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EUROPEAN NETWORK VPL

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The unfinished story of VPL

Valuation & Validation of Prior Learning
in Europe's learning cultures

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Preface

During the past three years the Leonardo-networkproject Valuation (and Validation) of Prior Learning (VPL) has been working on the research and knowledge exchange of VPL in European practices. The result of this work is presented in this book.
In the period 2002-2003 the network concentrated on making an inventory of national learning cultures. This information is compiled in the 2nd chapter. From 2004 onwards the network discussed the possibilities for designing a European model to cover the whole VPL-process. This discussion isn't finished, as the implementation of VPL in Europe isn't finished. Chapter 1 is representing this unfinished discussion, focusing on the VPL-model for implementation on organisational level. The other chapters are contributions showing the details of VPL-implementation in some countries. The last article tells us more on the somewhat missing learning culture in the presentation of the network, i.e. the eastern European learning culture.

The VPL-network consists of a wide range of disciplines: research and knowledge organisations, companies, ministries, vocational colleges, branch organisations, umbrella organisations, labour organisations, etc.
The VPL-network intents:
- to contribute to a European approach by working bottom-up on the basis of national good practices;
- to initiate a European wide platform to discuss valuation and validation of prior learning (methods, systems, results, good practice) as an approach in (vocational) education, human resource management, labour counselling, reintegration, for job-seeking purposes and for the sake of personal development. The (ultimate) aim is to propose an European approach for VPL;
- to exchange knowledge and experience of (best) practices, to learn from each other and to co-operate in this theme;
- to stimulate valuation and validation on European level in order to increase application of results of prior learning activities (study, courses, professional experience, managing a family, etc.);

- to stimulate initiatives to develop a personal (electronic) portfolio in which individuals can show their development in their profession, experiences, skills, knowledge, diplomas or certificates, etc.;
- to establish a sustainable organisation for sector, regional or national centres for VPL in Europe.

The VPL-Network focuses specifically on organisations, institutions, policy makers, etc. who are in the position to use VPL in their own practice or to stimulate other organisations to do so. These organisations have responsibilities for the development, presentation and implementation of systems for valuation and validation of prior learning. By working with these so-called stakeholders the network hopes to be able to reach the European citizen his- or herself so that they learn to use the VPL-systematics to create their own opportunities in society.

With this way of working the network operates as a forum of experts originated from various disciplines, various kinds of expertise and backgrounds. This multifunctional group discussed the development and implementation of Valuation and Validation of Prior Learning, reported on the outcome of these discