were part of the steering committee to allow for the best possible interoperability of the Competence Cards. The immigration counselling for adult migrants often uses a case management approach. Within the latter process, identification and documentation of skills and prior learning is an integral part of the first two stages (see Figure 3). It is here that the Competence Cards support the interaction between the guide and client.

Figure 3: Case management process of migration counselling

3. Identifying skills and analysing potential

Skills assessment approaches can generally be divided into subject-oriented (or formative) and requirements-oriented (or summative) approaches which play a role in various phases of the skills recognition process (Cedefop, 2015).

Figure 4: Existing methods for analysing potential
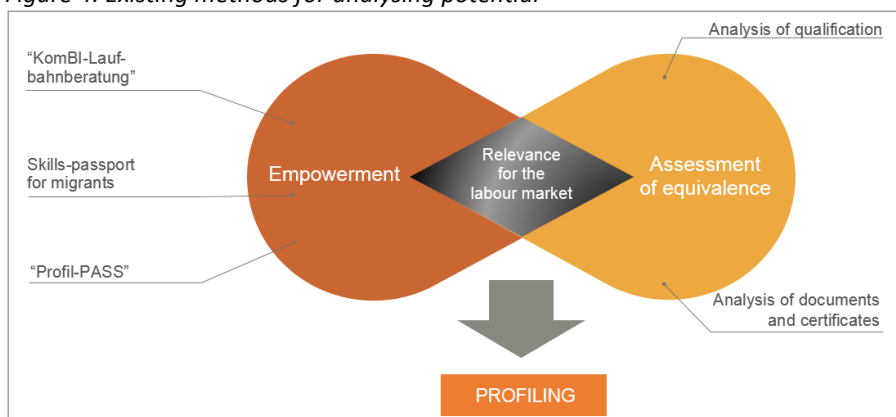
Subject-oriented approaches aim at making the participants aware of their own competencies, skills, and abilities and support them in structuring their further professional development (IQ expert work group for skills assessment, 2008). Focussing on the person's own educational and personal biography and viable personal development options is a core component of these approaches. The precise measurement of skills plays a lesser role than empowering the person seeking advice, ergo, increasing their autonomy and personal empowerment. Instead, consultation is more focused on identifying and documenting existing potential and reinforces a resource-oriented point of view instead of a weakness-oriented point of

view; one might call it a bottom-up approach. Examples in Germany include a variety of portfolios such as the skills passport for immigrants and the profile passport (ProfilPASS), which the consultant and client develop and fill out together. Most of the methods for the analysis of a client's potential currently in use in Germany are subject-oriented approaches (Kucher & Wacker, 2011).

Requirements-oriented approaches more closely resemble a top-down approach. They are based on standards, reference frameworks and requirements of the labour market or the formal educational system and examine which of the required skills pertain to the client at what level of proficiency, as well as which skills are still lacking. The focus is not solely on the documentation, but also on the evaluation of existing skills, often in order to determine their equivalency to defined standards. This includes tests, technical assessment procedures or assessment centre procedures like the analysis of qualification (Qualifikationsanalyse). The analysis of qualifications, as regulated by the Qualification Recognition Act (Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz, 2011), pertains only to immigrants who cannot document their formal educational degrees obtained abroad as a result of having to flee their country of origin. However, an adaptation of the method to informal learners without a migration background is currently being developed[26] with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In contrast to the subject-oriented approaches, such methods are used to determine both the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate. The focus is on the compatibility of the skills with the established professional qualifications (cf. Döring, Müller & Neumann, 2015 for a detailed comparison of the analysis of potential methods).

Sometimes, both approaches are combined. This is the case, for example, within the public employment agencies' profiling system, which analyses the existing skills' relevance for the labour market (see Figure 4). The profiling procedure consists of the analysis of strengths (professional history, qualifications, expertise, skills and personal strengths) and the analysis of potential (personal profile and context profile) of the person seeking advice. In many cases, an initial analysis of a client's potential is already conducted outside of the public employment agencies, for example, at immigration counselling offices. There, the analysis serves to prepare clients for subsequent consultations with guidance and placement agents at the employment agencies. Ideally, insights gained and results compiled during the analysis of potential at the immigration counselling offices should, therefore, be prepared in a way to foster smooth integration into these later consultations. A survey we conducted among 23 experts and practitioners revealed, however, that the majority of existing procedures for determining potential is currently not directly compatible with the profiling system of the public employment agencies. This results in inefficient processes, which can turn an initial sense of empowerment into

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26 See: www.validierungsverfahren.de/en/home/ (GFWH mbH, 2016) [Accessed: 23.06.2017].
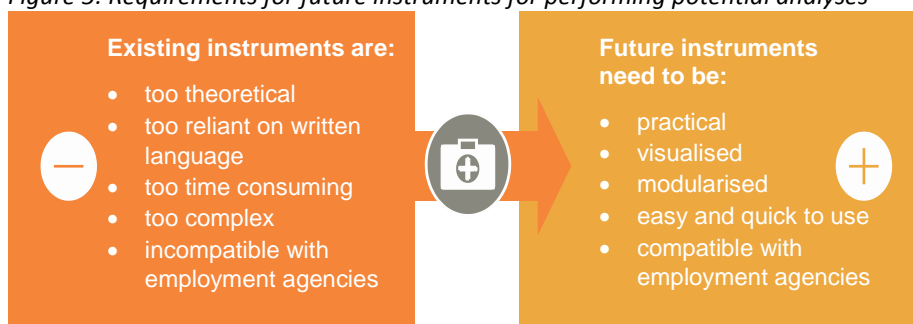
frustration. According to the counsellors, existing instruments had other disadvantages, too, resulting in very unsystematic use. This was the starting point for the development of the Competence Cards.

4. Requirements for practical instruments

Every consultation has its own purpose and every analysis of potential its individual objectives. Procedures, methods, and instruments for analysing potential have to be designed accordingly. The following attributes are important quality characteristics, according to the surveyed experts (see Figure 5):

- *Visualised and multilingual*: Unless a professional interpreter accompanies them, clients with rather limited German language skills can only truly profit from the analysis of potential when using multilingual instruments. In addition, there are clients with language difficulties or who have suffered trauma who open up best when using images rather than written words at the beginning of the counselling interaction.
- *Flexible and modular*: Most of the established procedures require several hours. In daily guidance practice, it is not usually possible to spend that much time analysing potential. Therefore, flexible instruments that can be used modularly are very important. With their help, consultants can decide on a needs-oriented basis how to perform a skills assessment and how much space to give it in the guidance process.
- *Transparent*: Another important factor is the transparency of the procedure. The execution and results must be easily understandable. Ideally, the concept of the procedure will be self-explanatory and therefore low-threshold. Using terminology already established in competence research is also recommended.

Figure 5: Requirements for future instruments for performing potential analyses

Existing instruments are:	Future instruments need to be:
• too theoretical • too reliant on written language • too time consuming • too complex • incompatible with employment agencies	• practical • visualised • modularised • easy and quick to use • compatible with employment agencies

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung

- *Valid*: Procedures that provide trustworthy results are required. Even if the validity of self-assessments is limited by nature, the procedures used should result in the documented qualifications and actual qualifications matching.
- *Documented*: The documentation of the skills determined during the analysis

of potential not only increases the immigrants' self-confidence, it also provides an orientation for labour market entry. In practice, the documentation of the analysis of potential is often neglected, especially due to time constraints. If documentation is compiled, it is often not passed on. Consequently, easy access documentation templates are required, to help overcome this obstacle.

- *Compatible*: As mentioned above, a high level of interoperability of the tool can bridge existing gaps between different institutions. Among others, common competence terminology is, therefore, key to the client's successful and empowering guidance journey.

5. The Competence Cards

In cooperation with the seven non-statutory welfare associations, we developed an instrument that would meet the aforementioned criteria. Over the course of one and a half years, we involved around 60 migration counsellors, labour market integration practitioners and skills assessment experts. Starting with a needs analysis, covering multiple focus group workshops and ending with a four-week test phase, after which the prototype was finalised (see Figure 6).

Target groups, contents, and methodology of the Competence Cards
The 46 Competence Cards offer a flexible, low-threshold introduction to the topic of skills assessment. They are particularly suitable for immigrants and refugees but can also be used for other target groups. They illustrate social, personal and some technical skills. The cards use simple language descriptions, a visualisation and translations in seven foreign languages for each skill. In combination with the eleven interest cards, they can also be used beyond the direct purpose of skills identification, for instance, for professional orientation, for writing applications and CVs or to generally empower the client. People with migration experience, who have suffered trauma or who generally have low self-confidence profit in particular from this low-threshold approach.

Duration of the application and costs of the Competence Cards
The duration of the application of the Competence Cards depends on the objectives of the session and the counsellor's experience and available time. A short analysis of individual competence areas can be performed in 15 minutes. A complete analysis of potential can generally take up to 1 to 1.5 hours. Virtually no costs are incurred by the counsellor or the client since a printable pdf-version of the Competence Cards in both German and English are provided free of charge by Bertelsmann Stiftung.[27]

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27 Printed version at-cost price (in German): http://www.bertelsmann-tiftung.de/competence-cards.

Figure 6: Front and back of the competence card
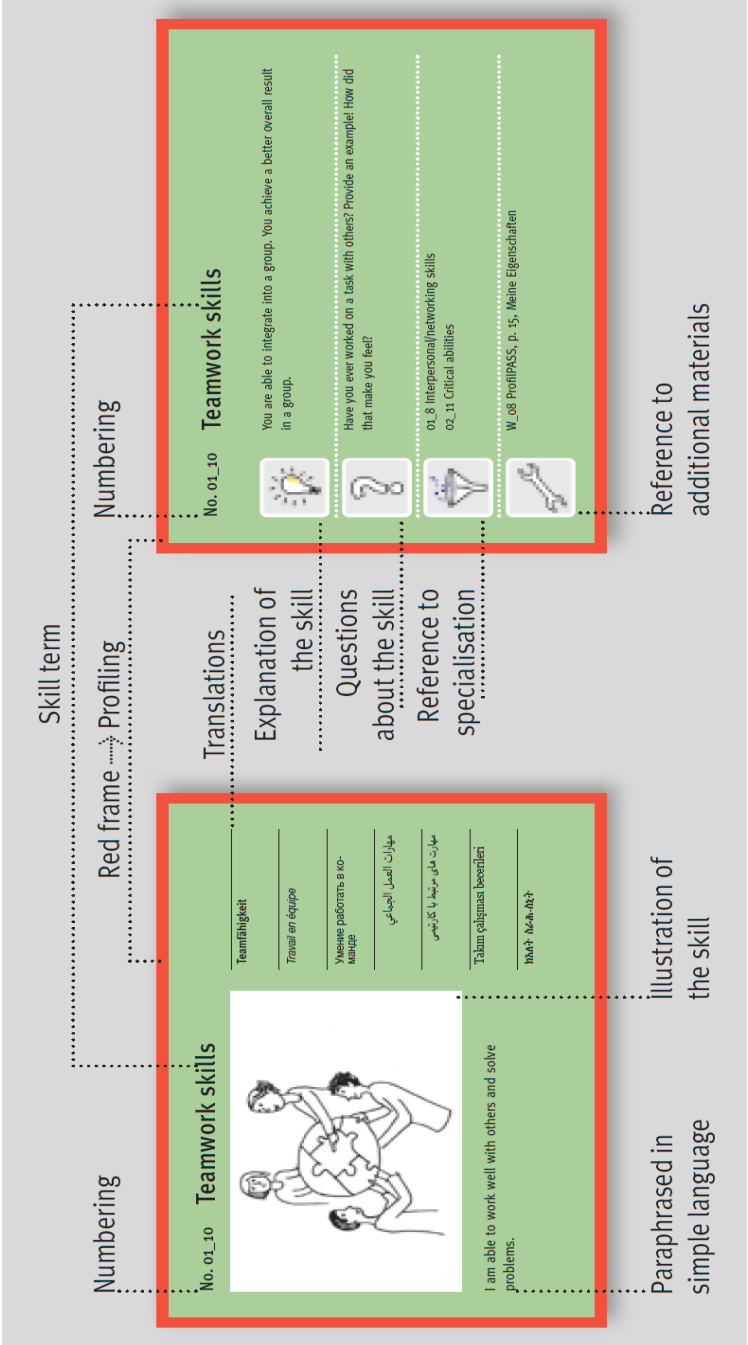
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung

Analysis and results of working with the Competence Cards
Throughout the course of the counselling session, client and guide identify existing skills. The counsellor evaluates the plausibility of the self-assessment using questions on the back of the cards. For example, he or she might encourage the client to share a particular event in his biography when that particular skill became evident. Furthermore, the guide can ask the client to estimate the level at which he or she possesses a particular skill, using the provided +, ++ and +++ card. At the end of the process, the skills (and their levels) are recorded in a documentation template which clients can take with them and submit to a potential employer or their employment agency representative, for instance.

Validity of the Competence Cards
The survey at the end of the test phase, involving about 60 practitioners and experts, showed that in the large majority of cases, clients correctly interpreted the visualisations and explanatory descriptions. It also revealed that the additional explanations, questions and references were very helpful during the skills identification process. An external evaluation based on a survey of 202 users and consecutive in-depth interviews confirmed the added value of the Competence Cards far beyond the initial target context of immigration counselling for adults. The majority of counsellors used the cards in every fourth session and 57 percent plan to use them more frequently in the future (Grebe, Schüren & Ekert, 2016). Feedback directly from the clients/learners has been difficult to obtain, however, largely due to the protected client-guide interaction. However, guides tell us that the most clients really enjoy working with the Competence Cards because it is a playful approach that helps tease out skills that even the clients themselves were not aware of prior. Some counsellors report that clients also tend to lose their reservations regarding German public institutions and open up to the guidance process. This is sometimes rewarded in much faster labour market integration, than anticipated (see Breukelchen, 2017 for a report on a day in the life of a guide).

Requirements for using the Competence Cards
A 10-minute explanatory video in German and English as well as the instruction offer a sufficient introduction for guides to start working with the cards. With increasing experience, it becomes easier to identify hidden skills and compare the self-assessment of the skills level with the requirements of the German labour market.

Compatibility of the Competence Cards with labour market integration
Representatives from the public employment services were involved in the development of the cards. This resulted in 20 of the 46 Competence Cards illustrating precisely the skills used in their profiling system. Red frames around those cards easily distinguish them from the other cards. The cards have been found to be very useful for drafting application letters and résumés since they help identify and clearly describe both the personal strengths of the clients and their central interests and hobbies.

Dissemination of the Competence Cards

More than 9,000 copies are currently in use throughout Germany, more than 10 times as many copies as the initially targeted 835 for all immigration counsellors for adults. The Competence Cards are increasingly used, in guidance contexts, which focus on job placement or professional orientation; namely, in youth migration counselling, in integration courses, at professional schools for handicapped persons, by adult education providers, voluntary initiatives helping refugees and even directly at the employment agencies. The cards have also been available as a pdf, in English, since May 2016. Since then, the Competence Cards have also been licensed under the CCBYSA 4.0 open license, making it possible for anyone who is interested in translating or adapting the cards to do so, as long as the adaption is shared under the same license. As a result, a Bosnian and an Italian version already exist, and a group setting adaptation has been developed in Slovakian, German and Czech. Interest has been shown also for translations into Danish, Norwegian and Dutch.

Use of the Competence Cards in practice

Job Coach Ramona López Salinas is a trained orthopaedic shoemaker. She has a master's degree in English studies, psychology and education and is a trained mediator and systemic coach. At the AWO Landesverband Schleswig-Holstein e. V., she helps refugees and other immigrants find ways to enter the German labour market. During the test phase, she got to know and appreciate the Competence Cards as a valuable instrument for examining potential in immigration guidance:

The clients are confronted with a picture; this is how they know the subject is 'family' or 'team'. It is easier to make things understandable using images first, and then language. Thus, the clients really understand what skill we are talking about and whether or not they have it. (I like to go through all of the cards with my clients and ask whether this card pertains to them. If yes, they consider whether they can do it well. In this case, I augment the card. There are three augmentation cards, + ++ +++ indicating whether they can do it well, very well, or if it is their passion, for instance, 'communication skills'.) We simply lay the cards to which clients don't relate aside and they aren't recorded. This is, in fact, an instrument that records the strengths, so we have a positive list and not a negative list of things the client can't do. For me, there are two ways to use the cards. First, specifically: if it's about specific professions or professional desires, for instance. Then, I look for specific cards in advance and determine, whether desire and reality correspond to each other. But I also like to go through all the cards with the clients during the first sessions; I get to know them well or learn what they can do and tease out hidden skills. The clients clearly recognise what they can already do and what they have already learned and that it can be valuable here too. Since we work very closely with the job centres [public employment services at the communal level] and write a report for them at the end, they can directly record and submit the skills we have recorded in their documentation which helps significantly with further counselling.

The use of Competence Cards can help refugees and immigrants take the first step toward having their skills recognised and thus integrate into the German labour market, but it cannot stop there. In order for the skills to be fully valued on the strongly formalised German labour market, they have to be measured against an applicable standard and certified in a manner that companies and individuals can understand and believe. Recent research comparing the German validation system to those of other countries has shown that, despite the European Council's 2012 recommendation to formally establish a comprehensive system of validation of non-formal and informal learning until 2018, the necessary framework conditions have yet to be established in Germany (Gaylor, Schöpf & Severing, 2015; Gaylor, Schöpf, Severing & Reglin, 2015). A survey of more than 300 VET experts in Germany confirmed this analysis and calls for action in five areas (Velten & Herdin, 2016):

1. Establishment of accessible and valid procedures and instruments for competence assessment
2. Distribution of responsibilities among VET and labour-market stakeholders
3. Provision of financial resources, particularly for disadvantaged learners
4. Organisation of easily accessible and highly professional support structures
5. Legal regulation of the access, process and outcome of the validation

Potential role in a national system of skills recognition

The Competence Cards are a contribution toward the development of innovative methods and can support the integration of existing guidance structures into a comprehensive support system. Such a system should introduce the client to the validation procedure and provide continuous support, for example, from educational guides throughout the validation process (Käpplinger, 2015). It should also be linked to a continuing education system which is able to fill the skills gaps that have been identified. This is another field in which Germany has some homework to do. Particular regarding the social inequalities and path dependencies of its educational system that are not mitigated but exacerbated throughout the course of an individual's life. Again, immigrants, refugees and the "low-skilled", but also atypical workers, are particularly disadvantaged with respect to their participation in continuing education in Germany (e.g. Frick, Noack, Blinn, 2013). One way to address this would be to make sure that the costs of participating in continuing education do not pose an insurmountable obstacle for the individual learner. Here the German public sector needs to strengthen its commitment, especially considering the long-term decrease in public investments (-41 % between 1995 and 2012) in continuing education and training (Noack, Frick, Hesse, Walter & Münk, 2015).

6. New developments

Both the success of the Competence Cards as well as the substantial reform deficits have motivated us at Bertelsmann Stiftung to continue working on supporting and

promoting the development of a German VPL system that specifically benefits migrants, people with low levels of formal qualification and other disadvantages learners. In particular, we are engaged in the development of further innovative instruments for the identification and self-assessment as well as objective assessment of vocational competences. In the following, we will briefly introduce three ongoing projects: the Profession Cards, a picture based vocational skills self-assessment web site and digital video and picture-based vocational skills tests.

Profession Cards for occupational counselling

After competences have been identified and documented with the Competence Cards, clients' positive lists of transversal skills creates a foundation for their further orientation towards internships, employment and/or vocational education and training. This is precisely what the Competence Cards are used for most frequently, as a survey of 549 users at the beginning of this year revealed (Täntzler, 2017). However, to better serve this purpose, an additional instrument was requested that would allow the identification of vocational skills. In fact, 95 percent of the respondents would appreciate a complementary instrument – Profession Cards – for identifying vocational skills.

To address this demand, we are currently developing such a tool again, in cooperation with the f-bb. Circa 50 cards will provide an overview of all the occupational fields in the German VET system. The core of the new card set is the more than 200 photographs, displaying people who exercise typical actions in recognised trades on the front of the cards. Operational fields like "Construction", "Health", or "Business" are translated into eight frequently-spoken languages of current immigrants to Germany, from English to Russian and even Tigrinya. The backsides of the Profession Cards provide useful information for the counsellor, for example, on the different sub-areas of activity and on existing professional qualifications in the respective field. In addition, the set will contain a sample of 30 cards on individual professions with information on typical action, workplaces and further training possibilities and the 10 most relevant transversal skills from the Competence Cards set. This makes it easy to combine both instruments and provide clearer perspectives for the next professional steps of a client. Additional support cards offer a quick overview of diverse practical application scenarios for the Profession Cards in the guidance context. Others display symbols that help identify the client's competence level, preferences or temporal scope of her or his professional experience within singular occupational fields or professions.

However, even a card with four different pictures for one profession has limits concerning the accuracy of skills identification. Which typical professional actions of a given profession in Germany can a client coming from another country already execute? How far does his or her experience reach? For a detailed analysis, one would need 20-40, rather than just four pictures per profession, which is clearly outside of the scope of an analogue tool. This is where our second project, the picture based vocational skills self-assessment web site, comes into play.

Multilingual web site for self-assessment of vocational skills (www.meine-berufserfahrung.de)

The basis for this tool are competence models that define 5-8 occupational fields of application for 30 professions, for example, electronics engineer. Professional experts developed these occupational fields and underpinned them with 3-8 typical occupational actions each. Then, they were reviewed in practical workshops with representatives from the regulative bodies (e.g. chambers of trade, chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of agriculture), masters, trainers and other occupational practitioners, as well as representatives from respective professional associations. Scientists from renowned research institutes provided support and reviewed the finalisation of the competence models. We are currently selecting photos for each of those 20-40 occupational actions in each of the 30 professions. The core of the website is the simple question: "How often have you done this?" The learner then can choose from four options for each picture.

After no more than 10 minutes of reviewing his or her own professional experience, the result of the self-assessment will be displayed and can be downloaded, printed or e-mailed. The client can switch between six website language options at any time: German, English, Russian, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish. The website *www.meine-berufserfahrung.de* presents the first ten professions in October 2017 and includes all 30 professions at the end of 2017. Again, the output of this instrument will be a positive list of the respondent's experiences in the occupational fields of application constituting a profession. It can be a useful basis for the counsellor and the client for decisions about further strategies regarding employment, training or even formal recognition. However, while the result of this self-assessment will cast some light on the learner's skills-set, in order to convince employers or even formal education institutions to recognise the prior learning, an objective external assessment is needed. This is where the third and last of our current projects on innovative skills assessments comes in.

Vocational skills tests: Multilingual, digital, video and picture-based

As the German labour market currently requests some kind of recognised proof of a learner's skills, in order to offer valuable occupational opportunities, the journey cannot end here. Our solution is to digitally measure informally and non-formally acquired skills and match them to job requirements. To integrate so-called low-skilled persons, migrants and refugees into the labour market, the Federal Employment Agency is planning to better identify occupationally usable, informally or non-formally acquired skills and use them to place people in apprenticeships or jobs. In cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the f-bb, the Federal Employment Agency has therefore started the "Identifying occupational skills" project to develop objective skills tests. The skills tests shall help decide in which typical occupational fields of a given profession a learner's existing experiences can be used on the labour market. The skills tests take approximately four hours, are performed on computers and are proctored by a trained test administrator, for example, from the Occupational Psychological Service at labour agencies and job

centres. The tests will be offered in German and the most important native languages of refugees and migrants: Arabic and Farsi, Russian, Turkish and English. This way, skills are identified right away, as soon as a positive long-term perspective for staying in Germany has been established. The job search can then begin earlier and language courses can already be attended parallel to working.

During the tests, the participants receive approximately 20 exercises for each of the 5-8 occupational fields of application for the chosen profession. The exercises follow a standardised model: the participants see videos and images of typical occupational situations and are then asked technical questions. They are supposed to, for instance, put the work steps in the right order, identify errors in the illustrated situations, or answer technical questions about the work equipment or occupational safety. The test results document how well they do in the respective field of the occupation so it becomes clear in which areas a participant possesses actual skills. The skills tests thereby help placement personnel at labour agencies/job centres design a more specific placement strategy. The test results indicate whether and, if applicable, in which occupational fields an early integration into the labour market can be aimed for, either directly or after further qualification. The skills tests do not replace formal occupational qualifications and are not suitable as proof of comprehensive vocational action competence in an occupation that requires a formal degree, either. As tests of occupational action knowledge, they do not supplant the assessment of practical skills. Based on the test results, however, participants can better understand for which typical occupational fields of application in Germany they possess the relevant skills and where they might need some upskilling.

The skills tests supplement self-assessments with an initial third-party assessment and thus make searching for a job and custom-fit placement in a qualification programme, trial position, internships or jobs easier. In fact, the test results provide potential employers with an initial assessment of the applicant's skills and information about potential fields of application at the company. While this is not proof of occupational qualification, based on the test results, the occupational skills can be reviewed in practice and, if necessary, expanded by means of targeted training. The skills tests will be developed for 30 professions. In selecting those 30 professions, we took both the previous experience of the target groups and the demand on the German labour market into account, among other factors. The first tests will be rolled out at the end of 2017 to all 160 public employment agencies in Germany equipped with an Occupational Psychological Service. The tests will be free of charge for the participants.

7. Final remarks

Instruments like the Competence Cards or the digital competence tests put the

learner at the core of a validation system and can help empower learners while simultaneously increasing the transparency of skills demands and supply on the labour market. They can even contribute toward reducing existing social and educational inequalities and help secure the increasing number of specialists required in our societies as a result of digitalisation and demographic changes. However, in order for them to realise this potential, we need to embed them in a comprehensive system of validation of non-formal and informal learning in which singular elements build on each other synergistically and are mutually recognised by institutions involved in education and training as well as by social partners. And here, the work has just begun.

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Guidance in validation in the Nordic region

10

Challenges and recommendations

Arnheiður Gígja Guðmundsdóttir and Fjóla María Lárusdóttir

The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) conducted a study on the status of guidance in validation in the Nordic region in the period of April 2014 to August 2015. The results of the study are presented in a report titled '*Guidance in validation within the Nordic region – Challenges and recommendations'* which can be found on the NVL website (http://nvl.org/Content/Guidance-in-validation-within-the-Nordic-region). The Education and Training Service Centre in Iceland coordinated the study and report writing in cooperation with the Guidance and Validation networks operating within NVL. A working group[28], including representatives from both networks, was activated in order to provide information on how guidance in the process of validation of prior learning (VPL) is carried out within the Nordic region. Representatives from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Åland, Faroe Islands and Greenland provided information for the study. The purpose of this study was to bring forth a common ground for discussing and developing guidance in validation which can hopefully be a small step towards seeking opportunities for improving the quality of guidance in Nordic validation systems.

The results of the study are based on information gathered from all areas of the Nordic region through: a) a mapping grid, where the status in each country was explored; b) summaries on main findings from each country; c) cases for clarifying guidance in the VPL process; d) SWOT analysis which was based on findings from a)-c). Based on the results from the SWOT analyses challenges and recommendations were identified with a focus on continuing development of guidance linked to validation measures. According to the results of the study it is quite evident that there are considerable differences in the scope of guidance provided in validation within the Nordic region. The main challenges evolve around the issue that the role of guidance in the validation process has not been clearly identified in addition to the need of increasing knowledge of the validation concept among guidance personnel and other related professionals. Policy makers need to develop clear

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28   Raimo Vuorinen provided feedback and support.

standards which increase transparency and coordinated cooperation in the process to the benefit of service users.

1. Recommendations for further developing guidance in validation

The following recommendations were identified by the working group for further development of guidance in validation in the Nordic region**:**
1. The Nordic countries should develop a set of common principles or guidelines for guidance in validation related to the different phases in the process, aiming at increasing the quality of guidance services and the VPL process.
2. The Nordic countries should examine whether and how Career Management Skills (CMS) can be used as a tool to increase the efficiency and transparency of career guidance in general and specifically linked to VPL practices. National or common Nordic guidelines on CMS/Career Competences could be based on the Nordic approach (see the report 'A Nordic perspective on career competences and guidance', 2014).
3. More focus needs to be on how guidance activities within VPL systems can be financed.
4. Education and training of those who are to deliver guidance in VPL processes needs to be established.
5. VPL should be a part of the initial education of professionals in education and counselling/guidance to enhance increased use of VPL.
6. National guidelines on guidance services and policy development in the area of guidance in general can support the identification of ways to organize and coordinate guidance towards increased coherency and impartiality in practices. The individual should always be in the centre.
7. The knowledge on VPL needs to be strengthened in society at all levels. Organizations conducting VPL could play a part in disseminating their experiences to a more extent to various stakeholders.

2. Method

In order to get an overview of current guidance practices in validation, a mapping instrument in the form of a grid was developed. The grid consisted of seven focus areas, identified by the working group, divided into three categories (Policy level, Organizational level and Practical level; see table 1).
For area 6 in the table, competence descriptions from the Canadian Blueprint for Life/Work Design (see: http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/blueprint.html) were used. Overview summaries, based on the information gathered through the mapping grid, were produced by each country. Cases were gathered for obtaining a better insight into the guidance process itself.
Each country/area representative also conducted a SWOT analysis, based on the information gathered through the grid and the national summaries, to bring forth a

national view of main challenges and identify possible solutions. Those are presented as common Nordic challenges and recommendations and are the main product of the study.

Table 1: Overview of focus areas of information gathered in the study

Policy level (macro)
1. Laws and regulations, for guidance in validation
2. Policies and financing, for guidance in validation
Organisational level (meso)
3. Responsibility for delivering guidance in the validation process (what institution/organization/specialists?)
4. Qualifications of guidance personnel and need for expertise in each phase
5. Feedback for quality and evidence base regarding guidance delivery in validation processes
Practical level (micro)
6. The purpose of guidance in different phases of validation
7. Methodology used in the different phases of guidance in validation

3. Aims of validation and lifelong guidance

The focus on Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) has been growing within Europe and the Nordic region over the last two decades. That also applies to lifelong guidance which has been the focus of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). The main aims of the two areas are linked in many ways as can be seen in various EU papers (e.g., Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems, Cedefop 2005; EU council resolution, 2008; ELGPN documents), namely to play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2012).

The EU Council Resolution - Better Integration of Lifelong Guidance into Lifelong Learning Strategies states the following (Council of the European Union, 2008):

> *The Member States should consider enabling people to benefit from support in obtaining validation and recognition on the labour market of their formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in order to safeguard their employment and maintain their employability, in particular during the second part of their careers.*

In table 2, the core aims presented in the aforementioned European papers on Lifelong guidance and VPL are mapped together. This simple mapping reveals that there is a close connection between the aims of the two policy areas which supports an interrelatedness in actions taken towards these goals.

Table 2: Comparison of aims of lifelong guidance and validation of prior learning

Aims of LLG	Aims of VPL
Citizens recognize their own skills, competences and interests (1).	Identification, recognition and possibly certification of knowledge, skills and competences of citizens (2).
Citizens make appropriate decisions regarding their learning and career (3).	The citizen should be able to make the best use of each phase of VPL in an appropriate manner (Identification, Documentation, Assessment and Certification), whether it is further learning or employment (4).
Citizens manage their individual paths in terms of learning, work and other activities (5).	The citizen is provided with individual paths according to the validation results that may lead to further learning or employment (6).
Working life receives motivated, employable and flexible employees with tools to develop themselves (7).	The citizen's existing competences are made visible in the validation process, which promotes motivation for further learning, employability and flexibility in working life (8).
Supports local, regional and national fiscal policy by developing more flexible and adaptable workforce (9).	The purpose of validation is to prevent redundant learning, shorten study times, provide faster access to the labour market (10).
Helps society to support the development of more socially aware, democratic citizens, who adhere to sustainable development (11).	VPL makes the citizen's knowledge, skills and competences visible, thus empowering and activating the individual, and enhancing democratization and social awareness (12).

Sources: see references

4. Definitions and interconnectedness of validation and guidance

Validation

In the Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012), the following definitions linked to VPL can be found:

- *Validation of learning outcomes*: Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed

against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.

- *Validation*: A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:
  1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue on experiences of an individual;
  2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences;
  3. A formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and
  4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.

Through the identified phases, the Council recommendation opens up a broader definition of VPL as a process. It is not focused solely on assessment and not only tied to the formal system. The documentation of competences and development of career competences could also be a part of the VPL process through the support of lifelong guidance activities.

Guidance

There have been discussions within the NVL guidance and validation networks which have highlighted the complexity of definitions related to the concept of guidance versus career guidance. There are cultural differences in the understanding of the two terms, whereas in some countries/areas the term career guidance is connected directly to the world of work and progressing in ones work related career specifically. In a Nordic report on career competences and guidance, this issue is raised and pointed out that a broader understanding of the word 'career' is becoming increasingly common in the guidance research and practice in the Nordic region and the international community, moving from the narrow perspective of the term to a more holistic view of 'career' as the individual´s path through life with all the twists and turns this might entail (Thomsen, 2014).

The definitions of the two concepts set forth in the European context do not seem to distinguish clearly between them. In the glossary on the ELGPN website (http://www.elgpn.eu/glossary) the definitions are the following:

- *Guidance***:** Help for individuals to make choices about education, training and employment. (ELGPN).
- *Career guidance and lifelong guidance***:** A range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used. (ELGPN).

The first definition is broad and focused on making choices. In many cases the guidance delivered may be in the form of information and delivered by various

professionals. From that perspective, it may not cover all the outcomes of guidance which could possibly take place in VPL processes, hence also the aims of VPL in Table 2. The definition of career guidance and lifelong guidance is identical and includes a large coverage of possible outcomes of guidance through VPL.

The Network for innovation in career guidance and counselling in Europe (NICE, 2014) delivers a perspective on the concept of guidance through describing the professional role of career services and career counselling as supportive measures to assist people in making sense of the situations they are experiencing in a reflective manner in order to open up new possibilities and develop their role in society. NICE further describes *three types of career professionals; career advisors, career guidance counsellors and career experts.* The level of competences regarding career guidance deliverance progresses from advisor to expert, whereas career advisors can be teachers, placement managers, psychologists, social workers or public administrators. Career guidance counsellors are dedicated to the subject as defined; practicing all of the professional roles described above. Career experts work towards the advancement of career guidance and counselling in different ways. Some of them engage primarily in research, academic training and developmental activities. In this Nordic study where the focus is on guidance in VPL, the full concept of Career guidance and lifelong guidance will not always be relevant. That is why the word 'guidance' is used, as an compromise between the definition of guidance and the definition of Career guidance and lifelong guidance.

5. The phases of validation and the role of guidance in the Nordic region

In the mapping procedure for this study the 4 important phases of validation presented in the Council Recommendation (2012) were used as a baseline, but with adjustments made to cover the Nordic view on how guidance can be used as an entry and closing point of the VPL process. It is to be noted that the notion and practices of guidance in general have a long history within the Nordic region, but the organization of its deliverance can be extremely variable based on areas, sectors and institutions. Based on best practices identified, the category INFORMATION was added covering the role of guidance personnel to introduce and inform individuals about validation possibilities and assist them in making an informed decision about participation or other options of competence development. FOLLOW-UP is also added as a part of the phase of certification, where guidance is provided towards the next steps of competence development.
This presentation of phases is in line with the European guidelines (2015) where it is pointed out that the VPL process includes an information phase, where the candidates are informed about the process and benefits of participation, and time should also be allotted to explore possibilities after VPL, which can be addressed as a follow-up (guidance) based on the process results. See table 3 below.

Table 3: Phases of validation used in this study.

Council recommendation 2012	Nordic working group on guidance in validation
	INFORMATION and introduction of validation to individuals – rights of the individual – spreading information on VPL through guidance deliverance
IDENTIFICATION of an individuals learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
DOCUMENTATION of an individuals learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
ASSESSMENT of an individuals learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of qualifications, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate	FOLLOW-UP based on the results – guidance towards continuing competence development and/or career perspectives

Based on the Council recommendation 2012

In the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) it is also brought forth that the individual should, during the VPL process, have access to *impartial counselling and guidance at the right times, focused on individual needs.* In the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012) it is recommended that '*the validation of non-formal learning is supported by appropriate guidance and counselling and is readily accessible* '. The thematic report on guidance and counselling, based on the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2014, p.1), reports that:

> The importance of ensuring that the provision of support and counselling is designed to meet the specific needs of different groups is significant, particularly in terms of devising a process of validation that is equal, and inclusive in its approach to supporting all groups to progress towards employment and/or learning.

It has also been pointed out in the European guidelines (Cedefop, 2009) that different professional skills sets are needed for guidance that evolves around the actual assessment versus the more general process. The difference between the roles of the assessor and guidance personnel in the VPL process has also been emphasized in various papers, and is in many cases kept separate. Guidance in the assessment phase alone, does not guarantee that the individual is receiving the more specialized guidance addressing his/her personal situation, needs in the process, and use of results. That type of guidance can be labelled as educational and vocational guidance or career guidance.

It is evident in the material gathered in this study that it varies considerably how guidance in VPL is conceived and executed within the Nordic region. In some

countries/areas guidelines on guidance are not used on a practical level or have not been developed. In other countries guidelines exist and are used in a specific field/with a specific target group. This may also vary within different sectors.

The SWOT analyses have revealed that there is a lack of coherent practices regarding guidance in validation within the Nordic countries/areas. A common understanding of the concept of guidance situated in a VPL process is therefore fundamental: *What does the concept of guidance linked to the VPL process entail?* This is also stated in the final synthesis report of the European Inventory (2014).

6. Findings and perspectives related to the content of guidance in the validation process

The information gathered through the mapping grid from each country/area revealed that there is quite a difference in how guidance in validation is approached on a policy-, organisational- and practical level. Therefore, it was decided each country/area would make a short summary based on their results from the mapping grid. The SWOT analyses conducted by each country/area were based on the mapping grid and summaries in order to focus on main challenges and possible solutions. Those results are the main product of the study.

The detected variability in guidance connected to VPL within the Nordic region brings focus to the importance of discussion in more depth the actual practices and organisation. For example, in Denmark the practice of validation in institutions and by other stakeholders can be highly diverse in the way the practices are integrated at an organizational level and regarding developments of procedures and methods. The guidance delivered may be detached from the process itself or evolve around the actual assessment and provide little or no career guidance. There has been an ongoing discussion about the need to establish independent guidance bodies to ensure career guidance for individuals in a lifelong learning perspective, but no decisions have been made so far. In the example of Iceland, VPL practices are focused on the target group of those who have not completed Upper Secondary school level. They are reached through Lifelong learning centres, based on defined national practices of VPL processes and guidance deliverance, which is embedded in the VPL process and publically financed.

In the mapping grid for this study a question was raised on a practical level regarding the purpose of guidance in the five phases of validation in the Nordic region. The answers from the Nordic representatives reveal that for each of the five phases certain aims/purpose is identified for guidance activities delivered. In the following table examples of such aims, which were most common, are presented. The examples may present good practices of guidance (in some cases presented as guidelines) in the validation process and as mentioned earlier, actual guidance deliverance may vary considerably between countries, areas, fields and institutions.

Table 4: Examples of identified aims of guidance in the 5 phases

Phases of Validation	Examples of aims/purpose of guidance identified in each phase
INFORMATION and introduction to validation	- Providing understanding of the process, benefits and obligations - Reviewing competences and experience of the individual – Reviewing further/connected learning opportunities
IDENTIFICATION of competences	– Informing about qualification standards – Informing about evidence needed on existing competences – Reviewing competences and experience of the individual – Introducing documentation tools – Informing about available competence development
DOCUMENTATION of competences	– Guiding, assisting and motivating the individual through the documentation phase – Initiating and supervising portfolio work individually or in groups (formative approach) – Providing support in the process of self-assessment against qualification criteria (summative approach) – Guidance and advice on individual planning – Guidance on how to present/demonstrate one's competences and prepare for assessment
ASSESSMENT of competences	– Assisting the individual in understanding qualification criteria and assessment procedure – Guidance and support on how to present/demonstrate one's competences – Promoting fair results – Advising on further learning
CERTIFICATION of the results and FOLLOW-UP based on the results	– Reviewing results of the VPL – Informing and guiding the individual towards continuing learning/career development (school, job, training) – Guidance on decision making

7. Guidance in validation and Career Management Skills (CMS)/ Career Competences

It was discussed in the working group that it would be interesting to explore the possible learning outcomes which might derive from guidance in the validation process in this study. An attempt was made in that direction through reviewing the Career Management Skills (CMS) possibly addressed through guidance in each

phase of validation. The ELGPN glossary defines Career Management Skills (CMS) as:

> *A range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals (and groups) to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions*.

For mapping purposes, Career Management Skills from the Blueprint for work/life design were used.[29] In career guidance the focus is on assisting the individual in identifying his/her competences, interests and strengths in order to make informed decisions regarding career/life issues. The learning derived from activities linked to that assistance has, in countries such as U.S.A., Canada and Australia, been presented as Career Management Skills (CMS). In CMS those learning outcomes are described which are viewed as important competences for being able to manage and develop one's career. In other words, building career competences for career development. Thomsen (2014) suggests that it would fit better into the Nordic culture to use the term 'career competences' instead of Career Management Skills, due to differences of cultural understanding of the concept. Thomsen also suggests that the overall concept is in its core linked to the notion of career learning. Career learning focuses on the career competence building of the individual, while career education focuses on the role of the guidance personnel supporting career learning.

The Network for innovation in career guidance and counselling in Europe (NICE, 2014) defines career education as 'the professional role of career services and career professionals to support people in developing the career management competences, i.e. the competences, which they need for career-related learning and development. Career management competences include the ability to become aware of own resources and needs, understanding the functioning of labour markets, vocational and educational systems, the mature use of career information systems, developing career plans, making career decisions, adapting to change pro-actively, self-presentation skills etc.' (p.19). A definition from the Canadian Blueprint for Work/life design provides an individual perspective:

> *Career development is about growing through life and work; about learning, experiencing, living, working and changing; about creating and discovering pathways through one's life and work. When intentional, career development is about actively creating the life one wants to live and the work one wants to do. (*http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/blueprint.htm*)*

Validation of Prior Learning can be seen as a part of an individual's career competence development based on the aims set for the concept e.g. in EU policy papers. The mapping grid used in this study reveals that guidance throughout the

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29 http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/blueprint.html

VPL process in many cases addresses, to some extent, the three main areas of CMS which are identified in the Blueprint for life/work design: personal management, learning and work exploration and life/work building. Looking closer, the competencies under the main areas most often mentioned in this study are the following:

− Participate in lifelong learning supportive of work/life goals
− Build and maintain a positive self-image
− Change and grow throughout life
− Locate and effectively use life/work information
− Understand, engage in and manage own life/work building process.

Using the Blueprint matrix in this study was a simple attempt to open up a discussion on how to identify career competences which can possibly be developed through guidance in VPL and support the defined aims of VPL (see Table 2). The matrix has however not been adjusted to the Nordic context. That may be an interesting subject to develop further in order to support quality and outcomes for individuals taking part in VPL.

8. Main challenges and recommendations

Based on the findings from the mapping and the SWOT-analyses, the working group identified the following main challenges linked to guidance activities in validation processes within the Nordic regions:

1. *A need for a clearer and a more homogeneous definition of guidance activities in the VPL process supported by national guidelines*

There is a need for defining more specifically the aims and content of guidance activities related to VPL processes. That can have a great impact on whether participants in VPL receive the guidance needed for fair and reliable processes and results. The aims of VPL can not be fully reached without sufficient career guidance/lifelong guidance. Definitions need to be developed both at policy and organizational levels, and presented in a way that gives space for quality services being delivered to people with various needs. In addition, there would be a need for monitoring actual practices for ensuring quality in the services provided and encouraging further developments in the field.

The SWOT-analyses revealed that:

− There is a need for defining the aims and content of guidance activities related to VPL processes and producing guidelines on a national level with a focus on roles and responsibilities of the guidance personnel. The purpose would be to enhance common understanding of guidance activities to be undertaken by practitioners and through that increase coherency of guidance services delivered in the VPL process.

- There is a need for national guidelines on the specific Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career Competences which can be developed through participation in VPL processes. That would increase the transparency of services to be delivered and highlight the competences needed among guidance personnel.
- There is a need to increase access to guidance in general (legal rights) to support VPL practices.

Recommendation is that the Nordic region should develop a set of common principles or guidelines for guidance in validation related to the different phases in the process, aiming at increasing the quality of guidance services and the VPL process. The Nordic region should examine whether and how Career Management Skills (CMS) can be used as a tool to increase the efficiency and transparency of career guidance in general and specifically linked to VPL practices. National guidelines on CMS/Career Competences could be based on the Nordic approach (see the report 'A Nordic perspective on career competences and guidance ', 2014).

2. *A need for financing guidance services linked to VPL*

How specific guidance activities are financed linked to the validation process varies within the Nordic region. It can depend on the legal framework in place, and whether guidance is a specific part of the process. In addition, it can be linked to how far the development of guidance in validation has come in the country/area. On municipality level this may vary in regard to how guidance and validation are organized in general.

The SWOT-analyses revealed that:
- There is a need for allocating financing specifically linked to validation activities.
- There is a need for developing additional financing for the VPL-system. Lack of financing effects access to VPL and career development for many citizens.

Recommended is more focus on how guidance activities within VPL-systems can be financed.

3. *Training of VPL staff/ Specific knowledge of guidance personnel - efficiency and quality issues*

There is a need for strengthening the education and training of the professionals providing guidance within VPL practices. Defining the competences needed for the guidance personnel is crucial for identifying what type of competences VPL guidance practitioners need to possess. In many cases there is a need for giving VPL more value in the initial training of professionals in the field of adult education and for developing specific training for validation staff.

The SWOT-analyses revealed that:
- There is a need for specialized training for VPL guidance personnel.

- In some countries/areas there is a need for more professionals in the field of career guidance. That may also apply to rural areas within a country.
- Competences related to the learning component of guidance (career education) need to be enhanced among guidance practitioners. Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career competences can support this development. National guidelines do not exist within the Nordic region.
- The knowledge on VPL and related guidance processes need to be provided in the initial training of adult education practitioners (teachers and counsellors).
- There is a need for developing coherent practices in guidance methodology linked to VPL practices.
- VPL guidance activities provided to immigrants need attention focus on development (formative).

Recommended is establishing education and training of those who are to deliver guidance in VPL processes, (for supporting appropriate and individual guidance). VPL should be a part of the initial education of professionals in education and counselling/guidance to enhance increased use of VPL. Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career Competences need to be implemented in the Nordic context in order to bring forth the possible career educational components of the VPL process and through that assist in defining the role of guidance activities (career guidance). Common Nordic guidelines could be developed.

4. *Coordination of guidance in VPL*

How guidance is coordinated and organized in general varies between countries/areas and within municipalities. Attention needs to be directed on how to develop impartial practices of guidance activities within the VPL process to ensure quality services and efficiency. The attention must also be on how the adult guidance in general is organized. In some countries, there is a lack of impartiality in guidance. There must also be a focus on how the connection is between the career guidance before and after the VPL and the guidance within the validation process because in some countries there is only little or no career guidance within the VPL process. The SWOT-analyses revealed that there is a need for:
- Clarifying the organization and coordination of guidance activities in the different phases of VPL.
- The impartiality of the deliverance of guidance in VPL needs focus.
- Coordinating guidance services related to VPL in different sectors and between various stakeholders.

Recommended: national guidelines on guidance services and policy development in the area of guidance in general can support the identification of ways to organize and coordinate guidance towards increased coherency and impartiality in practices. The individual should always be in the centre.

5. Information

For the concept and practices of VPL to develop further and become useful as a tool for more people it is important that information is disseminated to various stakeholders including professionals in education. The SWOT-analyses revealed that:

- There is a need for increased dissemination of information to stakeholders at different levels about the possibilities and benefits of VPL.

Recommendations is to strengthen the knowledge on VPL in society at all levels. Organizations conducting VPL could play a part in disseminating their experiences to a more extent to various stakeholders.

9. Concluding comments

Findings from this study lead to the question whether further work on identifying learning outcomes in the VPL process could assist in developments towards identifying guidance activities that support the aims of lifelong guidance and VPL. That would put more focus on the needs of the individual and empowerment measures towards lifelong learning based on existing competences. That would also call for looking into the responsibility of those who organize and deliver guidance activities, as well as directives from policy level.

As presented in the EU principles and guidelines (Council of the European union, 2004 and Cedefop, 2009), the roles of validation practitioners differ when it comes to knowledge and competences regarding providing guidance, conducting assessment, coordinating procedures etc. To guarantee fair results for service users, the division of roles and responsibilities in each phase of the validation process needs to be clear. The roles of the guidance personnel and assessors should for example be separate in this respect. This study reveals a need for further development of competences among validation practitioners in terms of guidance and in understanding the aims of validation.

The challenges identified in this Nordic study reveal that guidance activities linked to validation practices are not transparent and that there is a need for measures which increase understanding of the VPL-concept and related processes among guidance practitioners. That could lead to more coherency in practices and support for more individuals in experiencing career learning and through that make more meaning of the validation process in regards to further career development based on their personal situation and context. It is also feasible to explore further what competences/qualifications are needed for that service delivery. This work calls upon action and cooperation on policy level, organizational level and practical level.

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Validation of workplace learning

11

Examples and considerations in the context of national developments in VPL

Deirdre Goggin and Irene Sheridan

In Ireland, Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process whereby learning that has taken place prior to enrolment on a programme of study is explored, recognised and given value in the context of a destination award. In general terms this includes the recognition, evidencing and valuing of relevant and current formal, non-formal and informal learning. A broad aim of VPL in the Irish context is to encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education and to achieve qualifications through sensitive and accessible pathways. This is very much in keeping with the concept of lifelong learning defined by European Commission (2001), Behringer and Coles (2003), as "learning activity that is undertaken throughout life and improves knowledge, skills and competences within personal, civic, social and /or employment related perspectives. Thus the whole spectrum of learning; formal, non-formal and informal, is included as are active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and professional, vocational and employment related aspects." In considering VPL it is necessary to consider the broader concept of lifelong learning and how it pertains to the development of an individual and society at large.

1. Lifelong learning

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Werquin, 2010). Individuals learn in many contexts throughout their lives, including work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through their life experiences. Appropriate value should be given to all these contexts for learning. For an individual, competencies acquired in all aspects of life are essential parts of the overall learning experience.

Learning that takes place outside the formal systems for education and training, can, however, be difficult to identify and value (Werquin, 2010). The focus on lifelong

learning policy has slowly shifted from the traditional approach of 'learning in the classroom' to incorporate the diversity and richness of other learning environments. One of the distinguishing features of non-formal and informal learning is that the experience of the learner occupies a central place in all considerations of teaching and learning. These experiences may comprise earlier events, current life events, those arising from the learner's participation in the workplace or as a result of activities implemented by teachers and facilitators. It supports a more participative, learner-centred approach, which places an emphasis on direct engagement, rich learning events and the construction of meaning by learners within their individual contexts.

The Education & Training Monitor, 2014 Ireland, finds Ireland performing below the European average in participation in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2014). Only 7.6% of respondents aged 25 to 64 enroled in formal education. This remains below the Lisbon target of 12.5%, and the EU-15 average of 12% (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2016).

Figure 1: Education and Training Monitor, 2014
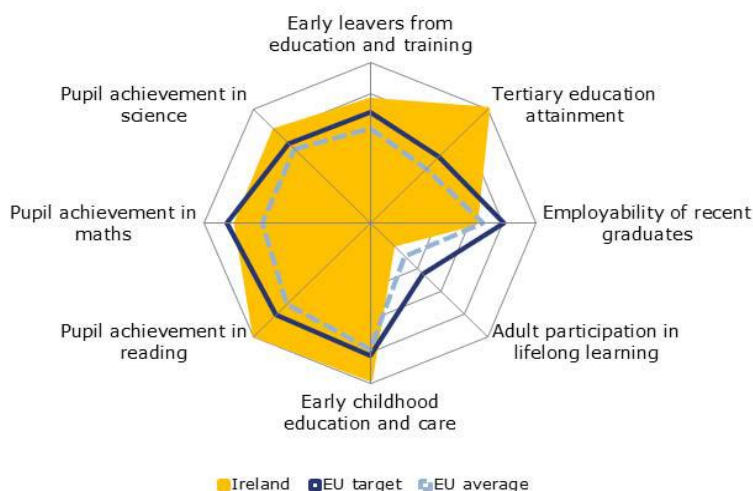
Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2013 and UOE 2012) and OECD (PISA 2012). Note: all scores are set between maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the chart).

The Irish economic downturn underscored the need for everyone, particularly those with low skill levels and those in vulnerable positions, to upgrade their skills. The aim is to significantly improve access for unemployed persons to job search, training and education, community and employment programmes, and to maximise opportunities so that people are better placed to avail of new job opportunities,

including emerging sectors. The Irish Government's Action Plan for Jobs points to the importance of competitiveness and the alignment of worker skills with current and emerging enterprise needs (Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, 2014). Increasing people's lifelong learning especially of those in employment was identified as a 'national performance gap' which the Irish National Skills Strategy 2025 is going to address.

The approach adopted by CIT is informed by national, European and international practice. The institute has been involved in and led the latest national research on RPL at higher and further education levels and on Irish higher education and industry collaborative programmes. The following provides some overview and key findings of this research.

2. Background to the study in higher education

The study on VPL in higher education arose from a research call from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in 2014. The study sought to explore current policies, frameworks and processes for recognition of learning in Irish higher education institutions. It also aimed to explore how these might be more coherent and consistent.

The research design for the study took a mixed methods approach which allowed for a comprehensive examination of the complexity of VPL provision in higher education in Ireland. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was designed to capture a macro-picture of the operation of VPL in Ireland in 2015 which was sensitive to the variety of contexts and issues around its provision. The researchers explored the current policies, frameworks and processes presently employed across higher education.

The desk review of practice included the international, European and national contexts in terms of position papers and strategy documents relating to VPL and the validation of learning gained outside of the formal education context.

The empirical research phase was designed to capture as diverse as possible a dataset which was representative of the broad range of stakeholders involved with VPL in Ireland. Populations of interest whose perspectives were sought included the higher education institutions connected with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFTL), students, policy makers and employer groups.

3. Overview of the findings of the study

The empirical and desk research phases of the study identified some key elements of practice which support effective systems of VPL. The first of which is the importance of having clearly defined learning and programme outcomes to provide

the attainment and assessment structure. Such scaffolding enables the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The importance of appropriate collaboration between departments, faculties, and institutions supporting consistency in practice and a coherent experience for the learner/applicant was also highlighted in the study. Such collaboration builds capacity with the assessment of VPL.

From the student perspective the study found that, having clear points of contact, accessible information and adequate supports for the learner/applicant are critical elements to provide a much-needed structure for VPL. Similarly, having clarity of roles with adequate training and supports for staff involved in the VPL process is also important.

The importance of using appropriate tools within VPL provision was apparent. The use of consistent systems to assist in structuring applications such as paper based portfolio templates and e-portfolios. Finally, the collection of data on VPL will build a foundational infrastructure which supports the ongoing development of practice and inform future strategy.

In summary the review of VPL in Higher Education in Ireland made the following conclusions:

1. There are organic developments of practice already in existence which can provide benchmarks and guidance for others with less developed processes.
2. VPL is developing within professional bodies and employer representative organisations nationally, along with developments within higher and further education.
3. There is a general understanding of what constitutes VPL however it must be stated that there is an absence of clarity and a commonly agreed definition of VPL in higher education in Ireland.
4. Records are maintained by some providers; however, comparable data and measurable indicators of activity are not currently available across the sector.
5. There are positive developments at a national and institution level, however alignment between national level and individual institution efforts is not clear.
6. Institutions have invested time in developing systems to support VPL internally. In some cases there is a variation between stated policies and actual implementation.
7. In maintaining the quality assurance and assessment systems, staff development for the implementation of VPL is not as proactively supported as it could be.

The study findings provide an insight into enablers and challenges for VPL/RPL for higher education providers in Ireland. The most significant finding is an absence of a single consistent means by which validation is implemented across higher education in Ireland and that institutions invariably develop their own systems which are informed, but not dictated by a central agency.

The following section outlines the research led by CIT into higher education- industry collaborative programmes which incorporates VPL and work based learning.

4. Collaborative course development

Work-based or situated learning has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of appropriate work-place skills, robust employability, and enhanced collaboration between education providers and employers. However, there is a danger that it might be viewed as a cost-effective response to a vaguely-defined skills gaps and that the complex relationship between the context for the learning and the content of the learning to be attained might be overlooked in the process. There are many different structures that identify and support work-based learning and also a range of definitions. The term can be used to encompass all kinds of non-formal and informal learning which happen (whether planned or not) in the practice domain as well as structured and planned work-based learning schemes which include carefully considered learning outcomes, supportive contexts for acquisition of knowledge skills and competence and quality assured assessment and validation of the learning. In some contexts the term work-based learning is used predominantly to refer to temporary, paid or unpaid, opportunities to gain workplace experience for students and learners. In others it refers to structured apprenticeship schemes with clear on-the-job and off-the-job elements.

Raelin (2008) suggests that there are three main elements of work-based learning:
- Learning is acquired in the midst of action and dedicated to the task.
- Knowledge creation and utilisation are collective activities.
- Learners demonstrate a learning-to-learn aptitude, which frees them to question underlying assumptions of practice.

The latter point underlines the reflective element which is common in most considerations of work-based learning. Connor (2005) recognised the difficulties associated with a clear definition of work-based learning. The expansion of work-based learning in higher education raises challenges to the traditional understanding of knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994). For the purposes of this paper, work-based learning is considered as learning which is planned, assessed and valued in the context of higher education learning outcomes and awards but is attained through, and at work by employees and with the support of the employer. It is built, therefore, on a tripartite relationship between the learner, the education provider and the employer and there is a clear requirement that the employer and the higher education provider enter into a relationship to plan and support the learning and the context within which the learning can be attained.

While it is widely recognised that learning happens within the workplace there has traditionally been a reluctance on the part of higher education institutions (HEIs) to

recognise this learning or to formally offer credit for it through a validation process. In 2008, a study was undertaken of 433 courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions which were offered outside of the central applications system for school-leavers and predominantly on a part-time basis to people who were in employment. At that time the responses indicated that involvement of employers was not common and that, in the main, the courses were designed and delivered as conventional classroom-type offerings. For instance, 84% were delivered on campus only, for 58% the need for the course was identified by the higher education institution, and in 51% of cases the design was by the HEI only (Linehan, 2008). Clearly there was a reluctance on the part of the academic community to involve employers in course development and design. Long term, sustainable relationships between higher education providers and employers play a key role in ensuring that work-based learning can be more fully embraced by the academic community (Linehan & Sheridan, 2009). The significance of partnership and collaboration between the employer or employer organisations and the education providers in the context for this new form of learning should be stressed (Mumford and Roodhouse, 2010). Many current reports and strategy statements point to the potential benefits for learners, employers and higher education institutions. The second strategic objective of the *Irish National Skills Strategy to 2025* intends for 'employers to participate in skills development through active collaboration with education and training providers'. The strategy identified the demand to develop 'occupational standards' to ensure the 'relevance and currency' of education and training provision (Department of Education and Skills. 2016a)The aim of this approach is to reduce the incidence of graduate skills mismatch. As outlined in the strategy report this can be achieved through 'increased employer participating in curriculum design and review' (ref).

5. National policy context of workplace learning validation

There is much anticipation in Irish government and policy circles about the potential efficiencies and economic benefits that could accrue from the validation of work-based learning activities in higher education and enhanced relationships between education and employers in the formation of the graduate and the ongoing provision of learning opportunities. In 2011 the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland published its forward-looking document 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). That document focused on restructuring the higher education system as a key action in ensuring Ireland's economic development and the creation of an 'Innovation Island'. The difficult economic climate in Ireland brought competitiveness and sustainability of employment and individual employability into sharp focus. This has, in turn, impacted on how industries and organisations are engaging with training and development in terms of planning for the future and having a workforce capable of responding to market changes. It is clear that by working in close partnership with

enterprise, higher education institutions can play a significant role in anticipating and responding to learning and development needs.

In its statement on education and training the National Competitiveness Council (NCC, 2009) stresses the role of higher education providers as key drivers of national and regional competitiveness and growth. The need for providers to respond more flexibly to the learning and development needs of the business community is a recurring theme. This view is supported in the *'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030'* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). which reflected findings of a 2010 European Commission report 'New skills for new jobs' which stressed the value of education, and in particular higher education for national The NCC-report notes that the possibility of stable career roles is growing less likely with individuals experiencing frequent change in roles during their working lives. This indicates a shorter skills currency window and an increased need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. Increasingly, therefore, the Irish higher education system will be called upon to facilitate the education and development needs of those already in the workforce, to ensure ongoing and resilient employability.

Addressing the difficulties anticipated by the HEIs in responding to the educational needs of those in the workforce, the NCC highlights the need for greater collaboration between education and training providers, employers and the students themselves to ensure currency and relevance of courses. In the 2016 *Irish Action Plan for Jobs* there was a call for increased support for the numbers of higher education institution – industry collaborations. The need for workplace based training which is fitted around working hours and is flexible in terms of timing and commitment to facilitate participation of workers is also underlined.
Ireland National Skills Strategy states as a key objective that '*Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.*' (Department of Education and Skills, 2016a:11)

The Action Plan for Education seeks to build stronger bridges between education and the workplace and recognises that:

> *While in the past, educationalists may have been wary that the narrow repetitive tasks of the workplace should not crowd out the broader agenda of education, now, the demands of the workplace are increasingly focussing on the very characteristics education nurtures – critical thinking, creativity, innovation, adaptability, collaboration. Learners gain experience from placement in real world settings, while organisations and enterprises (public and private) enhance their capacity to innovate and embrace new insights and technologies through interaction with education.* (Department of Education and Skills, 2016b:39)

From these reports it is clear that there is a recognition that Ireland is well behind target in terms of participation in lifelong learning and while it is generally anticipated that work-based learning can benefit many of the stakeholders, it is also recognised that this needs to be built on strong relationships and that there is a significant role for the employer in supporting the learning. The following section briefly introduces an exploration of one higher education institutions collaborations with industry to develop customised learning solutions and in the validation of learning acquired within the context of destination awards on the national framework of qualifications.

6. Work-based and context-sensitive learning

An in-depth review of practice in Ireland in the development of company or sector-specific learning solutions identified a number of exemplars and sought to develop supportive structures for higher education-workplace partnerships. The courses examined range from level 6 to level 9 on the Framework of Qualifications and from 10 to 180 credits. Through this exploration, good practice guidelines were developed for the general stages in customised course development (Sheridan and Murphy, 2012). These stages which are outlined below are not intended to define a rigid process but rather to provide a general approach for those involved in course development in response to specific workplace needs.

Figure 2: Main Steps in Customised Course Development
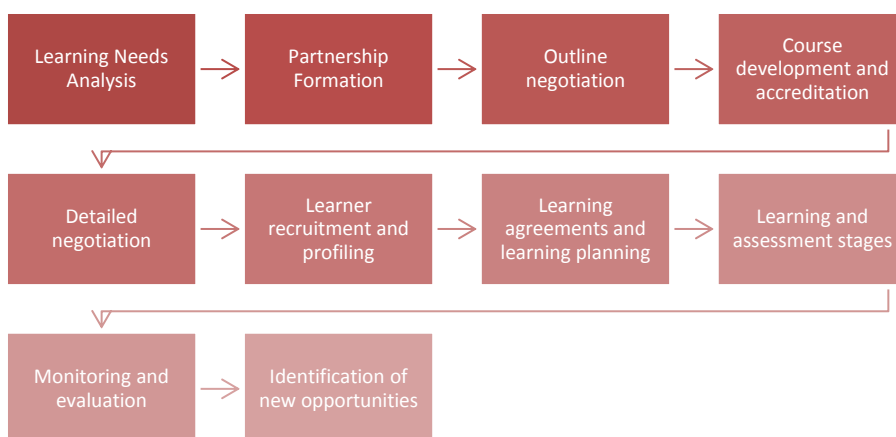
The report identified the following enablers for customised learning development programmes with industry:

- Existing relationship and good mutual understanding between the higher education institution and the company.

- Clear points of contact and commitment to the vision and the process from both sides.
- Clear decision structures in each organisation regarding the development of a customised programme so that changes are clearly and easily implemented.
- Identifiable learning need to motivate both in developing an appropriate solution.
- Flexible approaches to learning and assessment.
- Availability of funding.
- Existing exemplars which show the potential of HEI employer engagements.

These considerations form the backdrop to most higher education interactions with industry partners. There is a particular need to recognise that the provision of flexible and customised learning arrangements is not a simple service interaction but that a commitment of resources and realistic expectations are required by both parties. Much is said about the cultural differences between higher education and industry and the lack of a common language (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010) but in real terms there are many practical examples of open and positive collaborations which demonstrate that these differences can be overcome. There may well be tensions between the competing priorities of academia and business but a balance can be struck between them. These priorities can be respected through strategic partnerships to develop customised learning pathways that are sensitive both to the learner profile and existing skill set (through recognition/validation of prior learning) and are informed by the unfolding organisational needs and the workplace as a setting for the planned acquisition of knowledge, skill and competence.

A feature of courses which include elements of work-based learning is that some of the learning outcomes are achieved through and at work. This challenges higher education systems by separating the acquisition of the learning from the traditional setting and requires additional consideration at the assessment of the learning. It requires some reflection of the competences that can be gained and the competence frameworks which might be used to validate them. The particular difficulty associated with the assessment of work-based learning resulted in it being viewed as a discrete element of a particular programme and often considered on a 'pass/fail' basis or not subject to assessment (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010; Murphy & Sheridan, 2013). However, Basit *et al*. (2015) emphasise the need to take a strategic approach to work-based learning and to consider it an integral part of higher education rather than a peripheral activity. In considering how learning that is gained in practice settings is to be assessed and graded, attention needs to be paid to the design of the course or modules. How the learning outcomes of individual course elements and the overall programme outcomes have been written and whether this is sensitive to the variety of contexts in which the learning might be achieved will be important. From an academic quality perspective, all parties including the learner and the employer need to be confident that the assessment and validation processes are such as to assure the quality and level of the learning

and that the learning is appropriate to attain credit on the national qualifications framework.

7. The role of the employer

Planned work-based learning for employees places an onus on the employer in relation to the provision of appropriate supports and scaffolds for the learning. Greenwood (2011) considers this responsibility on behalf of the employer as a key investment which has significant business benefits. Johnson (2001) includes learning contracts and work place mentors in his definition of work-based learning and explores the barriers from the perspectives of learners, the university and the employer. Johnson identifies the potential issues relation to confidentiality of workplace information and data that may arise and the need for the employer to be directly involved in aspects of the supervision and the assessment of the work, the learning, and the application of the learning within the workplace.

To better support learning and development in the work-placement process in third level courses it is recognised that employers should work closely with higher education institutions in developing tripartite placement agreements to support the learning, develop appropriate job specifications, provide supports for the work-place learning, exploit opportunities to enhance networking and collaboration with higher education and be proactive in communication processes (Sheridan, Linehan, 2011).

The University of South Wales has developed a framework document for learning through employment which details issues facing employers. In responding to these issues they provide a toolkit which addresses some of the concerns that employers report, including resource commitment, commercially sensitive information, mentoring and supporting learners, ethical issues and academic language and structures including levels and credits (CELT, 2014). Employer involvement in the process is described as extending to:
  - Involvement in strategic discussion around skills, training and qualification needs in specific sectors.
  - Participation in curriculum working groups as subject matter experts.
  - Designing and delivering elements of a programme.
  - Offering work-based projects, placements or data sets and casestudies.
  - Assessment of work and learning.

While the relationship with the employer is seen as critical by most authors, Lester and Costley (2010) point out some inherent dangers where work-based learning partnerships are developed without a clearly thought-out and negotiated structure to underpin the process. This stresses the importance of advance planning and mutual understanding and trust in building the context for the relationship which

will support and scaffold the learning. These relationships are central to the examples summarised below.

8. The practice

The response of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) to customised learning needs is not one which has developed accidentally but is indicative of an institution which has invested time, money and resources in facilitating all learners whilst maintaining academic quality and standards. The institution has invested in staff development, cross discipline and functional teams, institutional learning which are underpinned by an open and flexible system. In 2011, CIT Extended Campus was established to stimulate and support interactions between CIT and its external partners. As part of this unit CIT has established the 'Learning Clinic' service which informs staff about CPD opportunities and how workplace learning can be valued within the context of formal qualifications. It also provides CIT with the opportunity of identifying upskilling or reskilling requirements of employees.

In responding to the needs of the workplace in a considered way CIT has adopted a flexible approach informed by existing relationships with the employer organisation and the needs of the learners. Increased negotiation with workplaces to keep pace with enterprise changes and challenges which will have an impact on graduate skill requirements in the future is also a factor of which HEIs have to be mindful, however the challenge is in striking the balance between education and industry priorities. These priorities can be achieved through strategic partnerships to develop customised learning pathways that are sensitive both to the learner profile and existing skill set and are informed by the unfolding organisational needs.

Recognition or validation of learning which ensures that the learning pathway builds on existing formal and experiential knowledge forms an important element of the approach. Work-based learning which can plan for the acquisition of requisite knowledge, skills and competence within the practice domain is part of the evolutions processes for customised courses. Programme development encompasses both full award and short special purpose learning at levels from six to nine on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. Examples of programmes developed in this partnership mode extend across the institution and span disciplines and departments. The added value element for organisations in getting involved in these practices spans beyond the individual worker, and into broader benefits such as informing curriculum and transforming the broader industrial partner into a learning organisation.

The following examples are intended to demonstrate the diversity and flexibility of interactions between industry and CIT in validating learning from the workplace setting within the context of destination modules and awards. The flexibility of

approach extends beyond content and assessment methods to future learning development opportunities which is in keeping with the objectives of *the National Skills Strategy to 2025* and the 2016 *Irish Action Plan for Jobs*.

This first case study outlines how CIT responded to a gap in graduate skills which enabled them to secure employment as identified and supported by the employers and representative bodies.

An analysis of the skills needs of the US multinationals in Ireland conducted in 2012 by the American Chamber of Commerce identified a structural gap in the pathway of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) graduates out of education and into a career. Ensuring that graduates are supported in making this transition protects the State's investment in educational outcomes and ensures that an appropriate talent pool is available to attract mobile foreign direct investment. Combining the knowledge that the graduate from the higher education process can gain significant and valuable learning within their first year in a workplace setting with the reality that many of the work opportunities created are for graduates with a combination of knowledge and experience, a programme was developed to provide a framework for higher education graduates to gain a recognised and validated award through a structured work-based learning internship within a partner organisation. This was a broader project with national reach and the partners in the process included:
- Higher Education Authority.
- American Chamber of Commerce.
- Department of Education & Skills.
- Department of Social Protection.
- Higher Education Institutions.
- American Multinational Corporations.

Over the course of a year a programme structure was agreed which resulted in the proposal to launch a national programme which would be implemented through partnerships between industry and higher education institutions. In order to develop an informed view of the existing graduate development activities, supports and employer expectations, a series of interviews with participating employer companies was undertaken. This research found that employers place a significant emphasis on the development of key workplace skills in their newly hired graduates. While the structure and the duration of the various programmes differ widely, all respondents considered that the learning experiences in the first six to twelve months after graduation are of significant importance.

All companies surveyed expressed the desire for graduates to achieve transferable soft skills such as:
- The ability to communicate, to build networks and ask questions.
- The ability to navigate their way around the company and an awareness of the roles and responsibilities of employees and project-teams.
- A professional attitude.

- The ability to 'impress from a distance' was mentioned by one company as being an important soft skill. In this instance graduates worked with overseas client on a continual basis, so, being able to impress that client through their non-face-to-face dealings was an important criterion.

One employer participant stated that their programmes hoped to help graduates 'take risks, make mistakes and know when to ask questions'. It was clear from the collaboration on the project that policy makers, employers and academics all considered the learning that new graduates gain in the workplace setting vital to their formation and future career. The programme sought to analyse and support that learning and to apply appropriate credit to it at a postgraduate level. CIT worked with a number of industry partners to offer this programme to graduates and while a cohort of graduates successfully completed the course, the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice which was developed through this collaboration did not gain the success or scale that had been anticipated (Fallon, *et al.* 2016). However, the process of the development of this and other work-based learning opportunities underscored the importance of the role of the employer in supporting work-based learning and the importance of the planning and development stages to support work-based learning.

This second case study outlines how a professional sporting club were interested in supporting the professional development of their players through building and developing their business competence.

IRUPA (Irish Rugby Union Players Association) and Munster Rugby aim to promote and protect the welfare of their members by endeavouring to safeguard their futures both on and off the pitch. With this in mind, IRUPA worked with CIT School of Business to develop an enterprise and business focused course for players. The partnership resulted in the development of a Special Purpose Award entitled 'Certificate in Enterprise Potential'. The course provides participants with the skills to understand how an enterprise operates and explores the steps involved in turning an idea into a business opportunity. The content and structure of the course was designed specifically around the needs of the players and the development process ensured that the course was flexible enough to work around the players' availability and scheduling constraints. This course allows participants to develop their own individual skills and to understand their own strengths. A key element of the course is the network of both entrepreneurs and business support contacts facilitated through the integration of elements of the learning with the on-campus incubation centre and the entrepreneurial and business community.

The final case study relates to a special purpose award at honours degree level for newly appointed supervisors in a manufacturing environment. The case outlines the process adopted and the benefit to the company in seeking validation for workplace skills. CIT has a long established relationship with the manufacturing company

Boston Scientific Ireland in areas such as research, student placement, learning clinics and professional development. They identified a need for newly appointed supervisors in the area of product manufacturing who generally would have an ordinary degree in engineering but would not have knowledge or experience in the people management area. The company had completed a skills audit to identify the gaps in the knowledge of the supervisors, they also had developed an outline training course based on the company culture, role requirements and the skills audit. The company saw an opportunity to develop a programme that integrated the knowledge and skills the supervisors were gaining in the workplace into a formal academic award and approached CIT. The company are familiar with the concept of RPL/ VPL and were interested in integrating that into the process where possible. A programme has been developed which comprises of three five credit modules for supervisory staff of Boston Scientific. Initially it was intended for those recently promoted but has been extended to multi-sections within the Cork office with discussions to make it multi-site CPD offering. In keeping with the structure of customised programmes developed by CIT it is intended that these honours degree level modules may be integrated into the many offerings of the faculty of Business.

9. Conclusion

This paper concludes that VPL-validation of prior learning is a critical element within higher education in Ireland, supporting the individual, employers and society generally in accessing education and training and allowing for all forms of learning to be valued. The future for VPL in Ireland is likely to bring many timely and significant developments.

The interaction of higher education institutions with enterprises and communities offers significant potential for scientific, social and civic innovation as well as for job-creation and economic development. There has been an evolution in thinking which has seen a progression from the concept of knowledge-transfer from higher education institutions to the idea of knowledge-exchange or knowledge co-creation. Partnership and reciprocity are central to these interactions, recognising that learning happens, and knowledge is both created and applied, outside of academia. Recognising the workplace as a valid and valuable centre for learning presents some challenges for higher education institutions. Identifying, recognising and assessing prior experiential learning presents a real challenge as the evidence of learning is provided out of the normal context within which the learning takes place and it separates the attainment of the learning outcomes from the assessment of the learning. Equally work-based learning requires the higher education institution to plan for the attainment of learning outcomes outside of the more traditional learning environment and relies heavily on the employer to provide the context for the learning and on the learner as part of the negotiated learning process.

The process of negotiation of learning pathways within the workplace has been very useful in assisting the development of enhanced mutual understanding between the academic and the practice setting and has laid the groundwork for further collaboration in many of the cases summarised here. Experience in this process has led to the development of some guidelines and frameworks which contribute to the planning stages and ensure that all partners to the tripartite arrangements have realistic expectations and understand their responsibilities within the process.

The strong research and practice of CIT in the areas of Recognition/ Validation of prior learning and situated learning have assisted in ensuring that the practices adopted by the institution are informed by national, European and international perspectives, approaches and strategies. The approaches are in keeping with the ethos of education and the institution.

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Exploratory Analysis for a National Qualifications Framework proposal in Venezuela

12

Anna Gabriela Pérez and Francklin Rivas Echeverría

Lifelong Learning is understood as a training activity developed throughout the life of people with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, social and working perspective (Guerra, 2014). This definition includes all learning modalities as sources for active citizenship, for social inclusion and for labor insertion (Vargas, 2009).

The need of having better prepared workers in order to respond to changes in the productive world, gave rise to alternatives for certifying labor competences of people. Policies on validation or recognition of learning experiences are especially a response to the economic need for more efficient management of human capital. These policies correspond to instruments aimed at the evaluation or recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience and non-formal learning pathways (Arbizu, 2011, Rimbau *et al.,* 2008).

This contribution aims at analysing the educational offer in Venezuela by studying the working population, identifying occupational categories of the economically active population (EAP) that might open up to to validation or certification of learning experiences and mapping their location in the country. This analysis generates valuable input for possible actions to establish and consolidate a Venezuelan NQF that could also be linked to formal, non-formal and informal learning practices in the country. For this purpose, the occupation categories of the economically active population in Venezuela that could require validation or knowledge certification and their location in the country geography, were investigated. Finally, also the institutional, normative and legal basis for the creation of a National qualifications framework was part of the research.

1. Context for validating and learning

When linking a NQF to non-formal and informal practices of learning, the UNESCO (Singh 2014) states that for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning, six key areas are to be considered by governments:

1. Establish RVA as a key component in the national lifelong learning strategy.
2. Develop RVA systems that are accessible to everyone.
3. Integrate RVA development into education and training systems.
4. Create a coordinated national structure that involves all stakeholders.
5. Train personnel for RVA activities.
6. Design sustainable financing mechanisms.

Occupational certification has been defined by Mertens (1996) as a process that tends to formally recognize the occupational qualifications of workers, regardless of how they were acquired. On the other hand, Vargas (2009) argues that the process of occupational certification refers to the formal and temporary recognition of the abilities demonstrated by a person in the work performance of an occupation, regardless of where these skills were acquired.

In Latin America, occupational certification began its development in the mid-1970s when the Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training of the International Labor Organization (Cinterfor/OIT) (2016) developed a project on the measurement and certification of occupational skills acquired by workers through systematic training courses, through work experience, or a combination of both (Comparán, 2007; Castle *et al,* 2001).

According to Vargas (2009), this process of occupational certification was promoted in Latin America by the public sector, especially Ministries of Education and Labor and national institutions of vocational training. However, there are also experiences that have been promoted by private enterprises. These initiatives are usually national scoped, cover various occupational sectors of the labor market and are promoted from an inclusive perspective.

A concept related to the validation and certification of learning is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which corresponds to a national policy that is aiming at recognizing all learning experiences of a citizen, obtained through formal education or non-formally and informally outside of the education system. (Vargas, 2009). The adoption of a NQF also means that a country creates a unique system to express the competencies of its workers and is about accepting the equivalence of formal educational levels with competence levels from non-formal and informal learning settings. According to Arbizu (2011), this corresponds to the design of National Systems of Qualifications and Vocational Training for identifying the professional qualifications that can be recognized and accredited when looking in to the actual and appropriate competencies for the professional practice in the production system. Moreover, such a NQF can contribute to the transparency and unity of the labor market, and the mobility of workers. It should be a common reference for training systems and for the evaluation and recognition of competence.

As indicated by Tuck (2007, cited by Solis *et al.,* 2013) a NQF is defined as an instrument to develop, organize and recognize the knowledge, skills and abilities that are demanded to perform in the workplaces, arranging them into competence

levels and tracing them on the basis of determined descriptors. With the existence of the NQF, the linkage of the educational system and the work space can be achieved.

There are several proposals to establish qualification levels (Singh et al., 2013) and despite their differences and number of levels, all of them agree that these levels are organized hierarchically from informal learning levels to the highest level obtainable in formal education. Each level of the framework has associated qualifications that can be accredited by credentials that allow recognizing learning of any kind representing social values and values and in the workplace (Solis et al., 2013, Bitran et al., 2011, Vargas, 2009).

The role of the state in the formation of a NQF is relevant, since the state is the one thatdeals with the design and construction of qualifications frameworks, is responsible for the quality of education and finances the operation of a learning system. Having a qualifications framework allows for linking public policies to job training and certification of competencies and directs public funding towards those actions that allow people to obtain the credentials associated with certain levels of qualification.

2. The Venezuelan educational system

According to the Ministry of Popular Power for Education (2015), the Venezuelan educational system consists of four levels of education (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Venezuelan educational system
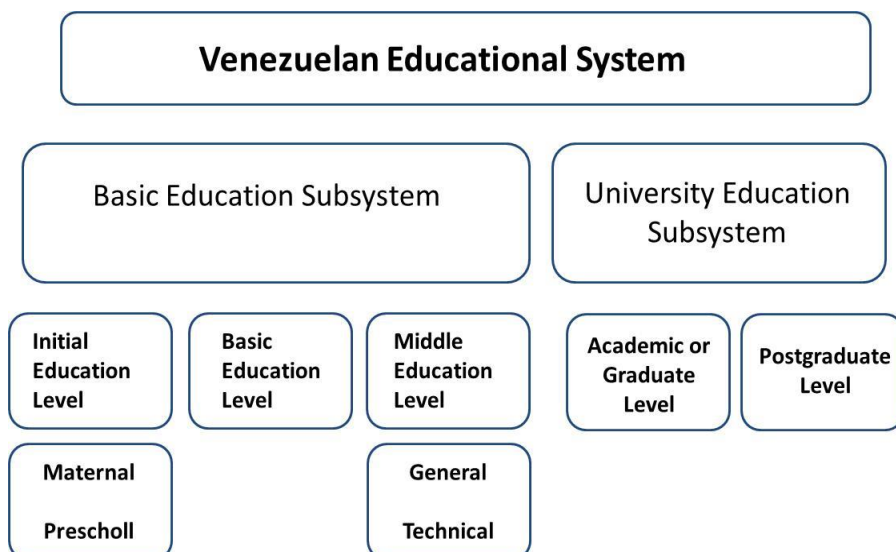
Source: based on Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación (2015)

The four levels are:
- Preschool education or Initial education: the first mandatory level of the education system and pedagogical attention takes one year. The average age of entry is 5 years.
- Basic Education: this is the second level of education. It comprises three stages with a duration of three years each:
  - Stage I: from 1st to 3rd grade.
  - Stage II: from 4th to 6th grade.
  - Stage III: 7th to 9th grade.
- Diversified or medium education: the third level of the education system and is before superior education. This level can have a technical output level.
- University education: it is based on previous levels and includes the formation or professional and graduate education. It can be attended at universities, colleges, and technological or pedagogical colleges.

University Education – Educational offer

University education is offered at universities, in university institutes and in pedagogical, polytechnic, technological, and university colleges. These institutions can be public or private, and according to the Ministry of Popular Power for University Education, Science and Technology (Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Universitaria, ciencia y Tecnología, 2016), there are a total of 261 higher education institutions, of which 109 are public and 152 are private, Table 1 presents the regional distribution of institutions of higher education.

Table 1. institutions of higher education in Venezuela

Region	Public Institutions	Private Institutions
Capital	33	41
Central	15	27
Western Centre	15	14
Guayana	9	11
The Andes	12	23
Llanos	6	4
Nor Oriental	12	14
Zuliana	7	18
Total	**109**	**152**

Source: Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Universitaria, ciencia y Tecnología. (2016)

Education for Work or Vocational Training

An important experience to mention in Venezuela is the National Institute of Educational Cooperation (INCE), founded in 1959. It is the entity that has been responsible for generating training programs for sectors with official certification,

attached to the Ministry of Education and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labor.

For example, the INCE promoted agricultural training of rural school graduates in order to train farmers to make efficient use of land and other renewable natural resources. It also created special technical training schools, organizing learning within factories and garages with cooperation of employers, promoting the fight against illiteracy and contributing to the improvement of general primary education in the country.

In 2003, the transformation of the INCE into the National Institute of Socialist Education and Training (INCES, 2015) took place, in order to accommodate it to the country needs and to the industrial reconversion process involving it conception and vision in the open and participative socialism environment.

Table 2. Professions qualified by the INCES

Administrative and Services Area	Industrial Area	Agricultural Area
Administrative assistant Computer Business Assistant Financial Accountant General manager in supermarkets Accounting analyst Assistant in foreign trade Food preparation and services in fast food establishments Restaurant service Kitchen Pharmacy assistant	Operator of oil plants Universal welding Plastic injection molding Automotive and diesel engine mechanics Refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics Automotive painting and painting Food processing machinery operator Machine operator for the manufacture of pulps and their preservation. Manufacture of mattresses Manufacture of shoes General Lithographer binding operator	Breeding laying hens Broiler breeding Veterinary Assistant Farm administration Breeding pigs Cattle breeding Construction and preparation of seedlings Real Estate Management Growing of leguminous plants Family vegetable garden Scholar Orchard Soil and fertilizer management Irrigation Operator Fruit crops Gardening

Source: Own preparation from INCES (2015)

The contribution of the INCES in the formation of human capital is very valuable, because through this Institute certification of learning and skills at a technical level is granted, which is not acquired in the formal education system. It is a learning experience in which young people are trained to work and are certified within a group of officially endorsed trades. This makes it an important support when looking for job opportunities, since they have the recognition of the corresponding government entity. Table II presents the areas and trades qualified by INCES.

Together with the INCES, there are other institutions recognized in training for work with headquarters in different States of Venezuela, such as Fe y alegría, Instituto

Venezolano de Capacitación Profesional de la Iglesia, Institutos de Formación Profesional con Certificación Universitaria and el Centro Técnico Profesional.

Regarding the media technicians, Herrera (2004) argues that the business sector has been an observer rather than a participant, that is, a passive actor in the training process and is attributed the responsibility of education to the State. At present, in the labor market the capacity of the middle technicians is questioned, due to the proliferation of University Superior Technicians, and the tendency of the business sector is oriented to the recruitment of mature people and with titles of Superior Technicians. Similarly, technical-media education professional is, today, a springboard towards the University, does not really train the individual and little has been done for its transformation.

3. Normative-legislative context of education and training for work

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Goals (2000), as well as a member of the International Labor Organization and UNESCO, among others, agreements and organizations all involved in a comprehensive reform for education.

When examining the legislative context regarding education, it is stated that in the National Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, specifically in article 102, it is established that education is a human right and a fundamental social duty, democratic, free and compulsory, and the State assumes the massive and inclusive provision of an integral, elemental and for the life education system. From this perspective, the Venezuelan State effectively assumes education as a fundamental social right whose sanction and public access would provide a significant improvement to the quality of life and collective wellbeing of citizens (Trall Project. ULA Report, 2011).

In the Venezuelan Organic Law on *Education* (Ley Orgánica de Educación, 2009), specifically article 22 expresses the obligation of public and private companies to contribute and provide facilities for workers for their academic training, upgrading, upgrading and professional development, to provide facilities, services, personnel Technical and professional training for the execution and development of programs in the areas of training for work, internship plans for students of general secondary and technical media, undergraduate and postgraduate university and in the modalities of the educational system. Jointly, public and private companies are required to cooperate in the educational, health, cultural, recreational, artistic, sports and citizenship of the community and its environment. Public and private companies must do it.

In the Venezuela Organic Law for *Labor* (Title V of Collective, Integral, Continuing and Permanent Training of Workers, chapters II and III) (Ley Orgánica del Trabajo para los Trabajadores y Trabajadoras, 2012): It is established that based on the economic and social development plans of the Nation, the State in co-responsibility

with society, will generate conditions and create opportunities for the social, technical, scientific and humanistic formation of workers, and stimulate the development of their productive capacities, ensuring their participation in the production of goods and services. The State, the family and society will create opportunities for young people to stimulate productive transition to adult life, particularly for education and inclusion in the social process of work as a student or trainee.

The Venezuelan Law for *Universities* (Ley de Universidades, 1970) establishes the functions, organization and responsibility of public and private universities. Specifically, article 145 of that law establishes that university education is directed to the integral formation of the student and his training for a useful function in society. The university education complements the training begun in the previous educational cycles, the universities will point out fundamental orientations tending to improve the general quality of education.,

Figure 2. Venezuelan Legislative Context of Education and Training for Work

National Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Organic Law of Education

- Law of Universities

Organic Labor Law

Regulation of Law on the National Institute of Training and Socialist Education
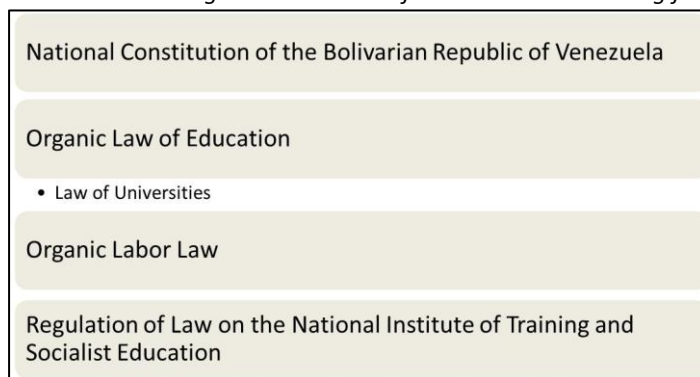
Source: own preparation

In the Regulations of the National Institute of Training and Socialist Education (INCES) Law (Ley, 2008), it is established that this institution aims at formulating, coordinating, directing, evaluating and implementing programs of comprehensive training and qualifications. Jointly, they promote the socio-productive inclusion of all people, especially those in extreme poverty and conditions of special vulnerability or exclusion.

4. General data concerning economically active population in Venezuela

The working population is made up of all persons aged 15 and over. It is divided into the Economically Active Population (EAP) and the Economically Inactive Population (EIP). This population represents the educational demand that corresponds to the people who can choose to enter the higher education system or professional formation programmes.

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Venezuela, for the year 2015, the information presented in Table III is available, which shows that 92.95% of the working-age population is employed (Occupation rate), while the remaining 7.05% is unemployed. Of the unemployed population, 6.4% were occasional unemployed, that is, people belonging to the working-age population who had worked at the time of the survey were not working and were looking for work, and 0.65% were unemployed, looking for work for the first time. The inactivity rate is 36.35%. The inactive population is those Venezuelans of working age, who at the time of the interview are students, housewives, rentiers, pensioners and retirees.

Table 3: Working Age Population Data

Occupancy rate	92.95%
Activity Rate	63.75%
Unemployment Rate	7.05%
Severance Rate	6,4%
Rate Looking for work for the first time	0.65%
Inactivity Rate	36.35%

Source: Own preparation from INE (2015)

Descriptive statistical analysis of the Economically Active Population

The study population corresponds to Venezuelans of working age, that is, whose age is greater than or equal to 15 years. The sample extracted was of 81,676 people of whom several variables were analyzed (gender, age, educational level, literacy, occupation, and living region), information was extracted of the Survey of Households by Sampling (SHS) for the second semester of the year 2012. From these data, a descriptive statistical analysis was made to characterize the population under study, which served as input for the construction of a national framework of qualifications. The SHS is a statistical research that has been carried out in Venezuela every six months since 1967, and arose in response to the need to have information on the structure, evolution of the labor market and the socioeconomic characteristics of the population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013).

Statistical analysis was performed using the SAS statistical package, and the analysis consists of two parts: descriptive analysis and multiple correspondences analysis. The most important results are shown below.

The gender variable only has two modalities: female gender and male gender. Of the Venezuelans included in that can be seen in the bar diagram (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Bar chart by gender
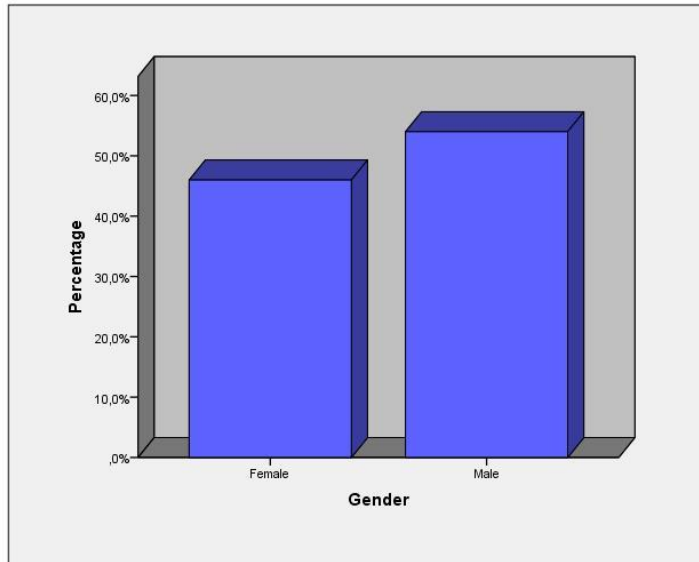
Source: based on SHS (2012).

The age variable was grouped into six age-groups (Graph 2) for economically active population, showing the biggest group in age-groups between 20 and 40 years.

Graph 2: Bar chart by age

Source: based on SHS (2012).

199
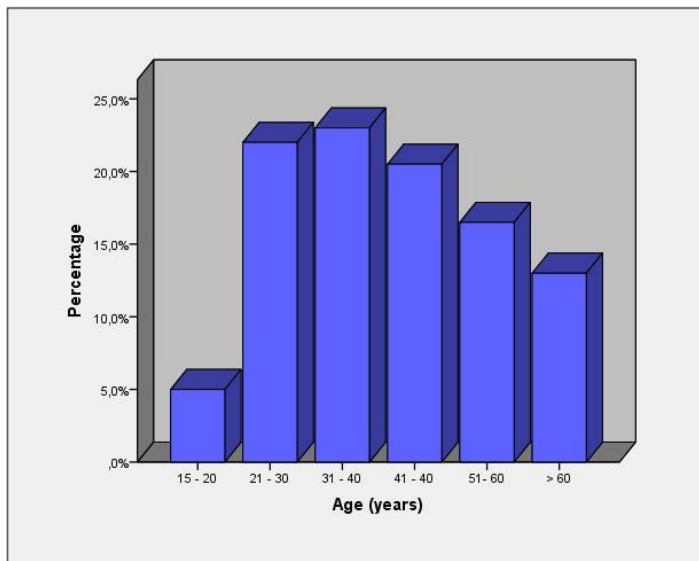
Concerning 'literacy', 95.35% of the people in the study were literate, and only 4.65% were non-literate, as shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3: Bar chart for literacy
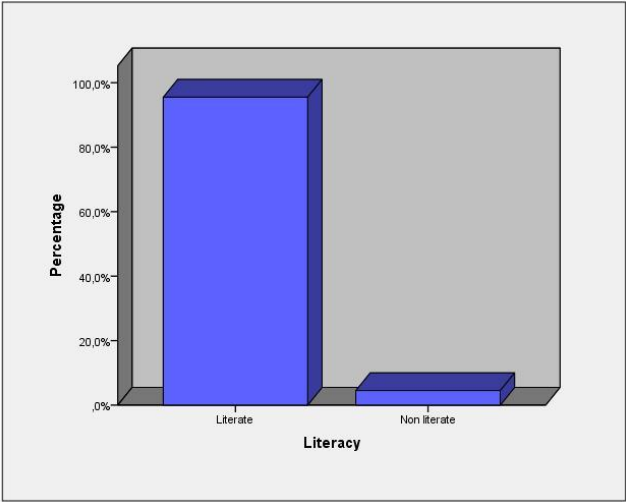
Source: based on SHS (2012).

Graph 4 shows the educational level of the people in five categories of basic and secondary education, university technical (TSU), university education and people with no formal educational level. The people included in the study, 70.47% have a secondary education, 16.68% basic education, 7.97% university education, 3.25% are TSU and 1.63% no formal educational level.

Graph 4: Bar chart by educational level

Source: based on SHS (2012).

200
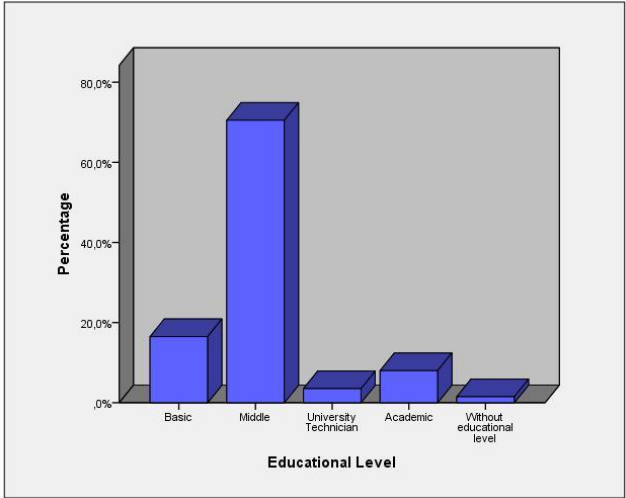
The geographical region variable (Graph 5) refers to the State where the place of residence of the persons included in the study is located. Venezuela has 23 States and one Capital District, which were grouped into six regions or geographical areas:
-   Central Region: states of Aragua, Carabobo, Miranda and Capital District.
-   Los Andes Region: Mérida, Táchira and Trujillo.
-   Los Llanos Region: Apure, Barinas, Cojedes, Guárico, Portuguesa and Yaracuy.
-   West Region: Falcón, Lara and Zulia.
-   East Region: Anzoátegui, Monagas, Nueva Esparta and Sucre.
-   South Region: Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro.

For this variable, the results reveal that approximately 50% of the people included in the study come from the central and western regions, a result that was to be expected since these regions are composed of States that have some of the most populated cities of Venezuela, in which much of the country's economic activity is concentrated, as well as the public organizations. The regions with the lowest representation in the SHS are the Andes region and the South region, as can be seen in Graph V.

Graph 5: Bar chart by geographic region
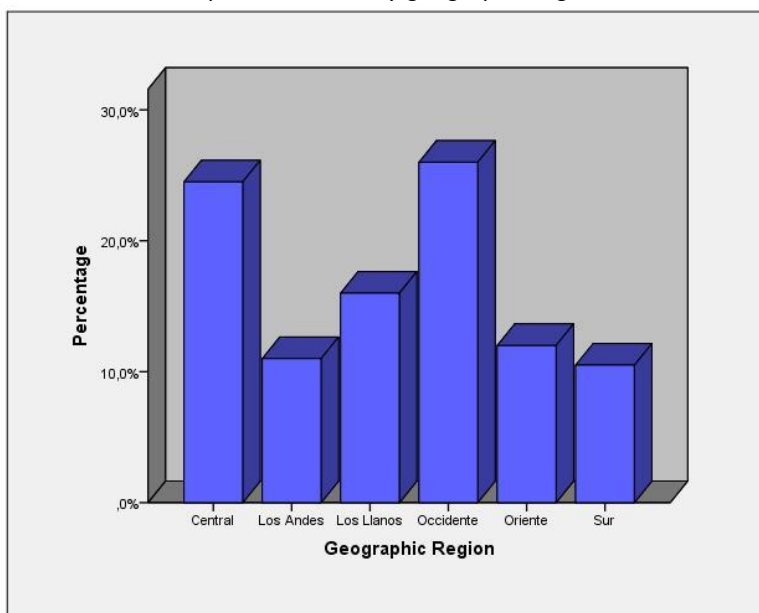
Source: based on SHS (2012).

Occupations

The most relevant variable in the study is the one related to the occupation of Venezuelans. When the sample of 81,676 people belonging to the economically active population was found, a great diversity of occupations was found. These occupations were grouped in eighteen (18) classes or modalities according to their

similarity and the educational level required for the performance of a particular occupation.

Table 4 shows the occupation modalities with their respective absolute frequency and percentage. Of these results, it should be noted that 15.83% of the people included in the study work as salesmen, promoters or in public service. The second category with the highest percentage of occupation is agriculture and related activities with 13.49%, and the third category with the highest percentage of occupation is that of the cleaners or persons who act as custodians or cleaning staff in public or private institutions.

Table 4: Occupations reported in the second half of 2012 SHS

Occupation	Frequency	%	Occupation	Frequency	%
Administrative - Legal	5078	6.22	Informal	3556	4.35
Air – Maritime	218	0.27	Petrochemistry	894	1.09
Farming	11020	13.49	Health	2030	2.49
Craftsmen	2.2	2.71	Security	2530	3.10
Cleaners	9042	11.07	Transport	5255	6.43
Goods and services	2828	3.46	Office work	6102	7.47
Building	7127	8.73	Technicians	5369	6.57
Basic education	4885	5.98	University students	336	0.41
Armed forces	266	0.33	Sellers	12930	15.83

Source: based on SHS (2012).

The least represented occupations are persons employed in maritime, air transport, university teachers and researchers, military personnel and workers in the petrochemical industry. There is a group of people belonging to the EAP that reported as an occupation at the time of the survey to be part of the informal economy. These people, usually, are street vendors or are dedicated to the rental of mobile phones.

Although there is a system of uniform classification of occupations accepted and applied at international level (ISCO), Venezuela does not use it. This ISCO system establishes the existence of ten large groups, as presented in Table 5 below, each group divided into subgroups, and the latter into primary groups of occupations.

Examining this classification, it is evident that the one used in the investigation is broader. In the health sector, for example, Venezuelans whose occupations are associated with this sector were all grouped together, and considered as doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, radiologists, bioanalysts, dentists, pharmacists, among others. When some of these groups were fused, the ISCO classification was determinative.

Table 5. Groups of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO)

Group	Description
1	**Directors and Managers** 11 Executive Directors, Public Administration Directors and members of Executive and Legislative Bodies 12 Managing and Commercial Directors 13 Directors and Managers of Production and Operations 14 Managers of hotels, restaurants, shops and other services
2	**Professional scientists and intellectuals** 21 Professionals sciences and engineering 22 Health professionals 23 Teaching professionals 24 Specialists in organization of public administration and business 25 Professionals information technology and communications 26 Professionals in law, social sciences and cultural
3	**Technicians and associate professionals** 31 Professionals sciences and engineering midlevel 32 Associate professionals health 33 Associate professionals in financial operations and administrative 34 Associate professionals Legal, social, cultural and related 35 Technicians information technology and communications
4	**Administrative support staff** 41 Clerks 42 Employees dealing directly with the public 43 Employees and accounting charge of registration materials 44 Other administrative support staff
5	**Service workers, salesmen and markets** 51 Personal services workers 52 Sellers 53 Personal care workers 54 Personal protection services
6	**Farmers and workers skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery** 61 Farmers and skilled workers in farms with for the market 62 Qualified forestry workers, fishermen and hunters 63 Subsistence farmers, fishers, hunters and gatherers
7	**Officers, workers and craftsmen of mechanical arts and other crafts** 71 Officers and construction workers, excluding electricians 72 Officers and operators of metallurgy, mechanical engineering and related 73 Craftsmen and operators of graphic arts 74 Specialized in electricity and electronic trades workers 75 Operators and official food processing, clothing, cabinetmakers, other artisans and related
8	**Plant and machine operators, assemblers** 81 Stationary plant and machinery 82 Assemblers

	83 Drivers and mobile-plant operators
9	**Elementary occupations** 91 Cleaners and helpers 92 Agricultural, forestry and fishery laborers 93 Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport 94 Food preparation assistants 95 Peddlers and related services 96 Refuse workers and other elementary occupations
1000	**military occupations** 01 Officers of the armed forces 02 NCOs of the armed forces 03 Other members of the armed forces

Source: based on OIT (2008)

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA)

The MCA is a statistical technique that is part of multivariate data analysis, which allows projection on a Cartesian plane relations between modalities of a group of qualitative variables, which in this case correspond to variables drawn from the Survey of Household Sample obtained in the second half of 2012. This technique was first described by the French Jean-Paul Benzécri, and is based on the decomposition of a frequency hypertable or frequency matrix called Burt matrix (Levart *et al*., 1984; Escoffier *et al*., 1992).

Using the decomposition in eigenvalues and eigenvectors, the coordinates (dimensions) that will be used to represent a Cartesian plane modality of qualitative variables under study are obtained. In this particular application, the MCA considering the variables age, gender, literacy, educational attainment, attendance at a school, region and occupations is done. For this analysis, the following results can be presented:

- The statistical value χ^2 = 3.006.492 suggests that the joint independence hypothesis is rejected, therefore it is possible to perform the Multiple correspondence analysis.
- Concerning the quality of representation, the best represented variables are the gender, the literacy and in smaller level, the educational level. Occupations and regions are poorly explained.
- It can be commented that the eigenvector or dimension or 1 (x - axis) explains better the modalities of literacy, age greater than or equal to 61 years old, without education and persons engaged in activities associated with agriculture and the university sector. On the other hand, the eigenvector or dimension 2 (y - axis) explained in greater proportion the modalities of the gender variable and literacy together with people without education, janitors and construction workers and other duties associated with the construction.

However, there are more interesting relations when considering the dimensions of MCA and a quadrant analysis as shown in Figure 3 and Table 6.

Figure 3: Representation of the first two dimensions of the MCA
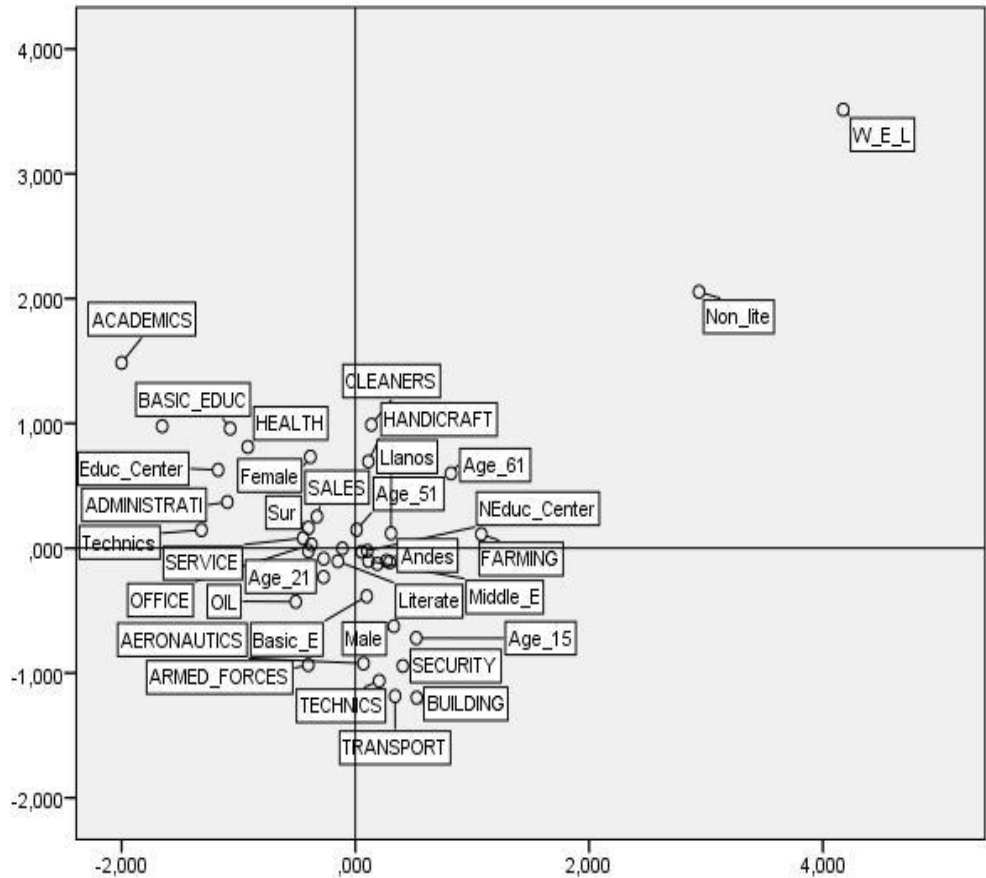
Source: based on SHS (2012).

Table 6: Quadrants Analysis

Second Quadrant: In this quadrant can be found female people mainly inhabiting the south region. The educational level associated with these people is Superior Technical University (STU) or University and by the time of the survey were attending a school. These people have occupations in the area of goods and services,	**First Quadrant:** This quadrant are mainly those who inhabit the Llanos region, aged between 51 and 60 years or over 61 years usually have no educational level and therefore are not literate. Occupations associated with these people are agricultural activities (agriculture, livestock, and beekeeping, among others), janitors and artisans.

administrative (managers, accountants, bookkeeper, among others), basic and middle education teachers or professionals and technicians in the health sector, office work and sellers in general.	
Third Quadrant: The third quadrant includes people living in the central region, aged between 21 and 30, 31 and 40 and 41 and 50 years. They are literate and engaged in the armed forces and the petrochemical industry	**Fourth Quadrant:** In this quadrant there are represented male persons that inhabit Los Andes, West and East regions. They are the younger people, because age is between 15 and 20 years. The educational level associated with these people is basic education and middle education, and those who at the time of conducting the survey were not attending an educational centre are also associated. Occupations associated with these individuals are construction and other related trades sector, security and civil protection, technicians (electricians, electronic, mechanical, electromechanical, among others), workers in the airline business - maritime and informal workers (vendors).

Source: based on SHS (2012).

Reviewing the multiple correspondence analysis presented in Table VI, susceptible groups to perform learning validation are the followings:

- People located in the first quadrant, i.e. those engaged in agriculture activities and especially artisans. In this last group are embroiderers, weavers, painters and plastic artists. In this case it can be designed State policies at the state level that can certify the knowledge on to general food agriculture area and in to handcraft area.
- People located on the second and third quadrant are part of the participants in the formal education, whose labor sectors require formation at Superior University Technical level or university level and therefore will not be key objectives within the creation or a national qualifications framework.
- People located in the fourth quadrant, whose occupations are associated with the construction industry, are technicians (electricians, electronic or mechanics, electromechanical, mechanics, mechanics, machines operators, among others), and informal vendors. In this case, it can be designed State policies that can certify knowledge in the construction and trade related areas.

- From the geographic point of view, the multiple correspondence analysis allowed detecting occupations that can be certified by region (Table VII). This suggests that State policies may be sectored by regions.

Table 7: Suggested certification by region

Region	Activities
Los Llanos	Agriculture and related activities such as farming, fishing, poultry and beekeeping. Cleaners and janitors Artisans: including in this group embroiderers, weavers, potters, woodworkers, among others.
Central South	Office work (secretaries, clerks, messengers, etc.), vendors
Los Andes West East	Construction (masons, plumbers, blacksmiths, welders, carpenters, machine operators) Technicians (electricians, mechanical, electronic, electromechanical) Informal Workers or vendors

Source: authors

Table 8 shows the correspondence between the occupation sector used in the research for Venezuela and the codes of the associated subgroups in ISCO - 08. This means, in the investigation for Venezuela, occupations reported in the Sampling Household Survey were grouped according to their affinity or similarity, and not according to the level of studies or training required for occupations. Only in some of them are the primary groups placed. Only for university professors and belonging to a research centre, were assigned the literal 2 of the group of professionals, scientists and intellectuals, since in the universities are gathered professionals from all areas of knowledge.

Table 8: Correspondence between occupational sector used in the research in Venezuela and the codes of the associated subgroups in ISCO – 08

Ocupation (Venezuela)	Code ISCO-08	Description
Administrative - Legal	112	Managing Directors and Chief Executives
	121	Business Services and Administration Managers
	122	Sales, marketing and development managers
	241	Finance prefessionals
	242	Administration Professionals
	261	Legal Professionals
	331	Financial and Mathematical Associate
	332	Sales and Purchasing Agents and Brokers
	341	Legal, Social and Religius an Asociate Professionals
	431	Numerical Clerks

Air – Maritime	315	Ship and Aircraft Controllers and Technicians
		3151 Ships' Engineers
		3152 Ships´ Deck Oficcers and Pilots
		3153 Aircraft Pilots and Related Associate
	511	Professionals
	835	3155 Air Traffic Safety Electronics Tecnicians
		Travel Attendants, Conductors and Guide
		Ships' Deck Crews and Related Workers
Farming	611	Market Gardeners and Crop Growers
	612	Animal Producers
	613	Mixed Crop and Animal Producers
	621	Forestry and Related Workers
	622	Fishery Workers, Hunters and Trappers
	631	Subsistence Crop Farmers
	632	Subsistence Livestock Farmers
	633	Subsistence Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmers
	634	Subsistence fishers, hunters, trappers and gatherers
Handicraft Workers	731	Handicraft Workers
		7313 Jellewery and precious metal workers
		7314 Potters and related workers
		7317 Handicraft Workers in Wood, basketry and related materials
		7318 Handicraft Workers in textile, leather and related materials
		7319 Handicraft Workers no ensewhere classified
Cleaners and Helpers	911	Domestic, Hotel and Officce Cleaners and Helpers
	912	Vehicle, Window, Laundry and other Hand Cleaning Workers
	961	Refuse Workers
Goods and services	133	Information and Communications Technology Services Managers
	134	Professional Services Managers
	141	Hotel and Restaurant Managers
	142	Retail and Wholesale Trade Manager
	143	Other Services Manager
	243	Sales, Marketing and Public Relations Professionals
	333	Business Services Agents
	351	Information and Communications Technology Operations and User Support Technicians
	352	Telecommunications and Broadcasting Technicians
	512	Cooks
	514	Hairdressers, Beauticians and Related Workers
	516	Other Personal Services Workers
	933	Transport and Storage Labourers
	941	Food Preparation Assistants
Building	214	Engineering Professionals (excluding
	216	Electrotechnology)
	311	Architects, Planners, Surveyors and Designers

	312	Physical and Engineering Science Technicians
	711	Mining, Manufacturing and Construction Supervisors
	712	Building Frame and Related Workers
	713	Building Finishers and Related Trades Workers
	721	Painters, Building Structure Cleaners and Related Trades Workers
	722	Sheet and Structural Metal Workers, Moulders and Welders, and Related Workers
	931	Blacksmiths, Hammersmiths and Forging Press Workers
		Mining and Construction Labourers
Basic education	233	Secondary Education Teachers
	234	Primary School and Early Childhood Educators
	235	Other Teaching Professionals
	342	Sports and Fitness Workers
Armed forces	01	Commissioned Armed Forces Officers
	02	Non- commissioned Armed Forces Officers
	03	Armed Forces Occupations, Other Ranks
Informal	521	Street and Market Salespersons
Petrochemistry	214	Engineering Professionals (Excluding Electrotechnology)
	311	Physical and Engineering Technicians
	313	Process Control Technicians
Health	221	Medical Doctors
	222	Nursing and Midwifery Professionals
	223	Traditional and Complementary Medicine Professionals
	224	Paramedical Practitioners
	225	Veterinarians
	226	Other Health Professionals
	321	Medical and Pharmaceutical Technicians
	322	Nursing and Midwifery Associate Professionals
	323	Traditional and Complementary Medicine Associate Professionals
	324	Veterinary Technicians and Assistants
	325	Other Health Associate Professionals
Security	541	Protective Services Workers
		5411 Firefighters
		5412 Police Officers
		5413 Prison Guards
		5414 Security Guards
		5419 Protective Services Workers Not Elsewhere Classified
Transport	831	Locomotive Engine Driversand Related Workers
	832	Car, Van and Motocycle Drivers
	833	Heavy Truckand Bus Drivers
	834	Mobile Plant Operators
Office work	411	General and Keyboard Clerks

	412	Secretaries (general)
	413	Keyboard Operators
	421	Tellers, Money Collectors and Related Clerks
	422	Client Information Workers
	621	Forestry and Related Workers
Technicians	311	Physical and Engineering Science Technicians
	723	Machinery Mechanics and Repairers
	741	Electrical Equipment installers and Repairers
	742	Electronics and Telecommunications Installers and Repairers
	821	Assemblers
University students	2	Professionals (in All Science Areas)
Sellers	522	Shop Salespersons
	523	Cashiers and Ticket Clerks
	524	Other Sales Workers

Source: Own preparation from OIT (2008)

5. Next steps for proposing a National Qualifications Framework

In Venezuela a legal framework is constructed for education and work. Venezuela has signed agreements with the ILO. However, Venezuela needs to develop a NQF, to have relevant qualifications that facilitate lifelong learning and employability through standardisation, evaluation and certification processes. In this first enquiry into the potential of a NQF in Venezuela, that might constitute an exploratory and diagnostic stage around the working-age population and the formative educational context, the identified areas of participation and interest groups are given by:

- State or Government through representatives of the Ministry of Popular Power for Education, Ministry of Popular Power University Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Popular Power for Labor and Social Security and other related Ministries, which policies and programs have to be articulated and creating a regulatory function concerning the NQF.
- Business and enterprises Sector, through the Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production in Venezuela (FEDECAMARAS), which corresponds to the main business association of Venezuela. Companies demand qualified workers, they will provide key information about the labor market, and the NQF needs to respond to those labor market needs.
- Workers, through different unions or public and private associations
- Educational and Training Institutions and Research and Development Centres, which correspond to training providers, from which the participation of the teaching community is required. In the educational-training centres the curriculum or learning programs are designed, the knowledge associated with the qualifications is imparted, this means that the qualifications are formatively translated.

According to Billorou and Vargas (2010), three levels of dialogue between social actors are distinguished: rector level, sectorial level and operational level. Figure IV shows the relationship between these levels of dialogue, highlighting the role of the State in the educational training activity, and workers as the ones who will require the certification of experiences and knowledge:

- At the rector level, policies concerning qualifications are designed, the NQF is designed and actions have to been taken to monitor and evaluate impact results, at this level the State intervenes through the ministries and/or agencies responsible for Education and work, enterprises, universities, training centres and workers through trade unions and associations.
- The sectorial level establishes the competences, standards and qualifications of each particular occupation sector. At this level the needs and strategies for the human resource development in the particular sectors are determined.
- At the operational level, the institutional arrangements are implemented once the NQF is implemented. The maintenance and updating, quality assurance, resource management and certification of competencies of the NQF are held.

Figure 4: levels of dialogue on learning
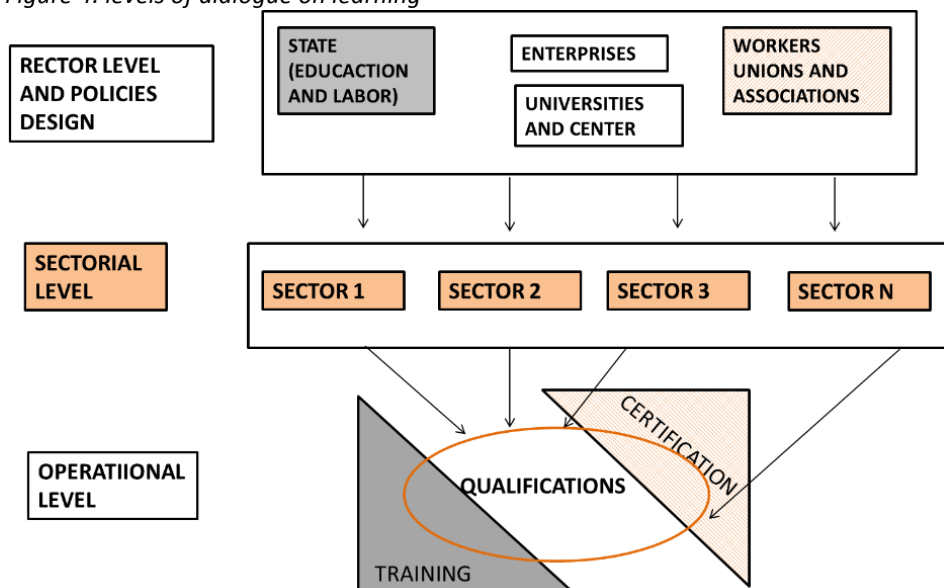
Source: based on Billorou and Vargas (2010)

According to Billorou and Vargas (2010) and Tuck (2007), the trend is towards the design of flexible frameworks, which is a bridge between the formal education system and training for work. The ideal situation converges towards a transfer between education and vocational training through statements and agreements, especially with secondary education and technical or technological superior education. In addition, it is suggested that the NQF should be linked, this means, that

there should be a joint NQF for the education sector and the labor sector. In Venezuela, a pilot or a partial NQF for a particular sector, without the need to unify all education and vocational training could be implemented, but keeping in mind the importance of this linked activity.

6. Conclusions

This paper corresponds to an exploratory phase in Venezuela to determine the need for a National Qualifications Framework that is linked with the guidelines for Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of non-formal and informal learning of the UNESCO. It is evident that there are groups of people in Venezuela that are suspicious to the validation of prior learning. The examples and results both within sectors and occupations and in specific regions, could form the basis for the creation of a National Qualifications Framework in Venezuela, which will promote lifelong learning for the sake of improving training opportunities for individuals. Also, it can support the linkage of educational, business and organizational sectors seeking to develop the skills required by workers and the validation of prior learning, improving working conditions and opportunities in the labour market.

From the results obtained from the statistical analysis (descriptive analysis and multiple correspondence analysis), a set of categories of occupation and their geographical distribution in Venezuela was determined. Based on these results, a national qualifications framework can be created that encompasses and addresses the learning processes that are tuned in to the requirements of the labor market and the interests of individuals. Such a NQF should also (1) stimulate creating procedures for standard setting in learning programmes (formal and informal), (2) ensure the quality of training of involved staff members and (3) manage the process of incorporating the qualifications that need to be part of the national framework.
The steps that must be met after determining the qualifications to be incorporated into the national framework are: the formal adoption of the framework for government and business entities. Subsequently it should involve the education sector into the activities of formalization, structuring and establishment of agreements and responsibilities of all parties involved. Finally, the national framework can be adopted by the different public and private sectors and serve as a reference tool for incorporating new skills, when labor dynamics requires it.

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Learning from volunteering $\qquad$ **13**

Recognition and validation of volunteer experiences

Guus Bremer and Jo Peeters

Volunteers contribute significantly to society by sharing their time, knowledge and experience. In giving and sharing what they already possess, they also enhance their competences and gain new ones. In this way volunteering has not only value for society, but also for the volunteer's development and career. In VPL-terms: volunteering is a mixture of non-formal and informal learning. *Edos Foundation* is developing ways to make volunteers and volunteer organisations aware of this added value, and how to get it validated. In several European projects we have developed easy-to-use tools and methods for the individual volunteer and for the volunteer organisation, like portfolio-tools, assessment-instruments, capacitation. For this we can rely on our more than thirty years of experience in working with volunteers. We share some highlights of our work as an inspiration for all and to prevent re-inventing the wheel.

1. European policy

Volunteering can contribute to people's personal development as a step to a paid job. By volunteering, people can develop general/transversal skills and competences (e.g. working in teams, conflict resolution), specific job skills (depending on the kind of voluntary work), and so called employee skills. The fact that voluntary work can play this role is widely acknowledged on EU-level, as written in several policy documents[30].

There is evidence that volunteering enhances people's competences: a research study of the City of London[31] on learning and development of 546 volunteers

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30 Amongst others: The role of voluntary activities in social policy, Council of the European Union (October 2011); Volunteering: passport to a job?, Committee on culture and education of the European Parliament (June 2012); Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (December 2012); Towards a European area of skills and qualifications, European Commission (June 2014); Validation of skills and qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning, European Economic and Social Committee (September 2015).

31 www.cityoflondon.gov.uk

working in schools and colleges shows that volunteers develop skills and competences across a broad range of business-relevant areas, e.g.:
- Communication skills.
- Ability to help others.
- Adaptability and ability to be effective in different surroundings and with different tasks, responsibilities and people.
- Influencing and negotiating skills, including persuading others, resolving conflicts and negotiating agreed solutions.

Research of the University of Bath (UK), carried out in 2012 at the request of the European Youth Forum, shows that employers are aware of the value of volunteers' skills and competences for people's employability. At the same time the employers state that volunteers are poor? in selling the product, in explaining what they have learned through volunteering. One of the recommendations of the employers is to provide more guidance to volunteers to help them translate their volunteer skills and competences to the labour market and their professional life.

All EU member states are encouraged to have a validation arrangement ready by 2018. For volunteers in all kinds of settings in all EU member states, validation of learning outcomes can create added value for their voluntary work. This will create the opportunity for volunteering organisations to make volunteering more attractive and attract new categories of volunteers.

2. Volunteer organisations

Why is it useful for organisations working with volunteers to have a validation strategy?
It seems clear that volunteering provides a rich learning environment, where motivated people of all ages contribute to society in a way and context that they have freely chosen. However, the results of the public consultation Towards a European area of skills and qualifications (European Commission, 2014) show (among other things) that there is lack of guidance for those who want to benefit from these non-formal and informal learning processes through having their learning outcomes recognised and validated. Also the link between these processes and the European Qualifications Framework is considered as weak, which might mean that in the near future these learning outcomes will have less value on the labour market than their potential suggests.

The last ten years, a large collection of tools and methods has been developed to support volunteers in getting recognition for the learning outcomes in voluntary work: volunteer portfolio, awareness tools, (self)assessment tools, validation methods, competence frameworks. These developments have taken place on European and national level. However, in our work, contacts, and meetings with

volunteering organisations, we see that not many organisations have developed a policy and strategy on recognition, implementing recognition in their policy to attract, train, support, and retain volunteers. However, it is not enough (as an example) to offer the volunteer a portfolio. The volunteer needs more support (guidance, etc.).

Translated to the world of volunteering, this means that:
- There should be more attention on guiding and coaching volunteers in their personal and professional development (instead of simply developing more tools and methods for recognition and validation of their learning outcomes).
- The starting point of the validation process should be the individual needs and interests of the volunteer.
- We should build bridges between the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning processes on one side and the European Qualifications Framework on the other side.
- Guidance also in how to use the experience to enhance their professional development irrespective of its recognition or validation

For volunteering organisations, this will create the opportunity to make volunteering more attractive, and attract new categories of volunteers. Even though it implies more input and investment on the part of the organisations, all the indications suggest that it will be worthwhile.

In the Vapovo project[32] we developed a way to help organisations find the right tool for their organisation. By connecting the right tools and methods to the work and objectives of the organisation, each organisation can develop its own validation policy. The Vapovo training course contains the following subjects:
- What is validation? What is non-formal learning? Introduction of terms, background information about European policies, best practices from several EU member states.
- A little taste of validation: What are my competences? How can I describe these competences? Why would I like to have these competences validated?
- Validation on the level of the organisation: what can the organisation do to support the validation of learning outcomes of volunteers? What are the advantages, disadvantages and risks? Examples of validation policies and models.

The training course was developed and tested in cooperation with different volunteer organisations. The training course is flexible, so form and content can be adapted to the needs of the organisation. The target group is policy makers and/or board members of volunteer organisations[33].

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32 Vapovo = VAlidation POlicy for Volunteer Organisations (Erasmus+ program (2014-2016).
33 http://edosfoundation.com/index.php/finished-projects/vapovo.

To illustrate the power of this organisational policy on validation we refer to a few good practises:

- *France Bénévolat* developed Passeport Bénévole[34]. The volunteer passport is a link between the volunteer and voluntary and community organisations. It provides evidence of the volunteer's skills and experiences in different forms of volunteering and in all types of voluntary organisations. The passport will follow the volunteer throughout his/her volunteering career to demonstrate how s/he is developing during his/her experience.
- *Victoria's Volunteering Portal*[35]; this Australian website from the government of Victoria offers a lot of information about volunteering and about the way to develop policy on this. It has different approaches for several specific target groups depending their needs.
- *Volunteer Ireland* offers a step by step approach to develop the volunteer policy for your organisation[36]

3. The volunteer

When a volunteer asks for a reference or certification of their competencies, the organisation can choose from a wide variety of documents to provide this. The specific one an organisation uses, should be part of their volunteer policy. If there is no such policy, or for some other reason there is no document available, the volunteer himself can make this choice.

In the Volcar project[37] we developed a framework to support volunteers in this process. The volunteer organisation and the volunteer create an agreement outlining the volunteer responsibilities and roles and the guidance that they will be provided with. Together they also record the competences and skills which are important for the role. The use and offer of this framework can make an organisation more attractive to potential volunteers. The explicit attention paid to the development of volunteers also gives social impact to the concerning organisations.

To benefit the most from the process, a volunteer can choose to participate in a corresponding training course. At the end of this training course the participant can:

- Evaluate, establish and document his skills, competences and qualifications in a systematic and well-organised manner.
- Identify important personal strengths and core competences.
- Draw conclusions for the further career from his learning progressions.
- Recognise perspectives for his career and plan realistic steps for the further personal and professional development.

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34 http://www.passeport-benevole.org.
35 https://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/manage-your-volunteers/policies-and-procedures.
36 http://www.volunteer.ie/who-we-help/organisations/managing-volunteers/
37 Volcar = VOLunteer CAReer Guide This project is funded under Erasmus+ program (2015-2017).

- Sustainably implement the management of the personal competences with support of the portfolio tools and under personal responsibility.

During the training the volunteer will:
- Establish, assess and evidence competences and other benefits from various areas of activities (training, paid and unpaid work, family), with a special focus on volunteering, verify learning processes, draw conclusions.
- Analyse / evaluate the implementation of the personal targets.

The training course consist of two connecting parts:
- Online training to start to think about how competences gained and develop through volunteering relate to careers and career aspirations of the volunteers.
- Face to face training to learn how to identify competences gained through volunteering and present that as evidence when searching for career development and progression.

This training course is offered as a tailor-made in-company training as well as part of an open program[38].

Inspiring examples of this process by and for volunteers can be found at:
- Jong Aktief (Young Active)[39] aims to give youngsters the time, space and opportunity to become self-reliant. They use the Europass Volunteer Certificate to award the results of the efforts a volunteer has made.
- Valorise-toi! (Empower Yourself!)[40] A self-assessment tool of acquired skills in the framework of volunteering in 'Scouts et Guides de France' It gives value to the skills a youngster or volunteer has acquired in Scouting.

4. The role of employers[41]

The entrance of youngsters to the labour market could increase significantly when employers are more aware and willing to give value to the learning outcomes of volunteering. Research by the Lifelong Learning Platform shows that employers usually value the fact that an applicant was active as a volunteer in the final decision to hire a job applicant. This optimistic result is supported by the fact that half of the respondents are flexible in allowing employees to take an active role as volunteers by providing flexible hours and authorised leave.

Another result of the survey is that the existing available tools to support the validation process are mainly unknown. It is crucial that employers become more aware of and understand and gain greater knowledge of these tools, and raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering for their businesses or organisations.

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38 http://edosfoundation.com/index.php/current-projects/volcar
39 http://www.stichtingjongactief.nl
40 https://www.sgdf.fr
41 Source: GR-EAT project http://www.eucis-lll.eu/projects/gr-eat/

Regarding volunteers, it is crucial to help them increase their employability skills and understanding about employers' expectations. (Based of the content of the article it is my view that there is a lot more that the individual volunteer needs to know and understand so perhaps this sentence might be added to.)

Not all employers give the right value or attention to volunteer experience, and not all organisations and volunteers are aware of the possible impact of validation and recognition. This shows the importance and need of more and continuous attention for these topics amongst all target groups.

The Erasmus Impact Study[42] that (international) volunteering contributes to a shorter period of unemployment and easier access to the labour market is an important piece of work. The findings are mostly based on volunteering in general and less on the concrete competences a volunteer gains through this experience.

5. European Recognition, Validation and Volunteering Network

Edos Foundation initiates training courses, workshops, projects and other educational activities to stimulate and facilitate the personal and professional development of adults and youngsters who are professionally or voluntarily active in the field of adult education, youth work and welfare work.

We are trying to establish a network of Erasmus+ projects that are dealing with recognition, validation and/or volunteering. Our aim is to profit from each other by sharing experiences, knowledge and outcomes of these projects. Hopefully it will prevent us from re-inventing the wheel. In the near future we hope to facilitate a conference with all members of this, so far, informal network.

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42 European Union, 2014.

The Concept of Competence and the Challenge of Competence Assessment **14**

Henning Salling Olesen

In order to promote new lifelong learning opportunities, you need practices of assessing and recognizing individuals' competences across different regimes of recognition, in particular business/industry and the formal education system. Recognition by business and industry applies an instrumental perspective and refers to structures and mechanisms of the labour market, assessing the perceived ability of the subject to function in the work situation. Recognition by the educational system is based on documented completion and description of formal curricula, defined by academic criteria.

The notion of "Competence", borrowed from social psychology, is supposed to serve as the new "general equivalent" of human capability. In practical assessment this notion of "competence" is placed in a tension between the need for standardisation and comparability, as outlined in Qualification Frameworks [European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)], and the need for sensitivity to individual pathways, which is topical for competence assessment procedures. The acknowledgement of the subjective nature of competencies means that the assessment must also be sensitive to individual diversities and to the contextual nature of informal learning. So the practical task of assessment requires a conceptual bridge between the societally defined qualification framework and the subjective trajectory of individuals.
This contribution explores the challenges involved in conceptualizing developing a language that can grasp how subjective re-configuration of life experience and learning can contribute to development of new competences.

1. The defining policy context

The idea of Lifelong Learning entails a vision of every individual not only having access to formal and non-formal education and training throughout the lifetime but also making use of all the informal learning which in everyday life – in work life, in family and social life, in leisure and cultural activities. The driving force in the contemporary policy interest in lifelong learning is to mobilize human resources and

competences for economic competitiveness – and an increasing recognition that not all these learning goals can be met by education and training policy alone. A lifelong learning oriented research and policy development for this reason in principle needs to address not only education and training, but a multitude of practices relating to work organisation, labour market, community and culture, health, etc… On the one hand it implies a total program of learning for work, which is inferred not only for education and teaching but also everyday life – a new level of economic penetration of society. On the other hand, this request for competence development in which the subjectivity of working people occupies an important role, constitutes a new arena of participation and democratic struggle over the directions of learning processes ((Salling Olesen, 2013a). To conceptualize learning in both intended education/training and in all the other areas of intervention a new discourse has been established in which the concepts of learning and competence play a key role. Education and training are being described in terms of (expected) outcomes instead of (teaching or curriculum) inputs, and results evaluated against employability.

On the governance level two quite technical tools are assigned key roles in implementing lifelong learning policy. The one is the development of all-embracing qualification frameworks, which allows comparison across national systems and between qualification obtained by formal education and non-formal/informal activities. The other one is validation of prior learning/competence assessment which allows for recognition of specific (individual) competences within a new environment of recognition. These tools are functionally connected.

The qualification framework has been quite contested in Europe because it has been seen as a tool for bureaucratic unifying of education institutions – or from a different perspective as tools for reforms and deconstruction of privileges embedded in obsolete institutional structures. In some countries it has actually been used as a top-down-governance – but mostly as a tool for communication and comparison (Alessandrini, 2017; Mikulec & Ermenc, 2016; Nicoll & Olesen, 2013).

The other tool, the competence assessment, has previously been seen as a "user-friendly" way of helping individuals to avail of new opportunities, in continuation of traditional access-measures (Salling Olesen, 2011). Institutions have used this tool on their own initiative and on the basis of their recruitment interests. The term VPL, Validation of Prior Learning, owes its specific meaning to this situation of recognition of non-formal and informal learning for obtaining access to formal education.

In the context of lifelong learning policies formal regulations in several countries oblige institutions to offer validation of prior learning for applicants without normal access background, and the European Union has recommended member states to implement validation procedures, and set a roadmap by 2018. This has already triggered a discussion which is also of the new understanding learning outcomes (Alessandrini et al 2016). The ultimate rationale however, is to create a procedure which enables the classification of individuals' competences in a way that can serve

as a "common denominator" for individuals, educational institutions as well as labour market agents.

2. The Concept of Competence and its use in Policy

Lifelong learning policy has introduced a new vocabulary, which has flipped the lens from teaching to learning, from curriculum to learning outcomes, from knowledge and skills to competences. This shift appears most obvious in relation to formal education, but also skills in the meaning of specific task related qualifications and the term qualification as such has been replaced. The new descriptor for human capability is competence (Nicoll & Olesen, 2013; Salling Olesen, 2013a). Originally the concept of competence had a legal meaning related to legitimacy. The meaning that gained ground from the 1990s combines functionalism and psychology, where the emphasis varies a little between the two and which has been applied in different ways (Gnahs, 2007; Illeris, 2009; Rychen & Salganik, 2001). Nevertheless, there is in practice today a core meaning: competence refers to the abilities of an acting subject to translate knowledge into appropriate action for everyday practical situations, above all in work processes, specified in the following attributes (Rychen & Salganik, 2001):
- The ability to act successfully.
- In a complex context.
- Through the mobilization of psycho-social prerequisites (cognitive and non-cognitive).
- With results related to the requirements of a professional role or personal project.

In this understanding, which is representative of the political-economic use of the term, competence is in one respect *functional, performance-oriented and pragmatic*, and defined in terms of external social demands that need to be mastered. Additionally, it also involves a questioning of previous conceptions of the application of knowledge, where knowledge is something one can *have* and where rational practice can be based on general abstract knowledge. "Competence" is addressing practices that are not fixed and known beforehand, and in competent practice knowledge must be mobilized and transformed in order to be applied successfully. Therefore, competence is linked to a potentially acting subject who is able to mobilize various prerequisites in a manner relevant to the situation at hand. In the context of the issue of recognition "competence" is supposed to serve as a general equivalent of human capability, replacing the dominant system of diplomas and certificates which have legitimacy in the regime of recognition linked to formal education, but it is not meant to create a new canon of knowledge or skills. On the other hand it is also supposed to be legitimate in the other regimes of recognition, which are prevailing in business, labour market etc.

Nevertheless, the practical application of this concept as a general equivalent between different regimes of recognition (Salling Olesen, 2014) has presented substantial theoretical and practical issues evidenced in the efforts to identify key competences, i.e. the qualities of the workforce that are seen as vital for the economy and competitiveness, and could serve as the guideline for competence development over time, as the same as enabling some kind of calibration for comparing the workforces in different countries.

In the OECD DeSeCo project (Definition and Selection of Competencies) this analytical task was approached quite ambitiously. The scientific project to create clarity and consistency in the definition of key competences was obviously triggered by the pragmatic desire to achieve workable indicators of generic competences for policy making and international comparison. One of the experts, the psychologist Franz Weinert, referring to the connection between competences linked to specific practices and key competences with broad or universal applicability, states as follows:

> *such scientific plans have often failed in psychology, however. The underlying multilevel models can be logically reconstructed, but not validated psychologically. The different degrees of abstraction mean, therefore, a fundamental asymmetry in competence research - high abstraction: intellectually brilliant, pragmatically hopeless; low abstraction: pragmatically useful, intellectually unsatisfactory. (Weinert, 2001, p.52)*

To put it simply: The scientific ambition to understand the dynamics of subjectivity must be sacrificed in the pursuit of pragmatic policy needs.

I think the difficulties involved in such use can be related to two conceptual problems, both enforced by the political context in which the concept was conceived and propagated. One is *reification* or *commodification*, i.e. it is assumed that competences are immutable properties that can be acquired and possessed. This reification is directly triggered by objectives of measurement and comparison, but also in the thinking of economists regarding the logic of the market (commodification) and capital (accumulation). The definition and description of key competencies seem to be driven by a dream of a universally flexible workforce in an era where the industrial (Taylorist) division of labour and reduction of the complexity of the employee's operations is becoming outdated.

In the above summary definition of competence the two first items clearly refer to a future work situation. In the 3rd item the attention is drawn to the necessary endeavour of mobilizing "cognitive and non-cognitive" prerequisites. This attempt for a psychological conceptual delineation revolves around the relationship between cognitive factors, which are well defined, and a great many other things that can only be defined negatively, as non-cognitive, but seem to include motivational and other emotional factors. Within a cognitivist figure of thinking and learning, which

seems to be the starting point, it is the relationship between universality/abstraction and specificity/concreteness that challenges the conceptualisation, since practical problem solving and agency involves something more than abstract knowledge. Weinert himself also refers to empirical data showing that the solution of difficult problems always requires the involvement of content-specific knowledge and skills (Weinert, 1998, 2001). In his psychological contribution to the DeSeCo project's initial conceptual process, Weinert emphasizes that competence implies and presupposes, in the fulfilment of a task, a combination of *'cognitive and (in many cases) motivational, ethical, volitional, and/or social components'* (Rychen & Salganik, 2001, p 62).

This leads us to the second problem of the prevailing competence discourse, namely that it does not take *the subjective nature of competences* seriously. In spite of assuming that the nature of practice is unpredictable and will require more and other than cognitive prerequisites, but it seems to be seen as factors that add to the complexity of the specific tasks on which the competent agent can act successfully. In this way competence seems independent of the specific subject and his/her relation to the practices in question.

This is fatal for the understanding of competence, and particularly the dynamics of *developing competences* – i.e. learning. Although the requirements or success criteria for competent practice are externally determined, competent actions are basically subjective processes, based in feelings and interpretations: problem comprehension, impulse for practice, mobilization of knowledge, learning, and practising skills in new contexts. These subjective or "non-cognitive prerequisites" – to use the DESECO vocabulary – are result of life experiences and previous learning. The concept must involve a view of competence as a personal, culturally anchored and experience-based capacity, located in the competent person's way of interpreting situations and engaging in them, and also as a tool for learning. It must seek to understand the subjective "productive forces" that may lead to learning and practice development, including those involved in the emotional and cognitive work of detachment and reconfiguration of experiences. It must enable analyses of the complexes of rationality and defence mechanisms, rooted in the life experience, from the interaction with family, leadership in community etc, and when, how and why they may in a professional career be redefined by professional knowledge – but still underpinned by personal life experience.

If we recognize this subjective dimension of practice we enable an empirical investigation of the relation between those aspects of competence that could only be negatively defined, the "non-cognitive psychosocial prerequisites", and the life experience and learning of the practitioner – which are individual, situated and changeable. This will, however, also require that we overcome the reification/commodification of competences – which is a consequence of the political use of the concept.

I have presented a broader theoretical and diagnostic discussion of these questions in an article (Salling Olesen, 2013a) and the thematic issue of the Journal in which it appears. This article gives an illumination of the contradictory societal space in which competencies, including their subjective dimensions, are transformed.

3. Theorizing learning (psycho-)socially

Theorizing learning adequately in relation to competence development can no longer be seen as a question of transferring knowledge transfer. It will not only have to take into consideration the unpredictable objects and the specific and situated nature of problems and practices but it must also incorporate the specificity of life history and the psycho-social dynamics of life experience. However, recent developments in theorizing of learning in relation to work may provide some points of departure.

The general development of learning research has in the last few years developed beyond a psychological and educational framework. Several more or less independent processes in other disciplines or across disciplines have contributed, also redefining the very object of research. These developments have involved several elements of radical rethinking which moves beyond the previous orientations to see learning as an individual acquisition process conditioned by more or less intentional stimulating activities in the form of education and training. First of all a fundamental constructivist thinking is prevailing: Learning is a constructive activity, which is interactive but neither just mirroring nor determined by the encounter with the outer world. Second: the notion of an individual, coherent subject of learning and knowing is being challenged by different ideas of de-centreed or collective/network subjectivity. Third: Learning (and knowing) as an entirely mental phenomenon is being challenged by different ideas of materiality, both on the side of the bodily nature of knowing and learning and in the sense of knowing and learning as social practices.

My own research has been oscillating between empirical and practical engagements in work life and work related learning and the general theory of adult learning processes. On this background I theorized learning on the basis of the concept of Everyday life Experience (Salling Olesen, 1989, 2007). The notion of experience has been an important critical concept in Danish academic research in adult education – among others because of shifting the perspective from education and teaching to the process and context of the (adult) learner, thereby addressing those many forms of adult learning that are not formal education, and thereby critical to the institutional horizon of the discipline of pedagogy/education. It referred strongly to work experiences and work related learning, but more broadly enabled a new mediation between educational research and other areas of research (labour market and skills research which saw adult learning as an adaptation to work life and

sociocultural research which focused on of political and cultural organizing (social movements history) and community activism.

With the framework of lifelong learning this theoretical approach has gained new momentum. Seeing learning as a ubiquitous aspect of everyday life experience means theorizing a relationship between subjective agency and identity processes and the social situation of the subject. Societal relations play a role not only "from the outside", shaping the social situation, but also "from the inside", by the societal production of the learner subject throughout life history. To avoid the usual dichotomy between the individual and the soci(et)al level of analysis is a key challenge for learning theory. Actually, I think that the theorizing of learning may be a key to discussions about agency and democracy in a globalizing capitalism, and the role of knowledge in a late modern society (with much broader resonance to social theory, politics and epistemology than can be discussed here (Leledakis, 1995; Salling Olesen, 2002).

4. Identity processes and life history

These conceptual deliberations – but also the increasing ambition to engage everyone in lifelong learning - has highlighted the necessity to understand adults' learning and subjective engagements as an independent dynamic. This imperative precipitated a methodological development of the Life History approach drawing upon inspirations and practices from (auto)biographical research as an empirical means of understanding and elaborating individual workers' learning process and how this arose throughout their lives and their subjective engagement, including working life. Understanding the significance of gender, class, ethnicity and previous career has become central to this line of enquiry, both in relation to specific work process and workplaces, and the livelihood significance of employment and paid work (Salling Olesen, 2004b, 2016; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2013).

A specific form of work identity, or subjective engagement in the work process by individuals, arose from studying areas of professional work. In professionalized occupational fields, it seems that the relative strength of worker identification with their occupation is stronger and more particular, and the significance of this occupational subjectivity in relation to competence in the conduct of these professionals' work seems to become an integrated dimension of personal identity and life experience. These findings arose through researching the work and sense of self of engineers, medical doctors (GPs), nurses and teachers. In these professions there seems to be strong interdependence and also tensions between personal life experiences (including gender, class and ethnicity) and the culturally shaped field of professional conduct which is transferred to the individual in the process of professional knowledge formation and the development of professional habitual practices. In these cases learning is not only an acquisition of knowledge – which is

but also a participation in a bodily practice formed by technologies, work organisations etc. So learning in the work process and the learning for a specific professional career seems to be a result of the interaction of relatively different dynamics of the individual life history and of societal and structural changes of the environment of professions' work, and the mediation between these dimensions must be seen as a specific version, as it has been structured in a heuristic model for empirical investigation (Salling Olesen 2002; 2007; 2012b).

Understanding subjectivity as a result of life history interaction experiences also led to a new development of the life history method, problematizing the subject position, in line with the general developments of learning. Drawing on social psychology and an "in-depth hermeneutic" procedure with the basis in psychoanalytic interpretation procedures transferred to cultural symbolic activities, we developed a new concept of subjectivity and a new procedure of interpreting everyday life interactions: i.e. in work and in work-related learning processes. This development enabled us to deal theoretically with the subjectivity of workers' individual engagement in work and also enabled a new methodological reflection of the subjective involvement of the researcher in the interpretation of learning processes (Salling Olesen, 2013b, 2016) – but actually it had a clear focus on understanding the subjective dimensions of learning. Emotional and cognitive processes are seen as dimensions of the same process and closely interwoven with bodily and social practice, processing cultural meaning and societal conditions. Studying the production of the relating subject in which they are united (the life history) leads our attention to symbolic activity and language use and their relationship to their lived experience and ongoing practice.

5. Experience

The concept of experience have many varieties in education, some of which are simplistic cognitive ideas within curricular thinking, others informed by a training strategy assuming that people automatically adapt practices they are experiencing. The concept of experience I would like to advocate is a much wider concept of life experience. It is the individual, sensual and embodied version of a historical or societal circumstances that this individual has experienced at "eye level" and as a personally involved agent, and on which (s)he has built a world view, coined by Theodor W. Adorno and elaborated by Oskar Negt (Negt, 1999):

Experience is the process whereby we as human beings, individually and collectively, consciously master reality, and the ever-living understanding of this reality and our relation to it. Experiences in the plural…as in everyday language… are to be seen as products of this process….Experience is a subjective process….[It is] also a collective process...through a socially

structured consciousness … finally an active, critical and creative process … (Salling Olesen, 1989, p 8).

The learning theory point is to connect the immediate experience of everyday life with it's societal as well as its individual psychic dimensions. For empirical analysis it offers an operational connection between three aspects or modalities of experience. Three relatively independent dynamics are mediated through each other in every agency and learning process: everyday life experience, life (history) experience, and cultivated knowledge. The consciousness of everyday life is a situated and embodied experience, closely related to the engagement of the individual in specific practices. The situation is structurally embedded in societal history, but it is also influenced by life experience and culturally available semantic schemes, and the way in which they are individually acquired in life experience.

We can analyse empirical material as mediations of these dynamics. It includes the individual experience building throughout *individual life history*, with the interference between cognitive and emotional aspects, which comes in a specific version in every individual. Every individual has a specific emotional and social experience which has sedimented a general view of the world and ways of seeing him/herself. We may understand *identity* processes in terms of this sedimentation and ongoing engagement in the world. Identity is thereby not seen as a final and stable self definition, but as a partly fluent, partly contradictory, and always active engagement and (re)construction of one self.

We can see *knowledge, symbols and norms* as forms of culturally objectivated experience - we may speak of an urban culture, or the female experience of double work – and in relation to the development of societal labour we may speak of an industrial experience, or a professional expertise - more specifically we can see crafts or professions as collective experiences that have been historically stabilized, and we can even see literacy and mathematical modelling in this perspective. By conceptualizing learning with the concept of experience applied here we open an examination of different levels of learning with different volatility. Learning is a constructive process, transforming collective cultural experiences (knowledge, skills and normative directions) into individual experience, constituting individual subjects in doing so, and at the same time changing social practices. The psycho-societal insights and methodology was developed to enable the understanding of the complex interrelation between the *subjective dynamic* of experience and identity, and societal changes. By referring to a material theory of socialization – seeing the building of individual psyche in the social interaction – it enables also the reflection of bodily and practical dimensions of learning.

6. Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning/Assessment of Competences

Back to the tool perspective: For the realization of a lifelong learning policy it seems essential to establish structures and procedures which support individual

competence development and identity processes. It is however a political issue to which extent it will prioritize the bureaucratic needs for stable and comparable measures, or will support individuals in reflecting and governing their own learning careers.

Assessment of competences at the individual level have been introduced in European countries under slightly different headings – Validation of Prior Learning, Competency Assessment, Recognition of Prior Learning, the Danish "realkompetencevurdering" (an assessment of competencies from all previous experience), the French "Bilan de Compétence", etc. Assessment criteria are completely different, procedures also, defined by the actors involved and the institutional environment (Alberici & Serreri, 2003; Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2013; Salling Olesen, 2004a). Generally, it is possible to see two main regimes of recognition; work life competence applied by business and industry and scholastic assessment of knowledge and intellectual skills applied by the formal education institutions. The concept of competence seems more adequate for establishing a framework which can mediate between these different legal and moral spheres. But remembering what has been said about the subjective dimension of experiences and hence reconfiguration of competences a substantial challenge of theoretical as well as practical nature remains (Salling Olesen, 2001, 2014)).

A couple of Danish doctoral research projects address a mechanism of individual competence assessment (IKV) of applicants to professional bachelor education within a number of areas (teacher, preschool pedagogue, nursing, physiotherapy, construction technician). The standard gateway to professional bachelor education now is an A-level and the applicants who benefit from the IKV-access are people who have a lower formal school education and then some non-academic professional education and/or relevant work experience. In these projects the researchers have adopted a qualitative approach to understand the life historical dynamics of competence development. They undertake life history interviews with a sample of students who have applied for and gained access to these professional programmes based on a non-traditional background. The analysis will seek to understand on the basis of these individual cases to which extent and how they have been able to reconfigure knowledge and skills between the life situations they have been engaged in, into the present situation of the educational program and the future of their planned professions. Apart from seeing knowledge and skills as situated in social practices, that are widely different, they are also analysed within a subjective process which involves a change of life perspective and preliminary identification with the situation as a student and the prospects of the profession chosen. The hope is to provide some exemplary interpretations which can illuminate the intellectual and emotional reconfigurations which take place in this process.
I will briefly summarize some of the emerging ideas about how these specific interpretations of life histories of learning and career can contribute to a theoretical framework or scaffold for understanding competence development and hence

assessing competence in the context of guidance and formal recognition of competences.

We need to understand the competence in the context of a life experience, and competence development as a change within a certain more or less stabilized identity, or as a moment of an identity development. In categorizing life experiences we may first of all draw on fundamental social experiences of class, gender and ethnicity which accumulate to create a cultural identity, but also the experience of the role of one self in life as can be seen in patterns of biographical narration: does the individual see him/herself as the master of his/her life course, as a product of certain environments or even a victim of destiny (Alheit & Dausien, 2002; Schütze, 1984). It is decisive to grasp identity more as a subjective act of identification than as the cultural imprint of social definition, and it is decisive to acknowledge the processual and most likely ambivalent nature of identity (Salling Olesen & Weber, 2001; Weber, 1998). However, it is further important to enable a more concrete differentiation of the societal relations, most importantly class, gender and ethnicity. Becker-Schmidt provided the conception of the double socialization of women (Becker-Schmidt, 1991; Becker-Schmidt & Knapp, 1987, Martin Baethge uses the term Life concept to signify the degree of work orientation in peoples' lives, distinguishing between work orientation, family orientation and leisure orientation – and more importantly in a major empirical research of young people's form of work orientation. He distinguishes in orientation to the work as concrete life activity, subdivided in self realisation through the content of work and primary orientation to social relations in the workplace, and work as an instrumental activity, subdivided into income and security orientation or career and status orientation (Baethge, 1990; Baethge, Hantsche, Pelull, & Voskamp, 1988). As can be seen these empirical sensitizing categories can be seen as specifications of class and gender identities, and in this way help to discover the micro changes and ambivalences in these fundamental categories. Within work identities one can further seek to identify specific work activities and the forms of engagement within them. Professional identification can be seen as a subjective identification presuming autonomy and responsibility in work, and in Baethge's sociological categories reaching between the specific work process content and the status/career category as a societal dimension.

My intention here is mostly to show the need to integrate categories which relate to the societal dimensions of life experiences with the idea of subjective experience process as indicated in the sections about learning theory and experience. It is – repeating – decisive to understand the complex process of career and competence development, processing on a concrete level of everyday life and identification but drawing on the previous life experience of individuals and thereby on fundamental societal categories like class, gender and ethnicity. It is further, from our development of the life history approach, a useful point to understand the "scenic" nature of life experiences (Olesen & Weber, 2012; Salling Olesen, 2012a). All the

knowledge, skill, attitudes, etc., we carry with us are embodied combinations of emotional, cognitive, and agentic practices that are entangled in a concrete scenario of experience, and learning is to a very high degree *experimental and reflective reconfigurations* of elements from these life experiences which detach them more or less from one subjective configuration to another. *Competence* in the meaning here promoted is a potential for in-situ mobilization of mental and bodily resources, which may also end up being as learning, producing a new *competency* i.e. a stabilized immediate availability of these resources which facilitates and increases the potential for other situations.

Competence assessment is a mapping *and prognostic* procedure in which you anticipate – with reflecting, guidance, and/or legal implications, to which extent and in which directions a person can develop his/her potential for mobilizing which resources. My idea is that the psycho-social integration, elaborated by those types of categories that have been outlined above, can contribute to a language that can handle (not resolve, because it is societal and inherent in contradictory interests) but *handle* the contradictions that are appearing in the use of the concept of competence in policy discourses like the lifelong learning agenda. And this is exactly what competence assessment and validation of prior learning is up to.

But there is still significant empirical research and conceptual elaboration to be undertaken before the assessment can become a relatively transparent general equivalent of human capability.

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Integrating non-formal and informal learning in Honduras

15

The educational model of Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras[43]

Céleo Emilio Arias Moncada

> *The fundamental purpose of scientific discourse is not the mere presentation of information and thought, but rather its actual communication. It does not matter how pleased an author might be to have converted all the right data into sentences and paragraphs; it matters only whether a large majority of the reading audience accurately perceives what the author had in mind. (Gopen and Swan, 1990)*

It is crucial to understand the university management processes in a multilevel context (mega, macro, meso, micro), on the mechanisms and/or elements that influence Honduran higher education as a public good. Especially when educational policies are impregnated with various discourses (dominant and alternative), even more when they are mixed and double, which respond to different interests and in order to interpret them it is required a critical analysis, to differentiate what actually leads or not to inclusive sustainable human development. In many cases, the same mechanism (isolated) leads to different impacts and several (articulated) mechanisms could lead to the same purpose. The analysis should consider a systematic focus that would deconstruct this discourse and, at the same time, facilitate the definition of inclusive public policies aimed at redistributive social justice in the Honduran sub-systems of higher education.

Wong (2014: 189) argues that the recognition of prior experiences and learning (VPL, RPL, acronyms in English) can offer a significant contribution to social justice and higher education through the practice of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning, aligned with the concept of social justice of the Human Development Capabilities Approach-HDCA.

To Identify the key elements and/or mechanisms that could contribute to the construction of a public policy of optimal integral inclusion in the Honduran sub-system of higher education, and particularly in the curriculum development of the educational model of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), as

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head of the sector, is significantly important. However, it must also reach all the other actors (public and private) of the sub-system of the higher level, as well as every other subsystems that make up the national educational system, within a framework of education and learning throughout life. With implications, both for each individual who values and defines being and making part of their lives a process of capacity development, as well as for Honduran society in general, and that transcends in contributing to reduce the levels of historical exclusion and inequality, reversing them gradually over time. Therefore, a doctoral thesis like the one developed and proposed in the present study becomes essential.

1. Background

At international level, Piketty (2014), based on historical data from various regions of the world, argues that capital accumulation models generate inequalities, among other collateral problems. Notably, according to López-Calva, Lustig & Ortiz Juarez (2015), the Latin American context has always been seen as a region with inherent high levels of inequality, referring to the statement by Alexander von Humboldt who defined the New Spain in 1803 *"as The land of inequalities.".* Always in the context of Latin America, Burchardt (2015) identifies a *paradox* in ancient models (over 5 centuries) exploitation of natural and human resources (mainly indigenous), making historical analyzes based on statistics from several countries in Latin America, drawing attention that despite the incremental income of the so called *extractive economies* in recent years especially in governances with 'leftist' perspective and progressive leaders, have not managed to redistribute social justice, and quite the contrary, inequalities are increasingly alarming, despite some redistributive practices but with not so significant levels. On the other hand, Peters (2012a) in the education sector, with case studies from Uruguay, shows that inequality is a challenge that remains pending from progressive and left governments, arguing with evidence that education is not the panacea to solve the inequalities, since there are other redistributive mechanisms for example of the labor sector and of social development that have contributed with greater significance in generating opportunities and reducing inequalities.

Research in the context of Uruguay, with a progressive perspective (Peters, 2012b), argues that *"the biggest challenge for Uruguay* 's *education system is* to *reverse the trend of reproduction of social inequalities"*. The Honduran case is no stranger to what happens in other contexts within the Latin American region, since in the last decades the region has the highest rates of educational inequality. According to Aponte-Hernández (2008, p 11, 14, 23), Honduras owns the highest concentration of inequality and poverty and low levels of per capita income. With tendencies of economic inequality (income), a Gini coefficient of (0.54), and trends of inequality in education (2002-2006) with adult schooling of 75%, primary and secondary education 87.6% and in tertiary education 14.7%. Indicators of inclusion and equity

in higher education (2001-2006); Tuition Higher Education 120,012, female 55%, GDP higher education 1.20.

At the macro level, in Honduras, paradoxes and contradictions in the model of historical and current development are present, which has favored recurrently the *free market* and in the case of the educational model of traditional UNAH in partnership with law presented. However, in relation to the current theoretical educational model that privileges sustainable human development, there are tensions and contradictions (autonomy and dominance), coupled with the internal dynamics of the institution (resistance to change and absence of complementary mechanisms). Is the issue of inclusion and inequality relevant? You can respond, taking into account some points. This is due to the pending debt of the UNAH with the Honduran society; the accumulated exclusion throughout its history up to the present in terms of; people, types of knowledge, experience and skills, noting that within the most unequal region of the planet (Latin America), Honduras's indicators of educational coverage and inclusion are the lowest, most of the groups that are economically vulnerable are those who have less access to higher education. In the case of knowledge, on the one hand, the non-formal and informal are affected, especially the informal, which does not have the full recognition of their existence.

From the most recent stage (last 12 years), during the process of creating the current organic law and giving way to the IV reform and transformation of the University, one of the arguments for its construction and implementation, was based on historical background of traditional educational models, pointing to them with pedagogical practices, access, power relations, learning, evaluation, management, as inequitable, exclusionary and generating inequalities, as well as high levels of institutional corruption and governance and centralized and destructive leadership, among other aspects. It is derived under the current process of the IV reform to counter malpractices described above, setting as a fourth university life knowledge management [1], and a theoretical educational model that favors the principles of quality, relevance, equity, among others in addition to some (partial) agreements, tacit, implicit, indigenous and local knowledge is recognized, but without the required mechanisms in terms of legislation, policies and regulatory framework, funds, and other elements necessary for a real and effective implementation. In other words, it has been incomplete and is more a declarative discourse.

With the previous paragraphs, attention is drawn to the trends of higher education according to UNESCO reports, mainly in developing countries, the statistics show not very favorable and flattering figures, although some authors (cf. Frank 2007) refers to the extraordinary expansion and global diffusion of the university in its historical process from its creation of its religious origins until the present time. Being relevant then the question posed by (Unterhalter 2013: 44), What about global inequalities in higher education? Responding and arguing that inequalities are entangled and entangled with dimensions outside the sector often associated with poverty. Peters

(2012a) argues that eminently educational factors are not the only causes of educational inequalities in the Uruguayan case, and mentions different socio reform labor *(family allowances, health, wage board, etc*.) in the middle run contributed significantly to reduce inequalities, namely that *"education is not a panacea for social policy [...] to Uruguay".* Peters (2012a) also wonders: *Is it possible* to *move towards equality in education?* Considering it as "the dilemma of the educational policies of the left in Latin America", according to Peters, the elimination and/or eradication of historical inequalities, would be difficult, as it would have to happen and/or imply "concessions to privileged sectors" The creation of broad political agreements.

Although higher education is considered a public good (criteria of non-rivalry and non-exclusion), historically in the different stages of evolution, since its creation in 1847 the National Autonomous University of Honduras has had educational models and perspectives that were oriented and led to a reproduction of exclusion and inequality. It favors among other things, on the one hand, elite groups with greater possibilities of access to education and, on the other hand, privileging traditional careers and formal and scholastic learning.

2. Problem Statement

There is a problem both in the context of Honduras linked to exclusion and the enhancement of inequality, as well as in the international context of the Recognition of prior learning (RPL) field of study as inclusion mechanisms, associated to models with perspectives that deal with a double discourse framework, which has been built by various actors in the last five decades. According to different sources, historically and at present, UNAH has been reproducing a systematic exclusion; *people* (vulnerable groups, ethnic groups, etc.), *learning, experiences, knowledge, geographical areas*, which as a consequence has contributed to the high levels of integral inequality (social, economic, cultural, political, etc.) of Honduran society. In the case of the higher education sub-system, the responsibility of UNAH is largely attributed to being the governing body responsible for conducting this sub-system.

The problem generally addressed in the present study, at the empirical level, is that of educational exclusion, which has been sharpened historically in the sub-system of the Honduran upper level with high levels of inequality in access. Such exclusion is related to various aspects and diverse groups of society. Within these aspects are identified; Inequality, it is worth mentioning that the term is often used synonymously and interchangeably, identifying the common element of justice and injustice within the definitions of each term. There are social groups or strata that have not succeeded in achieving the Honduran higher education system, for various reasons; rejection of admission exams, exclusionary pedagogical practices, socioeconomic limitations, geographic location, drop-out in pre-higher education

levels, among other mechanisms. Then within the groups that gain access to the university, but are not recognized and integrate the previous knowledge and/or learning that were achieved both before and after entering this sub-system, as well as those obtained in parallel non-formal and Informal, and within this group are individuals who do not achieve permanence and therefore terminal efficiency. There are also groups that managed to graduate from the upper level at the undergraduate level, but then from a perspective of continuous and/or permanent education these groups fail to recognize the experiences and learnings that occur outside of eminently formal scenarios.

In addition, the historical context of Honduras' national development models has responded to the demands of the so-called "free market", focusing on the one hand to favor the export of raw materials and mainly the extractive activities of non-renewable resources, according to and defined by Berry (1999), Gudynas (2013, cit. in Burchardt, 2015) as *extractive economies,* besides the two determinants classical force a) exploitation and utilisation of nature, and b) dependence on prices of raw materials the international market (Galeano, cit. In Burchardt, 2015), and on the other hand to reproduce since the discovery of America mechanisms of capital accumulation and limited mechanisms of redistribution, generating as in all countries of the Latin American region the highest rates of inequality, and in the specific case of Honduras, is the most unequal within the unequal. This is supported by empirical evidence, and it could be argued, extrapolated and contextualized based on studies on inequality (vine. Piketty, 2014), globally (cf. Burchart, 2015), in Latin America (cf. Peters, 2014) based on case studies in the education sector in some Latin American countries, as well as alternative proposals context of Latin America (vid. Peters, 2015).

In the literature review on 'prior learning', there are authors who identify theoretical problems (ontology and epistemology) and empirical problems. Guo & Andersson (2006) argues the theoretical dimension, referring to the equivalence of contexts, arguing that `*the main problem is the erroneous epistemological perception of difference and knowledge, as well as the ontological foundations of positivism and liberal universalism dominates current practice of `recognition'.* Then Peters (2006) on empirical dimension evidence argues a discursive struggle in the process of the recognition of 'prior learning' by linguistic analysis and critical discourse analysis, building on Fairclough, observes two practices associated with RPL, VPL; a) the use of learning outcomes and b) focused on portfolios. According to Andersson's introductory analysis, Fejes & Sandberg (2013), in the field of research on the recognition of prior learning, the discourse that has been constructed, originating in the 1970s from a humanistic perspective, to the 1980s an economist, has transcended in the emergency in the last decade in a mixed and/or double speech. In

addition, Andersson (2014)[44] refers to the voltage of both perspectives, based on the contributions made by several authors in this field of study. As it is possible to identify in the described in this paragraph, there is a general need, in the field of the previous 'learnings' declared by the authors, that according to the analyzed literature, have contributed more to this field, to realize discourse analysis and on a deconstruction that allows to clarify the combination of perspectives and/or double discourse, in multiple contexts and fed and complemented by other possible linked fields that possibly have more interdisciplinary maturity, in its components of theoretical, methodological and empirical foundation.

3. Justification the study

At the mega (supranational) level, the context of Latin America and particularly Honduras is vulnerable to the diffusion of foreign policies and discourses related to global agendas, which, on the one hand, do not necessarily respond to the authentic needs of society, and on the other hand, are not led to the perspective of Sustainable Human Development (DHS, acronym in spanish) that has been assumed by the UNAH in its current process of reform and transformation.

The current theoretical educational model of the UNAH proposes a category of 'emancipatory democratic' (inmaterial humanist) of 'lifelong learning' and states elements for greater inclusion, but there are gaps and/or it does not yet have the different and diverse elements and systematic and optimal mechanisms (conceptual, normative, instrumental, policies, programs, projects, strategies, budget, etc.) that would be required to achieve this in its practical implementation, and still remain elements that remain binding on the traditional model, i.e. Identifies even a double discourse that probably creates risks and problems to the institutional model and as a reference for the sub-system of Honduran higher education. The theoretical concepts still cannot be operationalized according to the needs of the context of Honduras and the different structural levels and of concretion of the educational model; for example, the concept of educational inclusion by vulnerable groups is still at the level of agreement of the university council, but after seven years have not yet developed the conceptualizations that are derived in strategies and mainstreaming the entire regulatory framework, reference is made to that it would adopt the concept of the United Nations Development Program, which privileges the clinical model of inclusion and is in the process of reform and debate to give way to a more comprehensive concept and a new paradigm of inclusion.

Within the UNAH, there is a Doctoral program on sustainable human development, but according to content analysis of a thesis sample on this subject, the maturity is

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44 DWORD: Research into practices? Third volume of the trilogy that according to Andersson (2014) represents the greatest effort to position the REAP as a field of study. '- noting that particularly in this volume - is foregrounds relevance and the relationship between research and practice '.

at an *introductory* level of the constructs or theoretical dimensions most determinant for the implementation of this educational model, including pedagogy and its curricular and didactic development, nonetheless privileging democratic emancipation and sustainable human development, as well as emphasizing a quantum leap to the traditional model exclusionary, even paradoxical aspects are identified, which on the one hand promotes innovative pedagogy, flexible, etc., on the other hand focuses on the disciplinary and leave the freedom to continue the designs by subject, among other elements typical of the traditional and historical. Added to this in the empirical dimension, according to the interviews, focus groups and documents, the current reality of the implementation of this model is insipient and not significant. Despite good intentions and actions that fail to concretize the proposal in a systematic way.

Regarding legal aspects, the new fundamental law of Honduran education, issued in 2012, integrates the formal, non-formal and informal components, and establishes that the sub-system of higher education will have to be developed taking into account these components. The UNAH as rector of this sub-system, to date after half a decade (almost 5 years) does not yet have all the mechanisms and/or elements to implement what the fundamental law mandates. There are some elements[45] through Resolution No. CT-No. 314-A-207, the University Regional Education Network Policy of the National Autonomous University of Honduras, for knowledge management with quality, pertinence and equity, is approved at UNAH. This agreement, among other aspects, aims to 'contribute to improving the relevance of university education and equity in the access of the Honduran population to higher education', as well as taking into account a) the concepts of indigenous (ethnic), local, tacit, and implicit knowledge. b) UNAH educational model document, approved in 2008, c) diagnosis of the situation of vulnerable groups, and social cohesion, promoted and facilitated by the RIAIPE-alpha III project with funds from the European Union d) agreements; The university council issued in 2009 (CU-O-092-010-2009) and 2014 (CU-O-092-010-2009), which seeks to develop the components i) System of continuous improvement of quality and Equity of admission, admission, permanence and discharge; ii) Integrated information system on Admission, Admission, Permanence and Exit of students; iii) Improvement of the quality of the national education system.

To achieve UNAH's fulfillment in its role conferred by the constitution of the Republic of Honduras, and according to the mandate of the current basic education law, as already mentioned in the different documents of the process of the fourth reform and university transformation, requires scientific studies that allow to identify and analyze its university management process with a focus of continuous improvement oriented towards an optimal integral inclusion of the sub-system of higher education in the formal, non-formal and informal components. Through a critical and

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45   According to technical reports of monitoring & evaluation of the Academic Vice-rectory of UNAH.

propositional analysis of the current educational model, it is necessary to identify and seek mechanisms and elements that allow integrating the demands of society in learning, experiences, knowledge and people, in curricular development, both in its pedagogical and didactic dimension.

Leadership and different key actors that integrate the levels of concreteness of the educational model of the UNAH are supposed to prioritize their university management taking into account the role played by UNAH in the rectory of higher education as a public good. In other words, they need to rigorously review the meaningful and abundant information on the different perspectives of university educational models. This would allow them to prepare and conduct themselves to the position they have adopted in their current model of sustainable human development. In addition to contextualizing its operation, taking into account the great trends, at all levels, on educational policies and practices at the level of the national, Central American and international educational system. It is very pertinent what some authors, based on empirical studies, argue about the diffusion of policies of the European Union and their direct and indirect influence on the national agendas of both the countries that make up the community European countries, as well as countries in other regions and continents.

Traditionally and particularly in the last decades, a number of initiatives and strategies have been implemented, which follow strategies and agendas from other contexts (eg the European Union), such initiatives translated into programs and projects do not necessarily respond to the needs of the context of Latin America and especially for purposes of the present study of Honduras. The elements of implicit discourse have not been investigated with much intensity from researchers of the so-called "South". Some independent studies point out that bilateral (Europe-Central America) partnership agreements respond more to trade rather than to cooperation (Morazán, 2008). In addition, initiatives have been more opportunistic to take advantage of part of the partner universities of Latin America, but without a strategy that on the one hand skills are developed, but also impregnate the interests and needs of the region, assuming the asymmetries and perspectives of optimal integral inclusion. It may have implications, in limits and/or problems to identify the direction in which some external initiatives are going, which probably are disguised as terms, that could be assumed relevant, however the effects or impacts could be partial on one hand, seeking to legitimize reproductions traditional status quo, and on the other hand not be optimal in terms of inclusion and social justice.

Optimal inclusion, increased access and coverage, reduced exclusion and inequalities in the higher education sub-system will probably depend largely on the perspective favored by the educational model and the body of mechanisms and/or elements that support it. Integrate the discourse of public policies of Honduran higher education. Therefore, the UNAH as the governing body of this sub-system requires original information on educational models that are oriented towards an

optimal integral inclusion. In addition to understanding traditional perspectives, approaches and models, dominant and alternative, assuming that the position that has adopted the current model of the UNAH is to give priority to Sustainable Human Development.

4. Purpose and objectives

The present research is confined to the field of study of prior learning, and as a starting point of this section, it is important to emphasize that research design articulates the internal coherence between the aims, objectives and questions of the investigation. To analyze the mechanisms of the discursive framework of 'prior learning' within the framework of 'lifelong learning' (knowledge economy, knowledge society) to contribute to an optimal integral inclusion of higher education and formal learning, non-formal, and informal (tacit, implicit, local, autochthonous) in the educational model of the UNAH.

The purpose and general objective is to identify the mechanisms and/or elements that make up this framework of discourses (concepts, constructs, approaches, perspectives, models, debates, agreements, etc.). Then, to construct the corpus and sub-corpus and proceed to the deconstruction of the discourse in function of the research questions formulated, that allow responding to how to contribute to an optimal inclusion of the learning that preaches the current educational model of the UNAH, conducive and oriented towards redistributive social justice.

Specific objectives were broken down, derivatives and constructed to contribute to the purpose and overall goal, then we describe each of them: i) identification of the state of the art and/or status of the field of study of the *'prior learning'* and as approaches, models and perspectives on education, and *'learning throughout life'* at all levels; ii) Analyze the 'lifelong learning' implicit in the educational model of the UNAH, based on models of institutional analysis (emphasis meso level); iii) contextualize and identify the elements and/or discursive mechanisms at all levels of concretion of the educational model of the UNAH; iv) broaden discourse analysis and complement critical content analysis; v) Contribute to a public policy in higher education in Honduras.

5. Research Questions

Based on the need for the study, the general question was identified: *How to integrate 'experience and prior learning'* [46]*, mainly informal and non-formal learning, in the educational model of UNAH for optimal overall lead to inclusion with redistributive social justice?*

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46   Prior learning is interchangeably in different contexts (see section concepts and definitions).

In order to approach this general question, two complementary analysis moments were given, disaggregated into two sub-questions: a) In the critical content analysis: What have been the most used constructs at the theoretical, methodological and empirical level in the field of the knowledge of prior learning and experiences (formal, non-formal and informal)? b) In the critical analysis of the discourse: How should the mechanisms and/or elements of the discourse of a policy of 'lifelong learning' and 'previous learning' should be defined and structured, in order to be guided and oriented towards an optimal integral inclusion?

In the literature review, the following was identified: i) "*At European level before taking out CONFINTEA 2009[47] , recognition and validation especially non - formal and informal education is important in equity, access and market of work. Informal learning is most effective for many of the socially excluded*. "; ii) "Peters (2006) using concepts of power and knowledge, from Foucault and Fairclough and Chouliaraki. For Foucault uses the concepts of speech, power / knowledge, biopower and power technology to explore because REAP practices have not succeeded in challenging academic or empower candidates hegemony; iii) ibid "postulates that RPL is caught in a bind, and candidates in a "discursive struggle"; d) According to (Wong 2014: 189) argues that the RPL, can make a significant contribution to social justice and higher education [...] privileging the perspective of HDCA.
Based on the foregoing, a hypothesis was proposed: *To help reduce inequality in higher education it will probably be required to systematically articulate mechanisms, practices and inclusive perspectives (multi-level) to redistribute with complete justice (social, political, economic, cultural, etc.), access and recognition of experiences and informal and non-formal learning.*

6. Delimitations

To answer the research questions, the hypothesis had to be validated, in order to make a pathway for the construction of the thesis, which is described in this section. On *the methodology,* a draft design for the research was due more to a deductive logic, but after a certain degree of implementation in the intermediate stages of the research process, a good level of consolidated research was achieved by making adjustments, especially in identifying the discourse analysis. This was key to the historical process of field of study and justified its complementarity to the content analysis and especially to the purposes, objectives and research questions, the stake a redesign[48] of the investigation was a key aspect of guidance for further improving and completing the different components of body chapters of this doctoral report.

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47 International Conference on Adult Education- Sixth International Conference on Adult Education UNESCO (CONFINTEA VI) held in Brazil in 2009.
48 Discussed during presentation, participation and feedback at various colloquia at Doctoral Global Social Policies and Governance (GSPG), International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel) and the International Centre for Decent Work (ICDD).

Especially in the iterative moments that built and deconstructed, and in some spaces puzzle in different sections, for which the methodological framework and the implicit logic and structure were displayed, allowed to light and find answers to research questions, adjusted and improved and in some areas puzzles were displayed in different sections, for which the methodological framework and the implicit logic and structure, allowed to light and find answers to research questions, adjusted and improved.

On the *main results*, the state of affairs of field of study, with the caveat that the sample is limited to documents that were selected for analysis were identified. Based on these results succeeded in making a measurement of the likely level of maturity, which gave elements to design strategies in multiple dimensions, among which stands future studies that will be required for both ripening fields of study linked, as the researcher of this research. In addition, it was possible to identify key concepts and constructs most commonly used in the scientific community in the field of study of *prior learning*. Based on which the categories of content analysis defined, then encode the sub-corpus that made the general corpus of speech and the respective mechanisms and elements that comprise, differentiating privileging each type of speech (dominant and alternative).

On the major *contributions of this study*, however they relate to the above, a) validate the analysis of content analysis literature as a good practice to study fields linked to this thesis; b) to provide a common language for the theoretical analysis framework, by constructing integrative categories merging models approaches and perspectives, with very good logical operationalization and analysis of the key, alternative and mixed speeches (double); c) to propose an additional level of specificity to the educational model, to achieve a more enlarged spreading global supranational policies and critical vision, which respond more interests and agendas of the North ;d) hybridizing research designs multiple analyzes with mixed approaches (quantitative and qualitative) with very good levels of validity, saturating and triangulation, privileging qualitative; e) synthesising in relation to the context of Honduras, and specifically the sub-system of higher education are primarily the identification and analysis of the mechanisms and/or key elements discursive policy learning throughout life, to achieve integration of previous experience and mainly non-formal and informal, to conduct the educational model UNAH to optimal comprehensive social inclusion distributive justice learning mainly non-formal and informal, to conduct the educational model UNAH to optimal comprehensive social inclusion distributive justice.

Limitations on itself: a) the historical databases access, inclusion and/or exclusion of sub-system of higher education are scarce and in a few decades not official data, data from the last decade only, not have complete data affects the analysis are robust and can do some relationships to the types of educational models certain times, setting trends and their effects and impacts; b) samples and selected, in

addition to a small number, were not selected at random (non-probability), and both fields of study related to this thesis, documents do not have meta extensive analysis, only some collections in books and some articles that highlighted some surveys of certain periods. c) on the methodological, discourse analysis has a variety of approaches, in the current study was a qualitative emphasis deconstruction, future studies need to be developed further with quantitative approach, among other linguistic tools. d) data empirical dimension was reduced to have more representative samples will require expansion.

On the *implications* in relation to future research emphasis on further developing actions to achieve greater maturity in fields of study related, based on the constraints and needs identified in this research it is done, and thus be fed back processes decision-making in the sub-sector of higher education. In terms of public policies oriented strategies proposed design them two - way (from top to bottom and vice versa) to achieve greater complementarity and efficiency of the different mechanisms that require prior learning to be integrated into the educational model in UNAH. In addition emphasis on the convergence of partnerships (public and private) stakeholders led to a national vision towards redistributive social justice it is done. Develop systematic installed capacity throughout the higher education sector, considering all levels within a framework of education and learning throughout the life.

On the general question of research, added to briefly expressed in the preceding paragraphs, integrating learning experiences and mainly the non - formal and informal educational model, require multiple actions in the short, medium and long term. With a knowledge management passing articular all university tasks and institutional sub-system of higher education, at all levels of multi - level (Mega, macro, meso , and micro), mechanisms and discourse elements (concepts, constructs , legislation, policies, regulations, agreements, memorandum, backgrounds, agendas, conferences, debates, etc.) to conduct a comprehensive inclusion optimal redistributive social justice, must privilege the *intangible humanist* as a category, which it is akin to the field of study and/or paradigm called 'human focus' capacity in developing democratic 'model and emancipator` the 'radical perspective` criticism.

To validate the hypothesis identified by the analysis developed in this study, the following thesis was constructed:

> *The new task raised in the fourth reform and transformation of UNAH, knowledge management, the components of the fundamental law of the system of Honduran higher education current and leaderships as a major driver of outcomes and impacts should consider education and learning to throughout life, through mechanisms of recognition of experiences and learning prior (formal, non-formal and informal), incorporating and*

strategically including all stakeholders and key players, with transdisciplinary multidimensional scientific mediations and mediation technological, essential in these tasks, integrating categories (approaches, models and perspectives) that privilege mechanisms and/or discursive elements immaterial oriented humanist, in order to reduce the historical inequality in higher education (the Honduran context) and also inclusion optimal overall redistributive social justice.

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How can effectiveness of VPL foster individuals' benefits?

16

Bodil Lomholt Husted

The use of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is assumed to enhance individual's benefits for the access to labour market and job mobility respectively to lifelong learning and education, e.g. VET, HE and CVET. In general, benefits for the individual are recognized in a broad sense, covering also personal development and growth. National and EU policies on VPL highlight the impacts for both employability and lifelong learning[49] while also stating the necessity of the Europe 2020 strategy for "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by enhancing the use of more flexible learning pathways.

In the 2016 Erasmus+ Project *EffectVPL*[50], it is a main perspective to investigate the effectiveness of VPL policies and practices for labour market inclusion and access to educational pathways.

The initial project objective is to carry out a research study among former users of VPL in order to examine their experienced benefits of VPL as these are expressed by the users and afterwards assessed as deriving from effectiveness of the concrete VPL process. Based on this research, the project will identify shortfalls as well as good practices of VPL and its impact on individuals' labour market mobility.

This article focuses on the necessity of acknowledging the complexity of VPL when considering effectiveness of VPL and individual's benefits to be strongly connected. While addressing the Biennale 2017 objective, "VPL strengthens lifelong learning for all – The user at the centre", the article will focus specifically on the learning aspects of the VPL process given that lifelong learning should be conceived in many respects and likewise realised in terms of a multitude of learning steps. In addition, the article's focus on benefits for the individual is mainly looked at from the perspective of the target group of disadvantaged people.

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49 Council Recommendations, 2012; Official Journal of the European Union, C 398/1.
50 http://www.uni-bremen.de/en/zap/research/effectvpl-effectiveness-of-validation-of-prior-non-formal-and-informal-learning.html

1. What determines the effectiveness of VPL?

To answer the overall question raised above, how can effectiveness of VPL foster individual's benefits? two more questions need to be examined; firstly, what determines the effectiveness of VPL? i.e. which elements, aspects, demands and requirements must be fulfilled by the VPL arrangement in order to assume a causality of effectiveness and benefits for the individual?

Major European documents, i.e. European Guidelines on validation on non-formal and informal learning 2015, The Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014 together with the Cedefop paper, 2014, Stepping up the pace [51] highlighted which requirements concerning structure, approach, methods and tools used in the VPL process should be provided in order to support the individual's benefit of her or his VPL results.

When talking about enhancing individual's benefits for career and lifelong learning, it is a specific focus of interest to examine the learning elements in the VPL process while anticipating that a learning approach by the VPL professionals provides a powerful platform for the individual's later benefits – especially for the differentiated target group of disadvantaged people – and for whom the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is of crucial importance.

In the following, such learning aspects are examined for the VPL arrangement in terms of a number of interrelated implications.

Implications of transparency in structure and procedures for the individual's VPL

The aspects of availability of - and the access to the VPL arrangement deals with the concrete visibility of the VPL arrangement; i.e. VPL exists as an offer to individuals to have their prior learning assessed, validated and possibly recognised. Information about VPL as an offer for citizens should be at hand as specifically targeted information, also for the broad and differentiated group of disadvantaged people who might not have - for various reasons - benefitted equally from lifelong learning.

Transparency throughout the VPL arrangement is a key-requirement for the establishing of a comfortable and safe environment for the individual. Availability and access have to do with transparency of the VPL arrangement's structure and procedures Here, transparency counts for the information on what is going to happen in the VPL process? Why and How? What does it mean to have my prior learning examined and validated? Am I going to fail? Is this a kind of examination? Sentiments and questions of this kind are typical for individuals that may not have been first-movers in school and career.

For people, having throughout lifetime been confronted with knowledge and skills gaps and lacks, an offer for validation of prior learning obviously requires both adequate information and appreciative communication - to be actually accepted by

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51 Stepping up the pace (2014), Reflections on the future of EU tools. Cedefop, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

the user as an offer for a second change and a possibility for lifelong learning via new learning pathways.

Awareness raising for the potential benefits of VPL calls for the provision of motivation and guidance resources in the entire VPL arrangements and, in addition, relevant and understandable information is crucial for the individual VPL user to enable her to decide whether to take part in validation or not.

Therefore, in order to make the VPL process transparent and consistent for the individual, information on who, what, why, where and when concerning VPL should be clearly communicated.[52]

Implications of approach for the individual's VPL

To accept the VPL as the new chance for stepping up in career and lifelong learning strongly relates to the individual's possibilities for influence in his own VPL process. Does the individual take part in the VPL on his own choice? Or does this happen as a necessity being more or less forced, by, for instance, the employer or social authorities? Is the purpose of the VPL defined by other stakeholders than the individual? Or, does the individual have the right and possibility to define her own purpose of her VPL, e.g. for an access to or customizing of education or for enhancing own opportunities in the labour market? And, does the VPL process provide frames and guidance resources to allow for a change in the individual's own purpose for the VPL process if this should occur during the VPL process?

Defining VPL as a learning process requires the involvement and co-responsibility of the individual – precisely as it does in all learning processes. Levels of involvement in the learning process clearly imply high learning potentials for the learner.

Likewise, when the VPL candidate encounters an open-minded, user-oriented and recognising approach by the VPL professionals, an important foundation of motivation for lifelong learning could be built here. Hence, the individual's initial meeting with the entire VPL arrangement is of crucial importance for the VPL results. This initial meeting is recommended by the EU VPL policy as the identification phase. Therefore, the VPL processionals should be able to:

- Support the individual define his / her validation purpose and to help any redefinition of purpose if this changes during the identification process
- Advice and guide the individual in choosing the appropriate form and method for the identification process.[53]

Implications of methods and tools for individual's VPL

Evaluation of the VPL usage in the Nordic countries demonstrates that the users who benefit the most from a VPL are people without formal qualifications from upper secondary education or VET, and immigrants. What is interesting here –when looking for the effectiveness of VPL - is the interrelationship of the VPL approach and

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52 ValiGuide, http://nvl.org/valiguide/
53 ValiGuide, http://nvl.org/valiguide/

the choice of methods that are used especially in the mapping and documentation phase. As illustrated above, VPL is also a learning process and especially for the users with less acquaintance with the formal education sector. This is strongly focused in the mapping and documentation of individual's competences that takes place by common effort of the individual's and the VPL practitioner to make visible all competences acquired in the various learning contexts. This part of the VPL process implies the individual's learning potential of becoming increasingly aware of his or her existing competences.

In the process that leads to this awareness, the VPL practitioner must be aware of not narrowing the width of the individual's total competences too early. Among various means and methods for the mapping and documentation purpose, the retrospective and exploratory conversation, with the divergent perspective, is essential as this supports the individual in examining the wide range of her entire experience, knowledge, skills and competences with a scope that is not, at this stage, narrowed and focused according to a more specific aim of assessment. When the user is ready for this, another type and approach of conversation is useful for this purpose, focusing now on the perspectives of user's documented experiences. This conversation, with the convergent perspective, contributes to the systematization of prior learning and the relating of this into a clearer defined future job- or education perspective. [54]

Due to this article's examination of how effectiveness in the VPL leads to individuals' benefits, it is important to underline the fact that the mapping and documentation phase might lead to the assessment and certification phases, but it is also possible, that an individual's validation purpose only includes identification and documentation in order to acknowledge learning experiences. This perspective is of specific interest for the aim of this article.

Implications of cross-sectoral and cross-institutional cooperation for the individual's VPL

Many research studies of VPL practice have stressed the problem of fragility concerning the VPL strategy and structure when these seem to jeopardize the importance of cohesion and inclusion for the individual in her VPL. Fragmentation of the VPL risks occurring when VPL results are not recognised or trusted by end users – being either formal educational institutions or employers. The problem of such lack of trust might have to do with the absence of common agreement of assessment and recognition standards and criteria, and in some cases it could also be about coinciding interests.

Among more studies, the Erasmus +, 2014 project, AVA (Action plan for Validation and non-formal Adult education) have dealt specifically with this problem.[55]

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54 In the Interreg project, Yggdrasil, principles for the documentation of individual's competences are under development with the working title: Life CV. www.yggdrasil-oks.eu

55 http://www.eaea.org/en/projects/eaea-coordinated-projects/ava.html

The key to trust of validation results lies in the cohesion of VPL in terms of cooperation and coordination among cross-sectoral and cross-institutional contexts and depending on the mutual acknowledgement of validity and reliability of the individual's validation results. Obviously, the negation of such mutual acceptance and recognition of the individual's VPL represents a major barrier for the individual when talking about the relationship of effectiveness and individual's benefits.

Hence, to benefit from the VPL in terms of individual's ability to move one step up in career or further education, the coordination of phases in the VPL process are crucial. Cross-sectorial and cross-institutional cooperation together with transparency of all VPL elements for the individual contributes significantly to make the VPL arrangement consistent and permeable and to prevent fragmentation.

For enhancing the effectiveness of VPL and the benefits for the individual, the following suggestions are provided by ValiGuide, on the coordination issue:

- The Increase of educational and employment stakeholders' knowledge on potentials and rules of the national validation system helps overcoming mutual resistance on accepting the results of individuals' validation process.
- Dialogues between validation stakeholders in order to develop a common language and understanding of validation helps the recognition of the various types of benefits that validation can bring to individuals.
- Implementation of quality control methods and follow up on validation processes builds mutual trust between different institutions and sectors and leads to further development of validation arrangements.
- Increasing the transfer of existing tools and methods proven valuable in some contexts to different contexts contributes to the acceptance of individual's validation results.

2. How can individual's benefits be defined and conceived?

A new VET reform has been implemented in Denmark since 2015. A special VET pathway for adults (25+) is part of the reform and it includes a VPL as a compulsory element for the trainee to carry out before starting his VET. Based on the results of the VPL, the trainee's individual education plan is developed and – according to defined standards for prior learning and experience, relevant for the education in question, the length of the education is calculated; i.e. merit for trainee's assessed competences.

The political rationale for this adult vocational education pathway is partly to increase adults' motivation for VET having one's prior learning validated and – to various degrees – approved, partly to contribute to the solution of the national problem of an urgent lack of skilled workforce.

Apart from the potential of having the entire education shortened – which undoubtedly is motivating for many adults, the adult pathway also implies that the pedagogic and didactic practice of the education is planned with the use of learning

methods, which enables the trainee to further build upon her practice experience, knowledge and competences. For the VET schools and the teachers and trainers to manage this high degree of differentiation in classroom and workshop, flexible learning environments are under development throughout the Danish VET schools.

A national midterm evaluation[56] of preliminary results provides evidence of rather differentiated character. Firstly, the potential for having your VET shortened does not always reflect the adult trainees' interest and motivation. Some adults express an uncertainty as to acquiring – in the end – the entire competences due to final competence requirements and learning objectives of the VET. A fear of exams, maybe due to former negative school experience, demonstrate that the VPL process also has an important mission in the awareness raising and the building of individual's self-esteem. On the other hand, an increase of self-esteem together with the acknowledgment of learning needs for moving one-step-up is the typical outcome from the VPL as part of the VET reform, as teachers and trainers communicate about these experiences.

For the VET schools, the compulsory VPL is a new requirement and a more comprehensive VPL practice is under development in the years to come. Right now, it is obvious that VPL approach, professional competences and guidance resources should be prioritized in order to strengthen the outcome of the learning dimensions of VPL bearing the potential for enhancing the individual's learning competences.

Now, turning back to the initial question of how to define and conceive individuals' benefit from VPL, attention must be paid to the EU and national assumptions of individuals' benefits from VPL in terms of access to labour market inclusion and further education. However, there should be no doubt that this is the great expectations of individuals, 'belonging' to the broad group of disadvantaged people. Nevertheless, it is equally necessary to admit individuals the patience for realisation of such a step.

For many individuals, the road to harvest such benefits of VPL is preceded by a number of smaller intermediary steps before a major one. The title of the Biennale 2017 is: "Validation of prior learning strengthens lifelong learning for all".

Benefits – as VPL results - can be defined more or less narrow as respectively access to labour market & mobility and/ or to education and training. Therefore, VPL should not just be regarded the alternative access to labour market inclusion and education – as the summative result of a VPL. The VPL process bears the potential to add, significantly, to the individual's motivation for lifelong learning when the process successfully contributes to increase self-esteem, self-reflection of one's own learning abilities together with gaining the personal courage to enter lifelong learning.

Finally, for the actuality of the focus of this article – How can effectiveness of VPL foster individuals' benefit, the Erasmus+ project, EffectVPL is right now preparing for

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56   Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2016.

the research of how effectiveness of VPL and individuals' benefits for labour market inclusion and lifelong learning are - or could be - linked.

In the research to be carried out, there should be a specific focus on the preconditions of effectiveness in order to expect benefits, while looking at the entire VPL arrangement. Such preconditions are the dimensions of policy, structure, purpose, methods & tools to mention some basic principles in the VPL and not to forget others like the approach to the individual and her VPL together with resources of guidance and the professional competences to support the VPL process with the individual at the centre.

Thus, the answer to the above question should take a starting point in the preliminary acknowledgement of the complexity of the VPL process and practice and in the understanding that both complexity and diversity of the individual VPL processes must be acknowledged when the above focus is examined to identify the individual's – unique – benefits.

3. Concluding remarks

To support the learning dimensions of the individual's VPL – and hence, to increase individual's benefits the following general principles should characterize VPL approaches:

- The applicant must be met with openness and respect.
- Information and counselling about the process must be given.
- The applicant must be given the best opportunity to go over a clarification and an assessment with an outcome that they deem to be meaningful and fair, according to the expectations and motives of the applicant.
- Support and counselling should be provided throughout the process, and the people carrying out the assessment should make as much effort as the applicant to understand what the applicant is seeking.
- The applicant should have access to help to ensure they understand the information on the process and they should be given the opportunity to create an overview of time, methods and requirements.
- Educational institutions should plan clarification and assessment processes by introducing clear and transparent procedures.
- One must have an individual approach in order to meet the individual applicant.
- The applicant should receive continuous counselling based on their needs.[57]

References

Council Recommendations, 2012; Official Journal of the European Union, C 398/1

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[57] National Knowledge Centre for Validation of prior Learning: Anerkendelse af realkompetencer – Sådan gør vi /Validation of prior learning – how we do it. 2012.

Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2016. https://www.eva.dk

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National Knowledge Centre for Validation of prior Learning: Anerkendelse af realkompetencer – Sådan gør vi /Validation of prior learning – how we do it. 2012.

Spanish VET centres and validation of competences

17

The role of Spanish VET centres as open educational resources

Manuel Carabias and Luis Carro

The publication of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning stated that: *the member states should have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to have the knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, including, where applicable, through open educational resources* (Official Journal of the European Union, no. C398 of 22 December 2012).

The UNESCO stressed that universal access to high quality education is key for sustainable social and economic development: (*OER) Open Educational Resources provide a strategic opportunity to improve the quality of education as well as facilitating policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and the capacity-building process* (Unesco, 2012).

These statements implied that member state's institutions that facilitate processes of validating competences should be able to support these arrangements with open educational resources, through which citizens may be provided with full validation of their lifelong professional qualifications acquired by non-formal and informal learning.

In Spain, there are two types of vocational training centres that have managed to follow-up on this recommendation and organization and the resources that allow them to accomplish the validation of non-formal and informal learning within their own legislation, authorizing that this process of validation might be conducted as an open educational resource. Those two types are 'the Integrated Vocational Training Centres' and 'the National Reference Centres'.

In 2013, the process of validation of competences carried out by those centres, was investigated and assessed. It demonstrated that these centres have certain limitations regarding the procedure itself as an open educational resource. The mission of the centres clearly specifies their role in the validation process, but there are deficiencies concerning the organization procedure, the training process of their staff, and their ability to inform and advise with respect to the procedure.

This contribution seeks to analyse the role of Spanish VET centres in supporting the validation of competences by means of open educational resources.

1. The Spanish context

The Spanish scenario for facilitating validation of competences was already started up in 2002 with the *Ley 5/2002 de las Cualificaciones y de la Formación Profesional* on professional qualifications and vocational training. This law was used for founding the qualification and vocational training system, which included the qualification and competences validation process. The validation of non-formal and informal learning was standardized in 2009 by a Royal Decree (RD 1224/2009) that tdefined he validation process as 'the process of evaluation and crediting by which one individual's skills and competences acquired by non-formal or informal training may be recognized'.

The two main vocational centres in Spain stand out by their representativity and importance: the *Centros Integrados de Formación Profesional* (Integrated Centre of VET) (CIFP) and the *Centros de Referencia Nacional* (Centres of National Reference) (CRN). Upon its original design and legislation there is a certain amount of responsibilities connected to them, linked with the validation of non-formal and informal learning process. Those responsibilities are not being properly applied as inferred from the data analysis.

On the one hand, the CIFP centres are dependent on the Ministry of Education and regulated by the Royal Decree 1558/2005. According to this decree, the CIFP centres must contribute to achieve the main objectives of the National Qualification and Vocational Training System, including the the counseling and guidance services as well as the assessment of the individual's learning outcomes. In order to achieve the primary aims of the National Qualification and Vocational Training System, that is, integrating vocational guidance and tailored advice services, as well as the assessment of skills, it is explicitly specified that one of its main purposes is that of assisting during the procedure, in addition to participating and engaging on the official accreditation of the competences proposal. It is also mentioned on this RD that the CIFP centres must have properly trained staff members to perform the functions assigned to the centre as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the validation process of non-formal and informal training according to the regulatory standards on the CIFP centres

Article	Law application
Main Aim Art. 5.	- Empowering and renewing individual's competences throughout their entire life, adapted to the population and the productive system. - Providing guidance and advice services to help the individuals with the development of decision-making skills. - Contributing in assessing and certifying learning outcomes acquired by means of non-formal or informal training.

Article	Law application
Functions Art. 6.	- Providing guidance and tailored advice services in order to stimulate access, mobility and progress in all educative and professional outlines. - Taking part in the assessment procedure and, if necessary, conducting the official proposal on the accreditation of the professional competences acquired by practice or non-formal training. - Engaging in the promotion, training and development process of teachers and trainers within the different subsystems in the permanent fostering of the competences required by their specific function, according to their needs. - Collaborating with the National Reference Centres, different Observatories, and Institutes of qualifications, as well as other entities, in the analysis of employment and technological evolution and organizational changes that may occur in their own productive system. - Informing and advising other vocational training centres.
Conditions Art. 8.	- Having enough personnel to perform all their functions.
Autonomy Art. 9.	- The CIFP centres must be granted enough autonomy in the organizational, pedagogical, and administrative levels, according to what may be established by their specific administration.
Coordination systems Art. 12.	- The CIFP centres may be guaranteed all the required coordination systems to serve their purpose, such as: - Information and guidance. - Recognition and competence assessment.

On the other hand, the CRN centres are dependent on the National Employment Counselling and are regulated by the Royal Decree 229/2008. They have to apply and experiment with innovative proposals related with the evaluation processes and the qualification recognition process. Amongst their main functions, the CRN centres must be linked with the validation procedure, while also establishing specific departments that may be able to fulfil their duty on the validation of non-formal and informal learning process (see Table 2).

As a result of the investigation carried out on the CIFP & CRN centres in Spain, regarding implementation of the European guidelines (2009 & 2015), the main elements for improvement were pointed out. Following up on these points, this could result in conducting validation of non-formal and informal learning processes as an open educational resource. This would than align with the guidelines on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning, in which the vocational training institutions procedure concerning validation is clearly described (Cedefop, 2016):

- To conduct evaluation and validation processes.

- To assist the identification of an individual's learning outcomes, and the documentation process, as well as informing and guiding the individual through the entire process.
- Supporting people.

Table 2. The validation process of non-formal and informal training according to regulatory standards on the CRN centres

Article	Law application
Main Aim Art. 3.	Applying and conducting innovative proposals related with: vocational training, guidance and professional advice, assessment and crediting skills and competences. As well as others specifically designed for the National Qualification and Vocational Training System.
Functions Art. 4.	Taking part on the design and development of technological and methodological improvement measures specially intended for teachers or trainers, experts and professional advisors, and, of course, for evaluators that may take part in the validation process. Participating in the competence evaluation and recognition processes.
Organisa-tion structure Art. 9.	The CRN centres must establish the required departments to fulfill their observation, investigation, innovation, experimentation, formative, and validation procedures.

2. Methodology

The investigation into the ways of working with validation of competences procedures by the VET-centres, was developed using a holistic perspective (Hurtado de Barrera, 2000), taking into consideration a wide variety of different elements involved in CIFP and CRN. It was intended to perform a qualitative (Flick, 2004; Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012; Tójar Hurtado, 2006) and a quantitative analysis (Etxeberría & Tejedor, 2005) of these centres from the point of view of the procedure of validating professional competences. To a certain extent, this holistic methodology inflicted a descriptive approach that intended to achieve an accurate description of an event, such as the CIFP and CRN's *non-formal and informal learning validation processes*.

The design eventually proposed for the investigation, took into consideration a wide variety of different elements such as the Mixed Resources Design, the Contemporanean Transactional Design and the Univariable Design according to Hurtado de Barrera´s definition on the Holistic methodology:

- *Mixed resources Design*: in order to portray the event, this design arranges and combines the data resulting from combining various resources such as the data used in the validation process, the legislation, and by real-life situations (surveying the CIFP & CRN centres and performing and interviewing the

INCUAL).
- *Contemporanean transactional design***:** the research is intended to depict a certain event in a concrete moment.
- *Univariable design***:** the methodology used for this research has proven not to vary in any extent as it illustrates a unique element (the *non-formal and informal learning validation processes* performed by the CIFP and the CRN).

The analysis (Arias, 2012) was mainly conducted by using written data (such as legislation and International Directives) as well as sample units (mainly the surveys provided by the CIFP the CRN and the INCUAL).

3. Data sampling

The survey considered every CIFP and CRN centre established in Spain (Table 3). By so doing, a large amount of data from all Spanish regional autohorities was acquired: 71% out of the 149 CIFP and CRN centres took part.

Table 3. Number of subjects studied by centre in 2013

Spanish Regions	CIFP	CRN	CIFP & CRN
Galicia	22	2	0
Castilla y León	20	3	0
País Vasco	16	1	0
Comunidad Valenciana	13	2	1
Navarra	7	0	2
Región de Murcia	6	1	2
Aragón	6	1	0
Principado de Asturias	6	2	0
Andalucía	3	3	2
Comunidad de Madrid	3	5	0
Islas Baleares	2	1	1
Castilla-La Mancha	1	1	0
Extremadura	1	1	1
Cantabria	1	1	0
La Rioja	1	1	0
Melilla	1	0	0
Cataluña	0	5	0
Canarias	0	1	0
Ceuta	0	0	0
TOTAL	109	31	9

Research techniques
The research was conducted by using four different procedures: document analysis,

comparative analysis, surveys and interviews.

To develop the document analysis procedure (Gómez Mendoza, 2000; Piñuel Raigada, 2002), the main guideline was the bibliography and the legislation used to create 'the Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional' (SNCFP: the national qualification system for vocational education and training). The CIFP & CRN centres operate the validation process according to the European and national standards within this national system. The second part of the investigation was used the above mentioned analysis procedure.

The results obtained from this comparative analysis proved useful for comparing the European standards on the validation of non-formal and informal learning process with the *de facto* application used in Spain, and thus enabling us to judge the current development of the validation process in Spain.

The surveys conducted (Vilá & Bisquerra, 2004) provided an overview of the development and improvement on the CIFP and CRN procedure. The survey structure intended to compile a wide variety of different experiences and opinions by asking all sorts of contrasting questions to the interviewees. The analysis process was performed by leaving aside irrelevant elements. The main objective of the analysis performed in the centres was to determine its actual effectiveness.

The interview is meant to be a complementary element for all those mentioned above (Hurtado de Barrera, 2000). The *Instituto Nacional de Cualificaciones'* stakeholders were also interviewed, as they assumed all due responsibilities concerning the qualification and methodological processes.

Categories and indicators

A different instrument for each study unit has been used, giving us the chance to collect data, summarize it, categorize it, and, lastly, proceed to its proper verification (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

The categorization of every act the has been established according to the European Directives on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2016), which is also dependent on the 2012's "Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning" (Official Journal of the European Union, no. C398 of 22 December 2012). Table 4 provides an overview of the categories considered for the data analysis as well as the indicators required to double check if the Spanish validation of competences procedure is up to the European Directives.

Table 4. Categories and investigation landmarks

Categories	Indicators
The *individual* as the key figure of the whole process	Privacy and integrity
	Confidentiality
	Ethics
	Property over the data resulting from the validation process
	Fair behavior

Categories	Indicators
Validation process stages: - Determination Documentation - Evaluation - Certification	Procedure and tools used during the process
	Research form.
	Adaptability of the proposed procedure to the user.
	Trustworthiness of the validation process
	Continuous traineeship
Information, advise & tailored assessment	Proper use of the career counseling services offered
	Coordination (to provide a proper service)
	Inform on the costs and advantages of the validation process
Coordination and involvement of all the participants	Legal system
	Administrative procedures.
	Local and regional authorities' responsibilities.
	Coordination of all parties.
	Formal procedure´s scope
Bonding between the validation process and the National qualification systems	Assimilation of the *Validation process* within the SNCP.
	Interrelation between *validation* and the NQF
	Validation as a key element in the education process.
	Bonding between the validation and the credits´ transference and accumulation system
Standards and results over the learning process	Following on the same principles as formal learning
	The writing process as part of the learning outputs
	Writing down the data resulting from the learning process
	Revision control
Quality Assurance	Quality assurance
	Reliability, validation and credibility
	Participants in the Quality plan
	Internal and external checking
	Check-ins and user contributions to the process
Validation process staff member's competences	Requirements
	Professional development
	Online support community; online assistance

The results hereby stated are displayed according to the above described categories whereby the Spanish vocational schools and national reference centres situation is analysed.

4. The Individual as the key figure of the whole process

The individual must always be the main figure of his/her educational action, with the opportunity to choose a professional and formative career, including the possibility that his/her knowledge is recognized and certified. Table 5 provides an overview on the indicators corresponding to the intimacy, integrity and confidentiality, ethical procedure and property of the process´ results fit with the Spanish regulation. Nevertheless, we cannot state that there is a fair and equitable treatment since:
- These centres do not have enough competences to develop this procedure according to the contextual needs.
- The Government publishes the official announcements, being these posts limited (147,395 posts until January 2017).
- Due to all the previously mentioned factors, not all citizens have the chance of taking part on this procedure.

Table 5. Person's main character from CIFP and CR

Intimacy, integrity and confidentiality
These rights must be respected, according to 25 RD 1224/2009 Art.6 and RD 375/1999. They must be operated under guarantee of quality and rights of the participants. principles (Adviser's and asssessor's Guide).
Ethical rules
Professionals made up with ethical principles (RD 1224/2009, t.25).
Property of the results of the process
Candidate's documents are properly stored in the managing centre. Governmen liability (RD 1224/2009, Art.16).
Fair and equitable treatment
It is not possible to accede to the procedure willingly. People are not the protagonists of validation.

Validation stages
It is necessary to indicate that both directives for the validation process on the non-formal and informal learning and the recommendation of December 20th to use a different terminology from the one used in Spain as set out in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison on terminology between Europe and Spain

European nomenclature	Spanish nomenclature
Determination	Information and advice
Documentation	
Evaluation	Evaluation
Certification	Accreditation and registration

In order for the validation process to be performed, there are three main phases: Advice, Evaluation and Accreditation and record. Only some CIFP and the CRN are

involved in the advice and evaluation phases, and it is the regional administration's responsibility to indicate which of the advice and evaluation phases might or might not be carried out.

The data analysis shows that 41 % of the centres have not even taken part in the validation procedure, with only 27 % of them having designed their own official accreditation offer and also with only 38 % of the centres facilitating a modular flexible offer for those who do not accredit the whole complete qualification.

Table 7. Validation stages from CIFP and CRN

Advice and Evaluation stage
Limited participation of these centres during the procedure. The analysis conducted on the centres performance show that 41% have not taken part in the above-mentioned procedure. Only 27% have presented an official offer to the Government. It is developed in the centres assigned by the Government.
Accreditation and registration stage
Only 38 % of centres facilitates a modular flexible offer for those who do not accredit all the U.C.

Information, orientation and advice

The data show that 74 % of the centres receive demand of information from citizens, which ranges from 1 or 2 per month to even more than 20 per week in some centres.

Table 8. Information and Counseling on the CIFP and CRN validation processes

Career guidance and counselling services
The services are not the suitable ones if: It is the citizen who has to go to the centre in order to inquire. A great part of the centres (75 %) receives these inquiries.
Coordination to guarantee the attention
The required attention might not be provided from the centre itself: Not all the centres offer information about the procedure (17 % don't). Only 30 % of the centres satisfies all the information inquiries. The services offered by the centres are not fully guaranteed. 79% of the centres claims more resources.
Reporting on costs and benefits of validation
If needed resources are not available, it is not possible that the information is suitable.

The centres inquire on the procedure in general, on new calls, on whether their competences can be certified or on the formation that is offered if they do not accredit all the results of learning. Nevertheless, according the references from CIFP and the CRN, 17 % of the centres do not offer information to the citizens concerning the procedure. Only 30 % of the centres satisfy all the demands, whilst 70 % solve a

few of them or none. Furthermore, 79 % of the centres consider having more resources in order to properly inform the citizen on the non-formal and informal learning validation procedure.

Stakeholders' coordination

In the Spanish scenario, as presented in the introduction, a national legislation regulates the procedure of validation. Nevertheless, the Spanish Regional Authorities are responsible for summoning the procedure, according to their needs and specific criteria.

The CIFP and the CRN cannot validate the non- formal and informal learning of their own initiative. They have other responsibilities such as reporting and orientation, making offers of accreditation to the Autonomous Administration or improving the instruments of evaluation, since we have seen in Table 1 and 2.

These centres are in continuous coordination with the educational administration. Depending on the centre, the meetings are more or less frequent. Nonetheless, 29% of them consider these meetings as insufficient.

The validation procedure's integration in the centre's internal management is fundamental for developing the validation openly for the citizen. Nevertheless, the surveys shows that less than half of the CIFP and CRN follow the procedure through areas or internal departments.The scope of the validation depends on the summons published by the Spanish Regional Authorities. Until 2013, 17,300 files were processed from these centres, from nine million Spanish participants with professional competences capable of being certified.

Table 9. Stakeholders´ coordination from CIFP and CRN

Legal framework & administrative procedures
Legal framework established nationally:

- Validation of professional competences: 5/2002 and 1224/2009.
- Integrated Centres of Vocational training: 1558/2005.
- Centres of national reference: 229/2008.

Not all the *Spanish Regions* have published their legislation on the validation.

Local and regional responsibility
The *Spanish Regional Authorities* are responsibles of calling the procedure. The Councils of Education or Employment, depending on the Autonomous Community. Centres have responsibilities as report, orientate, design offers or improving instruments of validation.

Stakeholders and their coordination
The CIFP and CRN meet with a frequency from 1-5 meetings to more than 15 per year with the administration. 29 % of them considers it insufficient while the other 66 % consider it suitable.

Scope of the procedure
It depends on the administrations of the *Regions* and on the calls. Proceeded processes 17,300 until 2013.

Validation and national qualification frameworks

According to the analysis that has been realized of the summons of the procedure in Spain, the procedure of validation is fitted to the National Framework of Qualifications.

According to the Law 5/2002 the procedure is an instrument for the National System of Qualifications and Vocational training (SNCFP). The validation would be a support for the educational process making it universal for the citizens. The validation is still not integrated in the CIFP and the CRN, posts are limited.

The mechanisms of credit transfer and accumulation are well developed in accordance with the NQF. Nevertheless, for those candidates who do not provide the complete qualification, they only can find in the 38 % of centres a modular flexible offer that allows them to finish their formation.

Table 10. Validation and national qualification frameworks from the CIFP and CRN

Integrated validation in the SNCFP
The procedure is an instrument of the SNCP (Law 5/2002. Art. 4). In the CRN and the CIFP the procedure is not integrated
Relation between validation and NQF
The procedure has the NQF as a reference (Law 5/2002, Art. 8). In every call of validation the results are well identified and related.
Validation supporting educational processes
The validation would be a support for the educational process providing an universal nature for the citizens.
The mechanisms of credit and accumulation
Only 38 % of centres facilitates a modular flexible offer for those who do not accredit all the U.C.

5. Standards, results of the learning and quality-assurance

The standards of learning in the Spanish system are arranged through the NQF. Its draft and update are carried out according to the standards established as *learning outcomes* from the National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL) (BOE n. 64, of March 16, 1999). As said previously, the qualifications or pieces of the qualifications obtained by means of the validation and informal of non-formal learnings are equivalent to the qualifications obtained through formal education.

The training that is given in the CIFP and the CRN was adjusted to the NQF. In the same way, in the calls of the procedure, there is a clear reference to the competition or qualification that tries to accredit and all of them are in this NQF.

There are not specific measures of guarantee of the quality exclusively for this procedure. The European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and training integrates the quality of all the processes in accordance with the different national rules. The quality for the validation in the CIFP and the CR is included in the processes that assure the quality of the centre in general. There are no quality processes

designed exclusively for the validation. From these centres, there are internal and external evaluations made using different criteria, as quality measures.

Table 11. Standards and results of the learning process on the CIFP and CRN centres

Drafting of learning outcomes
Arranged through the National Framework of Qualifications. Through the National Institute of Qualifications.
Checking and updating
National Institute of Qualifications' responsibility.
Drafting as learning outcomes
The draft of the qualifications is realized concerning the results of learning, according with the European Framework of Qualifications.
Same standards as formal
CIFP a CRN are in the NQF. The non-formal and informal learning validation process follow the same standards as the formal formation, the NQF.

Table 12. Quality assurance from the CIFP and CRN

Quality assurance measures
There are not specific measures or guarantees of the quality exclusively for the procedure of accreditation of professional competences.
Reliability, validity and credibility
The professionals, according to the established rules, use trustworthy and valid instruments of evaluation that guarantee the process´ credibility.
Participants in the quality strategy
When there are not specific mechanisms, there are no one in charge of the quality strategies as such.
Internal, external control and supervision and users' contribution
Most of the centres have mechanisms to develop internal and external evaluations habitually.

6. Professionals of the validation competences

The requirements that the professionals of the validation have to fulfil and the contents that they have to acquire are clearly defined in the RD 1224/2009 that regulates the procedure of validation. In 2013 there were approximately 246 advisors and 297 assessors (13 % in Spain according to reports of the INCUAL). In the CIFP and the CRN there are professionals of the validation from unions, universities or from the Institutes of Qualifications, but only 32 % of the formed professionals do it conforming to the RD 1224/2009 (art.25).

Lastly, it is necessary to indicate that the different Regions (Valencia, Aragon or La Rioja) have established networks and forums where are advisers and assessors are

in contact during the procedure but there is not a general and stable form established.

Table 13. Professionals of the Validation competences from the CIFP and CRN.

Requirements
The requirements that the professionals of the validation have to fulfil and the contents that they have to acquire are clearly-defined (RD 1224/2009, Art. 25).
Professional development
Not all the centres have qualified staff to attend to the validation (only 65 % of the surveyed)   There are few professionals in the centres duly qualified to attend to the procedure of validation in a suitable way.   Advisors 246 → 1,889 participants (Incual, 2015) → 13%   Assessors 297 → 2,248 participants (Incual, 2015)→ 13%
Community for practice; online
Some Spanish Regions have established networks and forums where are advisers and assessors are in contact during the procedure.   There is not a general and stable form established.

7. Conclusions

Taking everything into account, the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the CIFP and the CRN centres are not yet fully prepared to conduct the validation of non-formal and informal learning process as an Open Educational Resource.

The main conclusion to be drawn is that considering the role of the integrated centres of vocational training and the national reference centres, it is still not possible to establish the procedure as an educational open resource.

The national regulation on the validation and the regulation of the CIFP and CRN is sufficiently developed in order that it could join the validation of the non-formal and informal learning as an common task of the CIFP and CRN, so that the validation would be established openly for the citizen and all the citizens with competitions would be capable of being accredited and could benefit from it.

However, in practice there are still several aspects that should be improved, if willing, for the validation process to be established universally.

- The validation of the non-formal and informal learning is a process regulated by the Government, so that the whole citizenship should have the right to take a part in the procedure.
- The individual should be considered as the key element of the procedure, so they could decide to take part or not without depending on calls with limited posts.
- The participation of professional personnel in the procedures carried out in the CIFP and CRN centres is mandatory. On the one hand, more professionals of the validation process are needed in every centre so they can become

responsible of the validation and all the other functions. On the other hand, it is necessary that these professionals be trained according to common contents as we have previously stated for the RD 1224/2009 that regulates the validation.

- It would be necessary to increase the quantity and quality of the information and orientation services of in order to satisfy the demand of enquiries from the citizens. A suitable information and orientation would allow the citizen to be aware of the advantages and opportunities of the validation, as well as the procedures from the validation of the non-formal and informal learnings.
- The Administration should have a higher degree of awareness and implication in the procedure. In addition, people in charge of the procedure in these centres should be more involved so that to bring over and integrate the validation in each of the CIFP and CRN.
- If there is an established rule where there are responsibilities that these centres have as for the validation, why it is not fulfilled?

It can be concluded that the improvement of the above mentioned arguments would allow an integration of the validation process in each centre's own organization, providing each one of them with more autonomy of management and increasing the number of potential citizen beneficiaries, and also adapting the citizens´ professional needs to the productive demands of every CIFP and CRN.

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Work & Study

18

Conceptualizing validation of work experience in a Finnish
University of Applied Sciences

Marjaana Mäkelä and Anu Moisio

Higher education in Finland consists of two educational pillars: in addition to the traditional research-oriented universities, higher education is provided by universities of applied sciences (UAS). The most unique feature for a UAS is the active collaboration with industry. In the national legislation regulating the functions of UAS institutions (Act 932/2014), it is an important element that these institutions have a mission to act in tight cooperation with the industries of their region, thus nurturing a spirit of entrepreneurialism and contributing to the social and economic activity in the disciplines and sectors involved in the respective degree programs. Hence, since their early years – the first UAS was established in 1991 – UAS institutions have been interacting with companies, organizations, institutions and individual entrepreneurs throughout a variety of projects, UAS theses on EQF levels 6 and 7 and cooperation of all kinds. Accordingly, the institutions have established themselves as hubs for active development, innovation and education all over the country. On a national scale, UAS institutions have a significant role in transferring knowledge and fostering innovation. To our understanding however, recognition of competences and skills acquired in professional life and throughout work experience has not been fully implemented in Finnish UAS institutions. Moreover, there is a need to embed the philosophy of validation to the pedagogical mindset of UAS lecturers and staff and extend it towards recognition of learning occurring in all contexts.

Combining higher education studies and work is undertaken in UAS institutions through a variety of modes: from mandatory work placements into projects assigned by relevant industries. In the last few years, the Finnish Ministry of Education has stressed the importance of smooth progress of studies and fast graduation and changed funding parameters to match these criteria. It has become an obligation for UAS institutions to focus on combining work experience – and that resulting from diverse associations, with bodies such as charities or even the individual learner's hobbies – to studies. The employment rate of graduates is one element in the funding mechanism of the institutions, which have hence a strong reason to facilitate

the path of their students towards employability and interesting careers. The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) has defined recommendations for generic competences required at EQF levels 6 and 7, and the ones for working community competence complement adequately the priorities of the European Framework of Qualifications (Appendix 1).

How to recognize learning that occurs at work and transform it into credit points has become one of the key issues for UAS institutions that find themselves currently in a period of restructuring and financial challenges. We argue that an understanding of the mechanisms of validation and their implementation from traditional non- and informal learning contexts towards real work contexts in a structured process, designed with modern pedagogy of learning by doing, results in more equal learning environments.

Moreover, an internal justification for validation among Finnish UAS institutions is that by better validation processes students maintain their motivation and proceed faster towards the aim of their studies – to be employed. However, the borderline between studying and working has become more and more blurred, since especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area, most students continue working at least part-time during their degree studies. Furthermore, there is an increasing number of part-time adult students in UAS degree programs. The syllabi for these students have been designed with the principle that combining full-time work and higher education studies is possible. Combining a full-time career with a UAS degree programme is a somewhat Finnish specialty which supports the lifelong learning ambition of Finns. More than 50 % of the Finnish higher education students who combine work alongside studies are employed in the field of their studies. This is a higher percentage than for higher education students in other European countries. The most important reasons for working are financing living costs, improving standard of living and gaining work experience (Hauschildt et al. 2015).

However, this establishes a challenge of importance and merits attention from the providers of education: how to take the experience and professional context of mature students into account and cater for their specific needs in terms of curriculum design and thereby enhancing their motivation? A restructuring of the validation process and rethinking its underpinning philosophy is one possible solution to this challenge for UAS institutions.

Validation of learning is one of the priorities of the education sector of the European Union. The European Ministers of Education in 2015 agreed and set the following objectives: enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching, fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives, making our systems more inclusive and implementing agreed structural reforms. Validation and various structures of recognition are at the centre of these priorities. Up to the present however, there is not much empirical research or documentation on structured, work-related implementations of validation (Souto-Otero 2014). To our experience, most UAS students are familiar with the concept of validation in terms of recognition

of *prior learning* in informal- and non-formal learning environments*,* but they do not necessarily anticipate the opportunity to benefit from the recognition of their work experience and learning occurring in their professional contexts.

In this paper, we present the outcomes of an ongoing national project in Finland concentrating on validation of learning occurring at work, implemented in the framework of UAS institutions (Verkkovirta). We outline challenges that the different stakeholders (institutions, students and employers) face when new models to combine work and studying are being launched within higher education, but introduce also solutions to enhance pedagogical processes to meet the needs of the changing world of work. Finally, we present a new concept for validation of learning occurring at work, which is launched under the slogan "Work & Study" at the second largest Finnish University of Applied Sciences, Haaga-Helia.

Drawing on prior research on learning in other non- and informal contexts, we aim at opening perspectives on work-specific problems in validation, and emphasize in a holistic manner of learning in the framework of professionally oriented higher education. We argue that a better recognition and validation of work experience within higher education is in the interest of students, of higher education institutions, of employers and ultimately, the socio-economic development of the country. Our second argument is that the potential of the mandatory work placements in Finnish UAS degrees is not fully exploited, if their objective is solely to accumulate the ECTS points dictated by the law, instead of integrating the placement to the continuum of learning of the individual, and by customizing this process by validating the competences acquired.

1. Theoretical background

Michael Tomlinson (2008) has studied employability of university graduates in the UK and argues that an academic degree as such does not guarantee a satisfactory career development, but students express a need for added value provided by other qualifications to improve their employability. Our stance is that also in a wider perspective, including Finland, this added value may be constructed through a solid and thoroughly planned embedding of working life skills in the curricula, and by validation of competencies acquired at work. Work-based learning has increasingly become an area of interest for the higher education sector (e.g. Brennan & Little 2006, Lester &Costley 2010). It can be considered as one of the means to support the personal and professional development of students who are already at work, with a learning and development focus connected to students' workplace activities. In validation of work experience, integration of theory and practice and the build-up of specific professional competencies together with generic working skills play an essential role. The theories of integrative pedagogics (Tynjälä 2008) as well as the connective model for learning (Guile & Griffiths 2001; Griffiths & Guile 2003) have been applied to build understanding on the topic. In integrative pedagogics,

conceptual and experimental knowledge together with control of activities combine in a way that enables the integration of formal and informal learning (Tynjälä 2008). The connective model (Guile & Griffiths 2001; Griffiths & Guile 2003) is an alternative way to support integration of higher education studies with learning at work. The model emphasizes the active role of the student in planning and agreeing on the learning outcomes in the workplace, as well as reflecting it to other learning environments.

In terms of assessment and evaluation of performance, combining work and studying is a challenging field for education providers (Griffin 2011). A better understanding of the processes and practices of workplace learning is needed to develop guidance in higher education. Students perceive learning at work compared to learning in educational institutions as very different learning contexts (Collin 2009). However, combining working with studies creates possibilities to assess competence, where formal and informal learning are acknowledged. The aim in the validation of work is to improve students' employability, which is one of the most important quality factors in higher education. It has been criticized whether this type of approach leads to one-sided meeting of the working life needs, whereas general academic competencies will not be achieved. (Puhakka et al. 2010). Fully aware of this constant challenge and whilst developing curricula based on both theory and practice, education providers should invest more in learning at work, offering such authentic and sustainable learning experiences that are important for students' professional and personal growth, but cannot be undertaken in the learning environment provided solely by educational institutions. According to our experience, the challenge in these processes remains first and foremost in providing a transparent and valid context for assessment of performance.

The lack of common understanding on assessment procedures transferred from the institutional context towards other contexts, such as work, has been highlighted by Boud and Falchikov (2007), who argue that current higher education assessment processes – built on the idea of the lecturer being present in all learning situations – do not fully equip students for real-life contexts, which may ultimately lead to difficulties in employability. There is a need to design competence criteria that can be used assessing performance at higher education level in versatile and changing learning environments, not only in educational institutions. This requires a solid theorization and context-specific implementation of assessment for learning and discussion on the dimensions of criteria- and competence based assessment as such (Sadler 2010). In competence-based assessment in higher education, competence is defined as knowledge, skills and attitude linked with authentic work (Saranpää 2012). In this endeavor, the distinction between criteria and standards needs to be defined (Sadler 2010), to avoid confusing both lecturers and learners, and to remain transparent in an assessment process which is valid and reliable also from the perspective of working life.

Current developments in validation as in the Nordic Model (Road Map 2018) enhance the applicability of occupational and professional standards towards learning and assessment criteria of higher education in general. However, Olesen (2014) emphasizes the gap which still exists between two distinct regimes of recognition, both with their agendas and criteria: those of working life, as applied by industry and business, and those applied by the formal education institutions, focusing more on intellectual skills. Dialogue between these two and developing a common discourse for them is one of the current challenges, whilst widening learning contexts outside the academic classrooms and libraries towards professional life, and in improving the credibility of the process. This fits adequately the objectives of both life-long and life-wide learning of the European Union.

Another feature of importance for successful learning outcomes in non-institutional environments resides in implementing peer-assessment strategies alongside assessment and evaluation by lecturers. The beneficial impact of developing systematically the peer-assessment skills of students in higher education on their work-related and meta skills, and eventually on employability, has been studied e.g. by Simon Cassidy (2006). He argues nevertheless that these skills do not develop without constant training, and this is one element investigated in the case study of our paper, the studification of work within Finnish UAS institutions and the process being currently developed for it at Haaga-Helia UAS. The terms "studification" and "educationalization" of work refer to the same concept, namely that of completing higher education studies while working in a relevant field. Within higher education, this is relatively new, hence the terminology in English is not fully established yet, although validation of work experience is a strategy and process applied in most countries especially in vocational education. In Finnish, the term "opinnollistaminen" is used widely. Educational terminology is however of no interest to industries that UAS institutions are collaborating with and to simplify the pedagogical jargon, Haaga-Helia UAS is launching a straightforward concept that tells exactly what the process is about: "Work & Study". Conceptualization and implementation of this process is one way to commit ourselves to creating a framework of blended learning that facilitates validation of work in UAS studies, for the benefit of all parties.

2. Description of a case study

The observations presented here are derived from a project called Verkkovirta (*Verkkovirta – new forms of studification in collaboration between higher education and work*). The project is financed by the European Social Fund and implemented from May 2015 to December 2017. It is one part of the project entity "*Osuvaa osaamista, korkeakoulusta työelämään (Apt competence, from higher education to work)*" governed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Haaga-Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education is responsible for coordinating the project,

while the subprojects are implemented in 14 universities of applied sciences in Finland, covering all fields of education on both Bachelor and Master level degrees as well as representing different fields of higher education. Verkkovirta aims at developing new models for accumulating study credits at daily work. At the same time, innovative ways to link studies with work are developed in addition to traditional work placement solutions. Furthermore, the project focuses on collegial and inter-institutional development of documentation and tools within a variety of validation processes and on promoting a common understanding of the objectives of validation of work in higher education.

Verkkovirta works hands-on with participating organizations. Between May 2015 and February 2017, the project has run 89 workshops and meetings in different universities of applied sciences. Currently, the project experts are collaborating with four target organizations and companies to construct models that combine workplace management practices with assessment of learning at higher education institutions. The project experts co-operate actively with the Students' Union of Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland – SAMOK to get constant student feedback on the new practices to be developed. Each subproject is bound to build new, easily applicable models for validation of work. The models will be shared within subprojects across fields of education.

The findings presented below draw on observation of discussions in workshops and meetings, interviews with key stakeholders at workplaces as well as student feedback from study modules completed in target organizations.

3. Findings

Validation of work challenges the processes and practices of the UASs
During our project, it has become apparent that Finnish UASs in different fields of education and with different regional profiles are still at the phase of building the processes of validation of work. In rural areas UASs often play a key role in the development of the region, whereas in the metropolitan area this development role is not as evident or perhaps important. Furthermore, different fields of education have various traditions for collaboration with workplaces. For example, in the field of nursing, students need to have official qualifications to be able to work in expert level professions, whereas in the field of business it is likely that students may work on expert level before they graduate. Nevertheless, it has proven very fruitful to pilot new approaches of validating work throughout the country and across different fields of education to find new practices that can be disseminated not only in the same field of education but also in a cross-sectoral way. The development from traditional teaching to fostering alternative ways of acquiring competence is a change process for the UAS institutions and will require time and leadership that promotes new ways of learning in higher education.

Since validation of work is a relatively new concept at the UAS institutions despite their established cooperation with relevant industries, communication about new

practices in different channels is essential. Students need to be informed on the possibilities of integrating work and studies at the beginning of their studies, preferably even already at the application phase. Virtual channels such as the social media are important, although based on our project findings, study counsellors are in a prominent role when addressing the topic in the first individual counseling session with each student. The Nordic philosophy of validation, with the individual at the centre of the process and making active personal decisions upon solid information, is the objective in the development (Road Map 2018). If the student works at an expert level position of the educational field, the study counsellor can introduce the possibility of integrating work and studies and encourage the student to consider that option. After that, it is the role of the UAS to provide processes and documentation that enable flexible, yet cost-effective learning paths for the student. All these practices are being developed and shared in the Verkkovirta project.

Curricula play an important role in validating work experience. Based on our research, it has become visible that if the curriculum consists of specific theory-driven study modules, the learning outcomes and criteria of the study modules are designed to support assessment applicable at the UAS, but not at workplaces. The language of the assessment criteria is academic, hence distinct from the colloquial use of performance and assessment discourse in professional situations in various fields, as it has been pointed out above by the findings of Olesen (2014). Therefore, it is most challenging for the student to make sense of how to fulfil the learning criteria at the workplace, without the support of a guidance counsellor or a lecturer. In our experience, the design of competence-based assessment criteria is one of the most time-consuming activities when competence-based curricula are being developed. At the same time, it is one of the key activities in embedding the pedagogical change at institutions. The process has a better chance of success when lecturers design the criteria in close collaboration and while networking with each other and with stakeholders in the relevant fields in industry.

The competence acquired at workplaces does not necessarily follow the structure of the curriculum, nor its timeline. Therefore, lecturers in charge of validation need to possess a wide and thorough understanding of the curriculum and the profession to handle the assessment. It occurs often that lecturers need to assess students together to provide a holistic, often multidisciplinary, view of their competence. This way of working is still new to UAS lecturers, who have traditionally worked alone with students in the classroom. As discussed earlier (Puhakka et al. 2010), there is still some scepticism among teachers and lecturers concerning validation of work. There remains some questioning on whether it is possible to reach a higher education level throughout validation of work. Hence, it is essential to emphasize relevant theory connected to work experience and reflect both towards learning. This process requires transparent and solid guidelines for both students and the institution.

Demonstration day – an innovation for validation of work
To provide of a smooth and cost-effective approach to validating work, Haaga-Helia UAS has launched in 2015 a concept called "Demonstration day", establishing thus an effective method to validate work in a collaborative setting, with the possibility to cover all study modules of the curriculum. Moreover, it is the finalizing phase of validation within the concept of "Work & Study". The process starts with thorough planning through mapping the competence criteria of the study modules to be completed by studification towards the projects and responsibilities of the student in his or her working environment and tasks. This plan is discussed and agreed upon by the organization in question, by the lecturer monitoring the process and by the student, who thereby engages him/herself to continuous documentation and self-assessment throughout the studification process. The lecturer ensures that the academic criteria aremet by advising on reading and possible further assignments such as portfolios, and the manager agrees on providing feedback on performance and achievements at work.

Before the demonstration day, each student prepares a pre-assignment that integrates the theoretical background of the study module, the related work experience and the reflection of the learning accumulated. This pre-assignment is first discussed and then assessed in the demonstration day by lecturers, peer students and related industry stakeholders with the competence criteria of each study module. The lecturers have the final responsibility for the grading of the students, and a variety of demonstration instruments are being applied. This approach has proven to be very effective, since numerous competence demonstrations can be prescheduled to take place in one day, and added value is achieved by the presence of industry stakeholders as external feedback providers. The demonstration day becomes a forum for the exchanging and sharing of knowledge for all parties. Demonstration days have been conceptualized and piloted at Haaga-Helia StartUp School, a hub for entrepreneurial activities of Haaga-Helia students, and by business administration degree programs. Furthermore, they will be launched in other units across disciplines during the year 2017. Additionally, other UASs taking part in Verkkovirta project have been following the progress at Haaga-Helia and are planning to launch similar concepts.

Students formulating competencies
Based on our findings from Verkkovirta project, UAS students who work either part or full time during their studies at expert level in their own field of education have warmly welcomed the new pedagogical approach. As one of our entrepreneur student stated: "I would not have graduated from Haaga-Helia without being able to demonstrate the competence I have acquired in my own enterprise."
However, validation of work requires new skills from students. They need to become active players, assuming responsibility of their progression since the validation process is initiated and managed by students themselves. Students have often become accustomed to being instructed by lecturers on what to do in each study

module, whereas in the new approach they design their own learning process and manage the progress. Training in the skills associated with peer assessment is also required and this has proven itself valuable for the future in terms of generic working skills.

Another challenge raised by students demonstrating their competence is the low ability in finding appropriate and accurate expressions to define one´s own competence acquired at work. At educational institutions, it has been common to talk about learning, not about competencies. The wording of competencies belongs to the skill set of current professional qualifications, and formulating competencies should be integrated as part of degree programmes at UASs

Workplaces enrich the assessment

For workplaces and employers, validation of work on a large scale is still an unknown concept. During demonstration days at Haaga-Helia, industry representatives have been involved in the assessment of students. Our findings show that their participation is beneficial for both UASs and students. These representatives can provide the latest knowledge of the field into assessment discussion, hence enriching and widening it. Some of our participating lecturers have stated that collaborating with industry representatives has updated their own competences and motivated them to modify the content of their respective study modules to meet the current requirements of the industry. The setting is beneficial to all stakeholders, including the alumni of Haaga-Helia who have been eager to get involved in the process, thus providing a double commitment: that of an alumnus having gone through a corresponding learning experience at Haaga-Helia, and that of a professional in the given field.
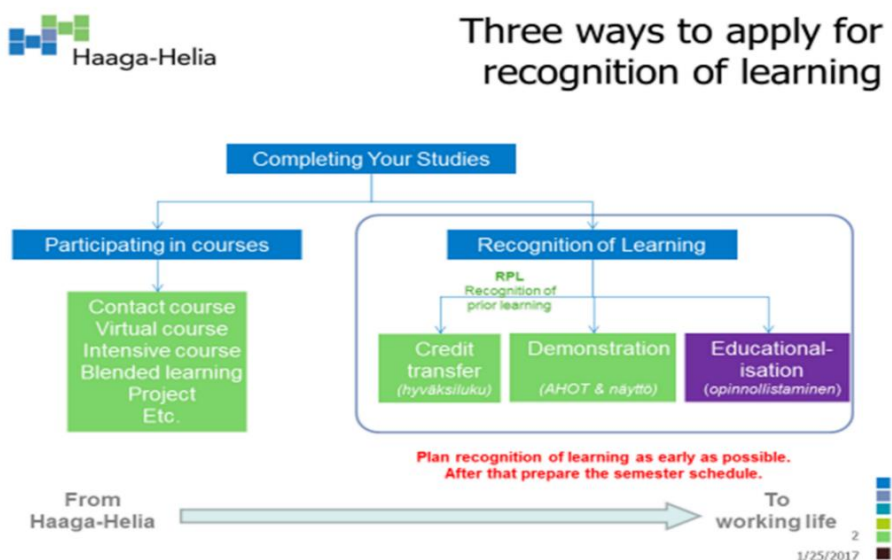
In our project, it has been noticed that industry representatives find it challenging to assess students based on the scales provided by the UAS. As discussed above, the discourse of the assessment criteria is often too academic, when reflected towards practices in professional contexts at work. While discussing the phenomenon of combining work and studies with four Finnish organizations during the project, it has been recognized that the potential of higher education studies has not been fully utilized at workplaces. Managers are not acquainted with the curriculum of the employee studying at a UAS. Therefore, it can be challenging to come up with a development plan that can benefit both the employee and the organization. More integration between development discussions at work and studies at a UAS is called for, and this would undoubtedly lead to the development of mutual added value and increased understanding.

4. Conclusion

The slogan for Haaga-Helia UAS states: "We open the doors to working life." There is a dual meaning in this objective: our task is to open the doors for students, of all ages, and to keep the doors open to the actors of working life itself. It is a two-way

road, benefiting all parties. At Haaga-Helia, we conceptualize the complexity of our learning environment with the following graphic:

Figure 1. Recognition of learning at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Haaga-Helia

Three ways to apply for recognition of learning

Completing Your Studies

Participating in courses

Recognition of Learning

RPL
Recognition of prior learning

Contact course
Virtual course
Intensive course
Blended learning
Project
Etc.

Credit transfer
(hyväksiluku)

Demonstration
(AHOT & näyttö)

Educational-isation
(opinnollistaminen)

**Plan recognition of learning as early as possible.
After that prepare the semester schedule.**

From Haaga-Helia

To working life

2
1/25/2017

"Work & Study" is not a method of teaching, an automate of credit accumulation or a framework of assessment, but a mindset. It does not transform sporadic occupations towards ECTS points, but caters for a novel way of tackling the validation challenge by establishing a platform of cooperation between the UAS institution, the students and the companies and organizations. Adopting new mindsets is seldom easy: students applying for "Work & Study" need to plan their part- or full-time working, internships and placements in functions of the entire curriculum and to be prepared to document activities and learning which they would not need to do, were they working just to be paid or to have undefined work experience. Lecturers need to adjust to a new way of mapping competence criteria towards learning outcomes in constantly changing contexts. Companies and organizations are expected to participate by providing feedback on the performance of students, and all stakeholders need to apply thorough planning, to nurture a positive and motivating learning environment. Documentation is essential, responsibilities must be assigned and the information must flow and be exchanged between the parties. Moreover, the structure needs to be compatible with the quality assurance system of the UAS institution and maintain transparency to remain reliable. The learning outcomes are defined in the curriculum text of each degree program, and the criteria for obtaining them cannot change although the context of learning is changed.

Already before coming to the end of its term the, Verkkovirta project has provided valuable tools for assessment, strategies of development and demonstration instruments for use by Finnish UAS institutions. It has become a platform of disseminating good practices and of discussing those that are still under construction. Moreover, it has equipped study and career counselors in UAS institutions with the knowledge and skills to establish novel ways to incorporate mandatory work placements with other modules of the curricula.

The website, available also in English (www.amkverkkovirta.fi/english) is an active networking tool and provides all the information of events, findings and matters of interest within the context of validation of work experience. For Haaga-Helia UAS, the project has been an efficient forum to disseminate the philosophy and practices of our way to conceptualize the validation our work: Work & Study. We are confident that it is one of the most effective ways to contribute to the development of more motivating learning paths, leading to interesting career opportunities for our students and future graduates. With the practice of demonstration days, resulting in the involvement and contribution of alumni the programme has generated genuine added value and cements the continued relationship between UAS institutions and their alumni.

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Descriptions of Generic Competences *(Arene 2007)*

	Description of the competence, bachelor level	Description of the competence, master level
Learning competence	- is able to self-evaluate and develop one's competence and learning style orientation - is able to retrieve and analyze information and evaluate it critically - is capable of taking responsibility for collaborative learning and sharing knowledge in teams	- is able to self-evaluate and develop one's expertise in a versatile and focused way - is able to retrieve, analyze and produce information and evaluate it critically from the point of view of different fields - is capable of taking responsibility for collaborative learning in a target-oriented way
Ethical competence	- is able to take responsibility for one's own actions and for the consequences of these actions - is able to work according to the ethical principles of the subject field - is able to take other people into account in one's actions - is able to apply the principles of equality - is able to apply the principles of sustainable development - is capable of social influencing using one's know-how and based on ethical values	- is able to take responsibility for the actions of a community and for the consequences of these actions - is able to apply the ethical principles of the subject field as an expert and as a developer of working life - is able to make decisions considering an individual and the community - is able to contribute to the principles of equality in working life - is able to contribute to the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility - is capable of leading socially influential activities based on ethical values
Working community competence	- is able to operate as a member of a work community - is able to operate in communicative and interactive situations in working life - is able to utilize information and communications technology in one's subject field - knows the working life in one's subject field and is able to create personal contacts in working life and to operate in professional networks - is capable of decision making in unpredicted situations - is able to apply the principles of organizational management and leadership in working life and has abilities for supervision tasks possesses entrepreneurial skills	- is able to develop the operations of a work community - is able to develop multidisciplinary communication and interaction in working life - is able to utilize information and communications technology in one's work - is able to create networks and partnerships - is capable of management and supervision tasks and is able to improve activities in complicated and unpredictable environments is able to work as an expert or entrepreneur and has abilities for management and supervision tasks

Innovation competence	– is able to conduct research, development and innovation projects applying the existing knowledge and methods of the field – is able to work in projects is capable of creative problem solving and development of working methods – is able to find customer-oriented, sustainable and profitable solutions	– is able to manage research, development and innovation projects and masters the methods of research and development work – is able to manage project work is able to create new information and improve existing working methods by combining expertise from different fields is able to develop customeroriented, sustainable and profitable solutions
Internalization competence	– possesses communicative competence necessary for one's work and for professional development in the subject field – is able to operate in a multicultural environment – takes into account the effects of and opportunities for internationalization development in one's own field	– is capable of international communication in one's work and in the development of operations – is able to operate in international environments – is able to predict the effects of and opportunities for internationalization development in one's own field

Building a RPL practioner network   **19**

Reflections and considerations from the Irish perspective

Deirdre Goggin and Josephine Finn

RPL practice in Ireland continues to be very uneven. While practice has been developed and advanced in some institutions this is not universal. The EU recommendation of 2012 calls for all member countries to enable citizens to gain recognition for their prior non-formal and informal learning. In Ireland, as reflected in the recent Cedefop report, RPL is still confined to pockets of practice that are geographically and institutionally dispersed. As a country without a national strategy the question facing us is how to grow knowledge of RPL within education and training settings as well as in the public domain and how to build practice. In many arenas of higher level adult education RPL remains a peripheral practice. Few dedicated RPL staff exist in Ireland. This means that practitioners do not have the means for building their professional competencies and have little or no voice in policy development. The establishment of a national network for RPL was viewed as one way to help address these matters.

This paper outlines the author's reflections of developing an RPL practitioner network in Ireland. The purpose of the network is to inform and enhance the discussions surrounding RPL nationally by bringing practitioners together in a community of practice. The paper discusses some of the key reflections the authors have from building a RPL practitioner network in Ireland with a top down and bottom up approach for all practitioners across all sectors.

1. RPL policy in Ireland

RPL and has been on the agenda at the national and international level for some time. In Ireland, the term 'recognition of prior learning' entered the public domain in 1973 when the National Council for Educational awards (NCEA) advocated for 'a facility to recognise prior work –based learning' in the government committee report on Adult Education (OECD Country Background Report, Ireland. 2007:18). Almost a decade later the Commission on Adult Education Report, 1984 was published. In the following years, further policy was developed by NCEA on 'work experience and experiential learning'. Participation levels were very low as "higher education institutions were mainly concerned with accommodating increasing

numbers of school leavers" (2007:21). Finally, in 1993 the NCEA published a policy on Prior Experiential Learning. Some practice was initiated in some institutions although in the university sector it was mostly confined to adult education and access programmes (2007:21).

In 2012 the Quality and Quality Assurance Act established Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) and tasked them to "establish and publish policies and criteria for access transfer and progression" (Section 56(1)) including policies on "credit and recognition of prior learning" (Section 56(3)). The complexity of the landscape of education and training in Ireland must be acknowledged here as it operates from levels one to ten on the framework with awards possible at all levels. Under the remit of the QQI are further education and training and the Institutes of Technology, including those with delegated authority. Dublin Institute of Technology and the University sector are not under the remit of the QQI. However, while the QQI do not have authority over Irish universities they were asked to 'co-operate with and give all reasonable assistance to the Authority in carrying out its functions'. RPL policy development and implementation is in the remit of QQI. In addition the Irish Universities signed up to The European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning (2010) which means that they agreed to the 10 commitments including one that stipulates support for policy and practice in the recognition of prior learning.

All post-compulsory education providers under QQI are required to develop "a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and/or access to a full award" (2006:26). It would appear that legislatively, Irish post-compulsory education has a legal commitment to the implementation of RPL. But the enactment of such legislation to require all providers to make available RPL within their institutions is outside the remit of the QQI and is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills. There is no central authority tasked with the implementation of RPL.

Table (1 NFTL 2015) outlines some of the key reports that have informed policy and practice in Ireland over the past decade which demonstrates that it has been on the agenda for a considerable length of time.

Table 1. Key reporting on RPL since 2004 (international and Irish)

International / European	YEAR	Ireland
European principles for RPL (EC) The role of national qualification systems in promoting LLL (OECD)	2004	
Bergen Communique	2005	Principles and Operational Guidelines (NQAI) Guidelines Irish HE Quality Network
Helsinki Communique	2006	

London Communiqué	2007	*EGFSN Tomorrows skills , towards a national skills strategy*
The EQF for LLL (EC) *Country note on the Recognition of Non - formal and Informal Learning in Ireland (OECD)*	2008	
European Guidelines for VNFIL Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué *ET2020*	2009	*RPL - A focus on Practice (EIE)* *HETAC assessment and standards guidelines*
Country Practices Report (OECD) *Guidelines for RNFIL (OECD)* *Recommendation on the promotion and VNFIL (EC)*	2010	
	2011	*RPL in University Sector (FIN)* *National Strategy for Higher Education (DES)* *Role of RPL (EGFSN)* *National plan for Equity of Access to HE (HEA)*
Guidelines on the RVA of outcomes of NFIL (UNESCO) *EU Council Recommendation on VNFIL*	2012	*Part time and flexible HE in Ireland (HEA)* *Qualification and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act*
	2013	*Education at a glance OECD Indicators ; A country profile for Ireland* *RPL Consultation Document (QQI)* *Education at a glance (DES)*
European Inventory Country report Ireland (CEDEFOP) *Education and Training monitor (EC)* *Employment outlook ; how does Ireland compare (OECD)*	2014	*HE system performance - first report (HEA)* *HEA consultation paper towards new NP for equity of access in HE*
The Bologna process; setting up the EHEA (EC)	2015	*RPL Research (NFT&L)* *Qualifications recognition ; mutual recognition of professional qualifications in Ireland (DES)* *Pathways to work ; government policy statement (DSP)* *Springboard; building our future*

Source: 'A current overview of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Irish Higher Education': Goggin. D, Sheridan. I, O'Leary. P, Cassidy. S NFTL 2015 report No 2

As evident in table 1, RPL in Ireland has been included in many of the major national reports on education. In 2005 the National Qualifications and Awards Ireland (NQAI) issued Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL. It's evolvement since then in terms of policy has been absent. The national development or discussion

surrounding RPL has been within national strategy documents regarding skills development and recognition. It has also featured in the strategy documents of Further Education and Higher Education in Ireland as an opportunity to address national issues surrounding access, transfer and progression. The evolvements of RPL at the European level with the European Commission recommendation of 2012 with regard to the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning has also ensured that RPL firmly stays on the agenda of the departments of government and the representative bodies who develop the strategy documents to inform future national directions.

The challenge in Ireland as identified in the National Forum on Teaching and Learning (NFTL) 2015 report is that though there are aspirations and recommendations for RPL at the national level these rarely translate into practice due to several reasons including resources, lack of expertise and the availability of appropriate systems to support RPL. The perception that RPL is difficult to implement contributes to the lack of development nationally as evident in the OECD Irish Country Report 2007 and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) reports on the Recognition of non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, 2014 and 2016. The added challenge nationally is that pockets of good practice are not always visible in the wider education, training and the public domain. These matters made the development of a network necessary.

2. The role of networks

Networks provide a means to develop collaboration amongst interest groups. They create a sense of common purpose and build solidarity. Thus they can emerge as a result of a shared desire for action in response to a policy and/or a knowledge development problem in a specific area (Popp, J. et al 2013:28). Many are 'bottom up' and are grown in local communities or communities of practice. Generally, in an educational context they act to:

> *… promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance professional development, support capacity building, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems. (OECD 2003:153 in Kemp 2010:46)*

They can be influential agents of change. The shared knowledge and exchange through a network can be useful in identifying and highlighting problems and creating new knowledge with members. They can also create recommendations that are subsequently brought to the attention of policy makers and government. Thus they can promote collective action and use it in a highly strategic way to advance their perspectives. This may mean, amongst other things, overcoming some

'bureaucratic rigidity' (Kemp, A. 2010:45), questioning policy development or advocating for changes in practice. This paper outlines how the Irish RPL network came about in this way but also in tandem with a national policy development agenda. The approach for the Irish RPL practitioner network was both bottom up and top down and can therefore be said to have begun in the middle.

3. The Irish RPL Practitioner Network

The initial idea of the network came about when three practitioners, who had been involved in RPL and adult education for over a decade, met at a RPL network event in Estonia. Subsequently they attended the inaugural VPL Biennale in Rotterdam in April 2014. Their chance meeting planted the seed of starting an Irish practitioner network which were further teased out and discussed in the summer of 2014.

The decision to seek support from QQI came about because they were, as stated earlier, mandated to oversee Irish RPL development and the deadline for the European recommendation that all member states should have policy in place by 2018 was coming closer. It was felt that the network would benefit from their support as they had the capacity to disseminate the network idea to the wider RPL community and their endorsement would carry weight with institutions, policy makers, practitioners, management and external stakeholders.

QQI agreed to support the initiative and a Steering Group was formed. This was an atypical mode of building a network. While the idea came from practitioners, bottom up, the involvement of QQI, a state agency, made it top down as well. It made good sense for QQI to partner with the practitioners to establish the network. Although the motivations that prompted the network initiative were not only policy focused, it was acknowledged that policy development could not be done without the involvement of practitioners, their voice was crucial. As Kemp notes:

> In later modern society effective problem solving by government is argued to involve interdependency and cooperative efforts: policy development and implementation require the concerted effort of multiple actors that possess some capability to act; it involves dependency on others to develop policy and convert it into action. (Kickert et al. 1997; OECD 2001 in Kemp 2010:44).

The policy needs of QQI and the practice concerns of practitioners intersected. Consequently, the network had from its inception, received government imprimatur; it had a formal mandate. It was foreseen that it would facilitate the practical processes needed to implement RPL in Ireland as well as having a policy development role.

4. Structure of the network

The practitioners had a concern that the network might become dominated by one sector or institution and if it gained a reputation as a 'club' dominated by specific interests it would not work. It was important to the original Steering Group therefore that no one institution or organisation dominate the agenda or be perceived as owning the network. Conscious efforts were made to avoid a sectoral approach as it would inhibit cross sectoral learning and dialogue. It was decided that the network would span all education and training in Ireland including higher and further education, professional bodies, public authorities, companies and organisations, private and public training providers and trade unions. This was an ambitious aim however given the size of the country and dispersed nature of practice it was felt that it was important to include all.

A call was sent out by QQI to sectoral organisations and institutions to propose representatives for the Group. Representatives came forward from an Institute of Technology, a teacher education college, a university, The Irish University Association, Further Education Support Services, The Adult Guidance Association and The Agricultural and Food Development Authority of Ireland (TEAGASC). These together with a representative from QQI formed the Steering Group.
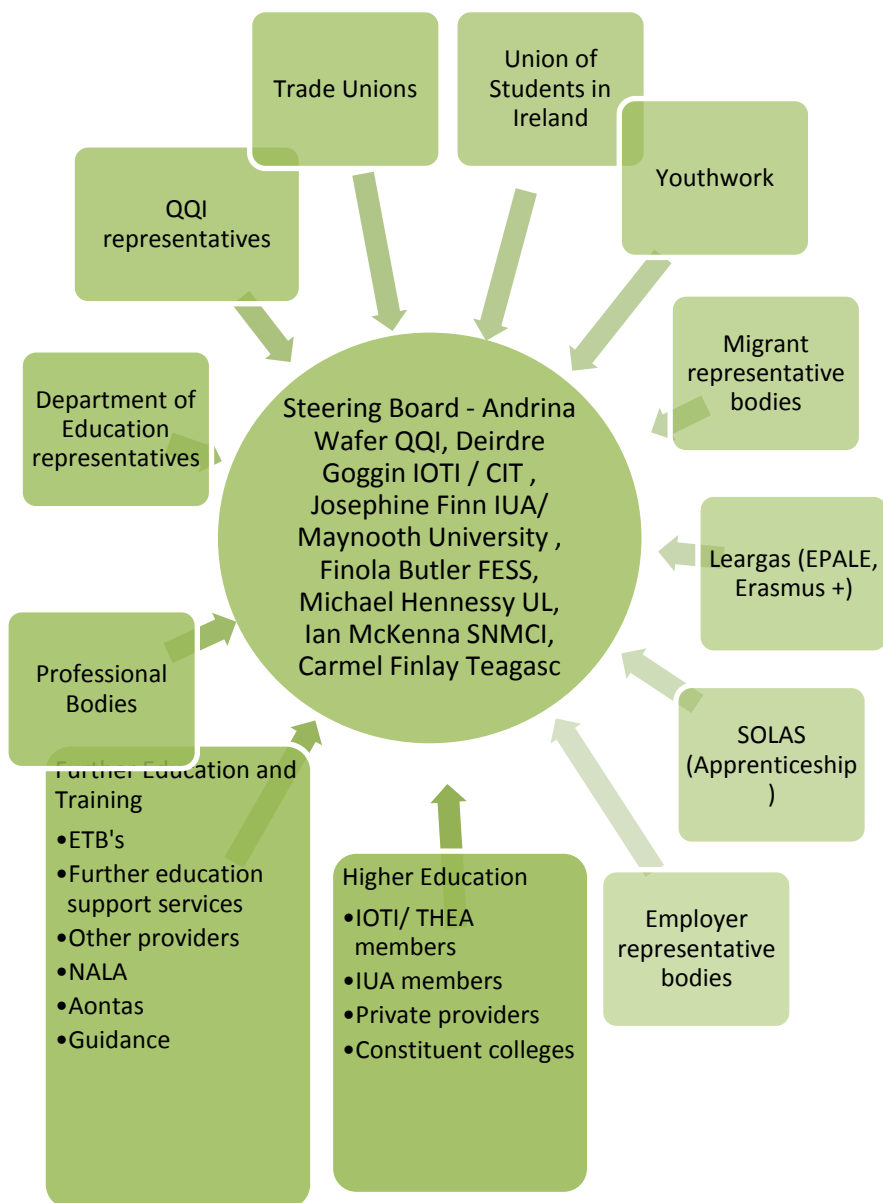
5. Governance

QQI didn't want to be the sole driving force behind the development of the network and it was agreed that two convenors would lead the network over a six-month period and then the mantle would be handed on to another two volunteers. Approval for the convenor system was proposed and approved by the members at the inaugural meeting of the network.

QQI at this point agreed to host and pay for four events over two years. They also agreed to aid the development of a web presence for the network and provide promotional advertisements and banners and give some administrative support to the convenors in the initial phase of expansion.

A network logo and website was developed by the Steering Group with some assistance from The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland. They were invited to become involved by the Steering Group as once more interests collided. The Forum has a role in promoting RPL in higher education and recognised the value of the network to their agenda.

In early 2016 a second RPL Practitioner network event was held in Dublin. At this event the governance of the network for the following six months was approved. Feedback and input from the floor was gathered at the initial two events which

informed the priorities of the network. The co-convenors were to assist in advancing these priorities and arranging two symposia that would focus on different sectoral perspectives.

Trade Unions

Union of Students in Ireland

Youthwork

QQI representatives

Migrant representative bodies

Department of Education representatives

Steering Board - Andrina Wafer QQI, Deirdre Goggin IOTI / CIT , Josephine Finn IUA/ Maynooth University , Finola Butler FESS, Michael Hennessy UL, Ian McKenna SNMCI, Carmel Finlay Teagasc

Leargas (EPALE, Erasmus +)

Professional Bodies

SOLAS (Apprenticeship)

Further Education and Training
•ETB's
•Further education support services
•Other providers
•NALA
•Aontas
•Guidance

Higher Education
•IOTI/ THEA members
•IUA members
•Private providers
•Constituent colleges

Employer representative bodies

Overall the members attending these two initial meetings placed a value on the diversity of the group and the network was viewed as a forum that could advance to

become not only a policy and practice network but a learning one as well. With this in mind it, the meeting asked that a national repository of practices from the multiple sectors involved in RPL be developed and that through this process members could learn from each other and enhance RPL in their own specific environment. To date this variety has kept it vibrant.

The chart above shows the range of organisations the network hopes to engage and serve. The initial meetings had strong representation from many of these.

At the first meeting many practitioners, senior management and key decision makers attended to ascertain what the network was all about and in particular how it related to their organisation and learners. As the network has evolved the mix of participants has grown to include private sector and local government representatives. Presentations at the sectoral focus symposia were provided by relevant specialists in the particular field. This approach was welcomed by members from these sectors as the issues, approaches and systems of RPL were of pertinent to them.

Identifying good practice and exemplars within the different sectors dispelled ideas that RPL is for others and not relevant within all sectors, for all learners or restricted to particular learning scenarios.

6. Priorities

In early 2015, the inaugural meeting of the RPL practitioner network took place in Dublin following several preparatory meetings of the Steering Group. It was hosted by QQI. The event was used to facilitate feedback from the participants about the value of such a network and to agree its terms of reference. It was also used to broaden membership of the Steering Group inviting those interested to become involved in growing and developing the network and RPL in Ireland.

The agenda and priorities being set by the members so far is being facilitated by the convenors and Steering Group. The members have begun to provide case studies of practice for the website and more and more practitioners, policy makers and educationalists with an interest in RPL are joining. The mix of participants is beginning to bring dividends. Next steps to promote deeper networking are being devised.

The first of these is the establishment of action and discussion boards around specific activities. The network needs a means of disseminating information on a regular basis. The establishment of a magazine or journal is proposed as the network grows and develops. It is envisaged that practitioners could provide short claimant profiles, photographs and commentary or stories from practice. These could be used to disseminate information about research in the field. It was agreed these would need a Publishing Board to develop and edit publications for the website and dissemination materials.

The second Board would be dedicated to policy critique and development. This is very relevant at the moment because policy is a hot topic and a national strategy is on the agenda. Practitioner's voices and the circumstances of their work need to be brought to the attention of government and articulated in policy. It would also become a policy watchdog on behalf of the members and a means of promoting their interests.

Some organisations are well practiced in using RPL while others are less involved. This requires sharing of knowledge and practice in a series of active learning events. A third Board devoted to practice itself is also proposed. It could also be a site for devising workshops, symposia and conferences.

While Ireland is a small country is can be difficult to maintain connections and this is a concern for network in the future. The idea that regional clusters be developed is attractive however it could lead to fragmentation. Locating symposia outside Dublin has been very positive. The first in Tullamore, Co Offaly and the second in Limerick city created a sense of a network that is mobile and ready to locate events where-ever they are required. This was received positively by the members.

7. Challenges

The network in its current evolvement and development has made some progress. However in looking at the future directions and aspirations of the network there is a challenge in terms of financial support. The network has been resourced up to now on the good will of institutions who have permitted staff to dedicate time to its establishment. The direct costs for events have been covered by QQI which has facilitated the sharing of practice and the European perspective from invited members of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG). QQI's involvement is for a limited period of two years after that members or institutions will have to be levied unless the Department of Education agrees to provide some grant aid to the network.

Funding models which may be available to the network at the national level need to be explored to guarantee its continued success. As the Steering Board is made up by a voluntary group who give their time in addition to doing their jobs, there is a need for a dedicated person to assist in driving the network.

Creating a learning network is also a challenge. Without adequate funding for secondment or 'buy out' of time members would be hard pressed to design and deliver learning workshops to further share practice and perspectives.

An online presence is very important to engage members fully in ongoing dialogue through social media, blogs and submission of exemplars. Responsibility for this activity is currently the remit of members of the Steering Committee however in the long time this will become piecemeal unless a person is assigned to oversee the website and its activities.

8. Reflections

Practitioner issues
When the network was initiated there was a variance in experience of networks within the Steering Board. Networks can be difficult to co-ordinate and build and it can be hard to hold the space and keep the energy flowing if the members are not active. This is one of the challenges for the RPL network too. As previously mentioned practitioners in Ireland usually do RPL work as part of another job. Little if anything is invested in their professional development and they can be given the responsibility for practice and procedures without any guidance or specific training. Anecdotal evidence suggests they are left to work it out for themselves. Invariably policy development relates to systems rather than practice, consequently the process of RPL itself is left out which is where the challenges predominantly exist. Practitioners have to use their ingenuity and instinct when working with students and must craft their practice through experience of actually doing RPL. This is of course an excellent way to learn however it means that they cannot benefit from the good practice already established elsewhere.
Some practitioners can find that the core process work of RPL is not recognised in their institution and becomes the invisible part of their jobs. Where RPL is less active it can be seen as a recurring nuisance especially where faculties are unconvinced about its value. In these situations, practitioners can become isolated and frustrated. The support of the network is vital in these cases as it can be a useful space to express frustrations and seek help to develop strategies to promote RPL in their workplace setting.

Support
One key reflection of the process is that the involvement and buy in from the national agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland and the National Forum for Teaching and Learning has been key in assisting in the longevity of the network. Their involvement has been fundamental in getting the network established and generating interest beyond the practitioners who initiated the network. In one respect this is one of the interesting points about the Irish network that individuals, organisations and institutions did not become members of the network due to some financial incentive.

Diversity
Having a network which spans so many sectors and getting everyone into one room is unique. The diversity that this brings is so rich in terms of learning and development. There is huge comfort that the issues facing sectors are universal and that collectively in addressing problems more workable and realistic solutions are found. The key success of the network has been twofold the commitment of the individuals who initially drove the establishment of the network and the involvement of other individuals along the way has been crucial. The willingness of

institutions and organisations to support the network through the release of personnel has also been important. They did not try to dominate or control the agenda of the network either which should be noted. Instead the members have instilled a sense of ownership and are interested in the development of RPL for the state.

9. Future Directions

Keeping the network relevant
The challenge for the network is keeping it relevant to its members and they take ownership of it. This involves commitment of many rather than a few. Conversations about practice and policy begin across the sectors. While some interests cross sectors others are context specific. This means that the network needs an organisational structure that can accommodate both common and singular issues.
There are many layers within the network in terms of awareness and experience of RPL. The idea of having action learning regionalised workshops has been discussed as a possibility. These could be sector focused or more general practice based learning and sharing workshops. It is vitally important that topics and events are not dictated by the Steering Board, these must come from across the RPL environments and practice.

Promotion of RPL in the public domain
Raising awareness about RPL was cited as an important role for the network. To date little has been done in Ireland to promote it or to get the message out to the general public that it exists. Institutions readiness to respond to learners requests for RPL tends to be one of the reasons why there has been a reluctance to promote RPL nationally.

Becoming a singular organisation
Currently the network is integrally linked with QQI as a national agency. Whilst it was very beneficial to have this support for the past two years the network must seek to disentangle itself from QQI and become a singular organisation in its own right.
This separation is foreseen as a challenge. The network depends on the good will of institutions to release staff for short periods of time to drive the agenda of the network and the involvement of QQI has enabled the broadening of involvement and interest from beyond higher education institutions. This is currently on top of their day to day duties which reflects the story of RPL practice too. In the longer term this would be problematic. A workable solution needs to be found as the network cannot be absorbed into or rotated amongst different bodies. Sustainable strategies need to be found.
The operation of the network could be spread by establishing clusters on specific areas of interest. This would involve small working groups coming together in areas of interest. These would meet regularly and join the Steering Board for bi-annual

meetings to identify topics for seminars, workshops or conferences. The second option would be the secondment of an individual to co-ordinate and drive the network. This would need the endorsement of all the members and the main representative bodies would have to support it especially the Department of Education in Ireland. The purpose of the role would be to facilitate engagement between practitioners within and between sectors, support policy development in Ireland at national and institutional level and advance RPL education for assessors, guidance counsellors and for those in educational leadership roles. It would also serve as a bridge between QQI involvement and network self-sufficiency.

European Context
RPL networks are not common in Europe which means that the Irish Network is unique. In many countries RPL is included in the lifelong learning agenda and not separated from the broader picture. A long-term goal is to link with European networks and share practice in this wider context. Connecting with the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group through the QQI and the invited speakers is key as a starting point.

10. Conclusions

The network is becoming valued by members as a space where RPL in all its difference, challenge and politics can be critiqued and analysed and where new possibilities for RPL may be imagined and pursued in the future. The network has achieved a lot in the short time it has been in existence, the most fundamental being the breadth of organisations and institutions who are represented in and by the network.
As with all networks their longevity is guaranteed only by sustained commitment to drive the network agenda forward coupled with maintaining its relevance to its members. In this regard, the network appears to have remained relevant however it is the commitment (financial and human resources) which are the challenge if it is to become sustainable into the future.

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Focus on the student   20

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) from student's subjective perspectives

Jeanette Leth

In 2007 the Danish Government (Ministry of Education, 2007) drew up a strategy on how to implement the European policy of lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001). This led to the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which covers non-formal, informal and formal learning (Aagaard, K. 2014; Alheit, P. 2012). It also led to new legal admission requirements to higher education, so that students with no formal upper secondary qualification can be admitted to higher education on the basis of RPL, as assessed by the individual institution. In international literature these students are also called "non-traditional students".

The aim of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of the experiences of recognition of prior learning as seen from students' subjective perspectives in Denmark. It is based on my current PhD thesis. The concept of lifelong learning has various meanings (Jarvis, P, 2012) and it can be viewed from a political, social and subjective perspective.
The objective is to understand RPL students' timing of commencement of education, choice of education, identity process and coping with being a RPL student in relation to their social and cultural background and their life history experience. The focus in this paper is subjective experiences of the RPL process as well as experiences of being a RPL student.

My research focuses on students taking the Bachelor programmes in Architectural Technology & Construction Management (ATCM) and Physiotherapy, both of which are 3½-year programmes. These were chosen on the assumption that the students' professional knowledge and history would influence the educational culture and also for reasons of funding.
RPL students are typically older students from their late 20s to mid-40s, without upper secondary school qualifications, and many are married with children. In the ATCM programme, 1.5% of the students are RPL students, whereas 3% of the students in the Physiotherapy programme are RPL students.

This research project is a part of a larger project on subjectivity and learning of RPL students at the Graduate School of Lifelong Learning at Roskilde University (2013-2017), which includes two further PhD projects focusing on other bachelor programmes. Lindholm J. is focusing on health care education (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and nursing), and Mellon K. is focusing on the teacher training and pedagogy programmes.

1. Methods

Life history interviews
Data were collected through life history interviews with seven students admitted via RPL to one of the two bachelor programmes.
Biographical methods accept the use of life history interviews as empirical material and recognize the narrative (Salling Olesen, 2002). I used the life history interview to understand how RPL students' background and experiences influenced their everyday life as students. This enables an understanding of different cultural, social and individual lives from the "inside" in an endeavour to understand lived life and resulting actions.

Psycho-societal approach (PSA)
PSA in Denmark has its roots in the Roskilde Life History Project, a theoretical and methodological project funded by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities. The aim of the project was clarification of the relationship between learning, education, participation and life history (Andersen, A.S. et al., 1998).
The project was inspired by the critical theory concept of subjectivity from the Frankfurt School. Critical theory understands human subjectivity as a result of socialization, in which a specific version of cultural and social experience is embodied, becoming a complex of conscious and unconscious preconditions for subjective action and later experience (Salling Olesen, 2002). Lorenzer is an influential contributor with his theory on socialization and language acquisition which provides a theoretical basis for this type of interpretation (Salling Olesen, 2015), as well as with his method of deep hermeneutics (Leithäuser, 2012, Salling Olesen, 2012, Salling Olesen & Weber, 2012), which enables us to go beyond the immediate understanding of social interaction (Salling Olesen, 2015). Lorenzer developed this method for cultural analysis (Leithäuser, 2012, Salling Olesen, 2012, Salling Olesen & Weber, 2012), and this further inspired Leithäuser and Volmerg to use it in research on working life and everyday life.

In practice, I have transcribed the interviews and repeatedly listened through the material to find interesting citations that illuminated the focus of the project. In the interpretation of the transcribed interviews, I looked for unusual use of language, notable ways of relating to the subject, expressions of feelings, relations to others,

descriptions of oneself and gaps and inconsistencies that could reveal experiences of relations, as a key to understanding learning and identity processes.

2. Theory

Learning is conceptualized as moments in individual life courses and subjective life experience (Weber, 2012, Salling Olesen 2002, Jarvis, 2012). I have been inspired by Salling Olesen's understanding of learning as an ongoing attribution of meaning to one's experiences which takes place in an interaction with others and is therefore also seen as social learning. Therefore, the possibility as well as the ability to connect one's experiences with the "new knowledge or skill(s)" becomes essential. Learning is embedded in everyday life and students' experiences as part of their subjective life history and therefore knowledge will be interpreted differently by each student (Salling Olesen, 2007). This means that the meaning making of what is taught will vary greatly, depending on factors such as context, previous experiences and the sense of well-being. This may allow for a new realization that can create personal development and change of identity.

3. Kenn

I will present part of a life history interview as an example of the complexity of the subjective learner as a reality in the learner's narrative. This provides a special understanding of universal lived life, with the conflicts and contradictions it contains and its reflection of society. I will first give a brief introduction to the anonymized participant. After this I will present some analytical points.
It is important to note that the full analysis behind the findings is not included, but only exemplified by selected key excerpts from the interviews. Also, in some cases, the point in question may be blurred by translation. In all my citations, I have striven to translate with loyalty to both form and content.

The first subject is Kenn. He is 23 years old at the time of the interview and is in the last semester of the ATCM programme. We meet up at the entrance to his college and walk together to a meeting room, where the interview takes place. Kenn sits opposite me. He is busy writing his final bachelor project and therefore occupied with scientific methods. He tells me he recently conducted his first interview which he found challenging, which seems to lead to an understanding between Kenn and me.

When the interview starts, I offer him a sheet of paper with a lifeline printed on it, which can be a help to write down points as we go, but he does not use it. Instead he starts telling me in a rambling way that he finished school after the 9th grade. He didn't like school and he didn't seem to connect with his teachers at all. He resisted being a learner, as he thought it was pointless. The narrative tells a story of a

rebellious pupil with a feeling of lack of recognition of him as a person. While at school, he worked as a store manager. Without wishing to discredit his story, this puzzles me but is an essential part of his narrative. He was advised to go to upper secondary school by his teachers but he refused.

Kenn's plans for his life were to work, earn money and have a good time. Unfortunately, the business went bankrupt and instead Kenn started working as an electrician's assistant, where he worked on installing electricity in new houses. He did that for 1½ years, after which he returned to a store in the hope of becoming head of department. Kenn lives with his girlfriend who is also a student. Kenn is the middle child of three; his mother works in an office and his father is a butcher and a carpenter.

I find Kenn sliding away from my questions as an unconscious defence. The transcription reveals very clearly that the interview is full of shifts of perspectives, which gives this interview a special kind of distance that Kenn is creating to his own life history. Kenn presents himself as a rebellious young man who has difficulty handling requirements, and therefore does not like authority. He is distancing himself in a special way from the programme as he sees it as a springboard to becoming an architect. Perhaps therefore he lacks peace of mind in his education. He is on his way to something else, which is reflected in the interview. Therefore, it becomes a big work of reconstruction for both Kenn and me: what is he doing here? A year before starting the ATCM programme, Kenn contacted the student counsellor for the programme, while he was working at the store for the second time.

> We wrote to him that I would like to start and I wrote that I've been doing so and so and worked here and there, so that I in a sense could prove, not prove, show him that I'd been working since school, that I'd always been employed, I've never been out of work…ahh, I think in a way he could see the motivation, this one, he wants something and so on.

This is told as a matter of fact. The girlfriend is clearly getting him going in the process, as he says, *We wrote to him.* She is of great importance for Kenn's personal development. Then he changes the perspective and speaks of himself. It does not seem clear to Kenn which non-formal, informal and formal competences he holds and the reason for admission. This might also be the reason why it is difficult for Kenn to connect with the programme, as he is not conscious of the future use of the knowledge and skills that the programme provides. Then he changes perspectives again and tries to comprehend the counsellor's reasons for admission, which in Kenn's point of view are based on the fact that he was never out of work.

> Then he wrote back to me that I needed this and that subject (at upper secondary level), and then we could look at it again. Actually, he didn't promise anything at that time. He said if you have those subjects, then it's possible and then I took the subjects and a year later I applied.

Kenn is still talking as a matter of fact about his first meeting with the programme and with the same distance which the whole interview gives an impression of. His inquiry is met with a barrier of three subjects at upper secondary level. He accepts this and the condition that this is no guarantee for his admission. He keeps working and he studies the three subjects in evening classes. So, in spite of his resistance to upper secondary school, he succeeded.

With the life story Kenn is telling me, I am puzzled that he is admitted through RPL and not an exemption.

> *Well, one just, somewhere, it's just a matter of priority because it was just at that moment that I needed to spend time on that, then you have to put your friends and girlfriend aside and now you're working and going to evening school, it's just one year of one's life, yes it was hard work of course… but I got through it.*

The first part of the quotation is said normally while the end *but I got through it* is said triumphantly. Kenn seems to be ready to shake off his resistance to education. He shows that he is changing his plan of life. Kenn explains how he intends to use the ACTM programme as a quicker way into the architect programme.

> *I'm deeply grateful for the way that one can do it, that you could – get around it, so that I didn't have to spend two or three years in upper secondary, this is a quicker way for that - I'm deeply grateful.*

It is with a clear voice and a short pause before *I'm deeply grateful* that Kenn understands his admission through RPL as a gift. The quotation shows how he shifts perspective from I to one and you and back to I. He argues that three and a half years in the ACMT programme is a quicker way into the architect programme, which is not the case, as upper secondary school in Denmark is maximum three years. In Kenn's view it is quicker, I suppose, in that Kenn would not be able to do upper secondary school without acknowledging that his school teachers were right. Therefore, RPL becomes the possibility between his life dream of architecture and education.

We are now talking about how he finds being an RPL student and he tells me:

> *Yes yes yeah, how can one say it, of course one could from the beginning have chosen to say that RPL is so and so but I didn't choose... I've chosen just to say that I was an electrician, it was easier, now I have a fair amount of experience with that, so yes, that's what we're going to do. It was like I fitted in and to protect myself, if one can say it like that…yes.*

He is speaking with a low voice and in a very mumbling way, when we are talking about being an RPL student. His denial of being an RPL student is inconsistent with

being grateful for admission as an RPL student. It shows that being an RPL student is full of ambivalence; he does not wish to be different, which could indicate that he is in the process of changing his identity from the rebellious student to a traditional student in the ACTM programme, which is why he lies to his fellow students. In a societal perspective, the socialization process is strong and people normally only wish to diverge from it for something positive. Kenn does not recognize RPL as equivalent to upper secondary school or the education of a craftsman; he gives it a lower status, which indicates that in Danish society RPL is not recognized.

4. Discussion

In Denmark, admission through RPL takes place by compiling a competence folder, where one has to document one's competencies and describe one's motivation for the programme. Counsellors have to assess the applicant on two parameters: Are the competencies equivalent to upper secondary level and is the applicant able to complete the programme (Styrelsen for videregående uddannelser, 2015). In Denmark, no one has taken the responsibility to actively provide information about this form of admission to higher education. In the national guidelines for education (UG), one can read about the folder but not about its purpose in connection to higher education and on the university college websites this form of admission is not on any of the main pages. This reflects the lack of discussion of RPL in Danish society and I would argue is the reason why RPL is not fully recognized.

Admission practice to the two programmes seems different. In the ACTM programme, all applicants are met with a requirement of 1 to 3 upper secondary level subjects. This is probably due to the experience that this helps the students. But it also allows for interpretation as a way for the profession to close in on itself. This is a familiar practice, which I interpreted as unwillingness by the educational system to recognize non-formal or informal learning. On the other hand, RPL students in the Physiotherapy programme either have a higher educational level or a qualifying examination. These different practices might be because of the different way of structuring the programmes by the government. The ACTM programme may admit as many students as they like (open admission, whereas Physiotherapy has a set number of admissions (closed admission). In the Danish education system, programmes receive funding according to how many students succeed in the programme. Therefore, the ACTM might have greater willingness for risk then the Physiotherapy programme as one lost student equals less money lost for the running of the programme. Another structural challenge is assessing whether a student will be able to succeed in the programme, which might be used as an excuse for not admitting any RPL students into a programme. A third practice that is seen in both programmes is that RPL is used to admit students categorized as exemptions.

For RPL students, RPL becomes a second chance in life to get on the train of education or to shift direction to something that seems more meaningful in their lives than their educational choice, or lack of choice, from the time when they were 16-20 years old. Their life history witnesses life changes, where the possibilities for or the necessity of getting an education become essential.

Kondrup emphasizes that those adults who choose education are marginalized in the labour market (Kondrup, 2012) and Illeris highlights how they are economically and socially marginalized (Illeris, 2003). These assumptions are partly identical to my informants' stories that reveal very different reasons for this change, such as a shift of direction due to stress, securing one's future, a new identity because of work injuries, a way to early disability retirement, part of a deal for achieving freedom, moving on and proving to oneself that taking higher education is possible.

Six out of seven informants did not know about RPL when they asked the counsellors informally about the possibility of admission. Only one of my informants knew about RPL before he applied and that was because he had already been a positively assessed RPL student in another programme.

All informants found the actual RPL process to be positive, but it is worth noting that they all had a successful application. They used terms like deep gratitude, being lucky, getting through the eye of the needle and relief that they did not have to do the whole of upper secondary school. RPL became an entrance to the educational system in a process that encouraged empowerment. When they started the programmes, these feelings seemed to fade into the background. They were faced with a new reality, and were not proud of being admitted on the basis of RPL. From the point of view of the programme, they were just like any other students (comment from teachers of both programmes).

Kenn lied about the fact that he is an RPL student. Others said that they did not talk about it unless they were asked directly, which indicates that being an RPL student in these two programmes is nothing to be proud of and that there is no real recognition of prior learning. Thus, being an RPL student is full of ambivalences.

Finally, all RPL students participate in the programmes, in spite of their different competences upon entering. This raises the question: which competences does one need to succeed in the two programmes? It is shown that a student with limited academic competence can make it through the programmes. My analysis does not give an unequivocal answer to that question, but rather emphasizes a combination of general competences, such as daring to make new attributions of meaning and realizations, combined with a high incentive to take the programme. Recognition of prior learning to some degree questions the admission system to higher education.

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The Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is more and more embedded in the primary processes of learning and working. VPL is a stimulus and 'guide' for sustainable personal development, in both processes. Moreover, it is aiming at creating shared ownership of citizens and organisations concerning their competency-based development.

The crucial question to be answered in this respect is how to further implement VPL as an effective method in lifelong learning perspectives, being able to integrate all citizens effectively and quality-assured into lifelong learning strategies at all levels and in all environments and contexts? This question relates to priority areas in the practice of sectors, regions, organisations and citizens, related to enhancing lifelong learning perspectives and to fostering social and economic progress by:
a. Integrating VPL on all learning levels and in all environments.
b. Offering concrete and real learning opportunities to all citizens, with a special focus on underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners.
c. Strengthening the levels of professionalism in VPL-functions to be able to cope with learner-steered and learning outcome-based lifelong learning.

The mission of the 2nd VPL Biennale was to share information, knowledge, ideas and visions on the practice of VPL: the learner in the centre. The learner is understood as the volunteer, the young one, the older one, the worker, the jobseeker, the teacher/trainer, the employer, the consultant, the trade unionist, etc. With this perspective in mind, the 2nd VPL Biennale was organised by VIA University College in Aarhus, Denmark on April 25-27, 2017. This Biennale focused on the alluring perspective of the integration of VPL in running processes and in systems of learning and working by putting the learner at the centre.

This sixth volume of the Series VPL Biennale provides more insight in the diverse ways that learners have at their disposal when it comes to making use of their personal learning experiences. Learners are owner of their learning history and are more and more allowed to capitalise on the personal richness that this history holds. That's what Validation of Prior Learning is about!

The Biennale Committee 2017:
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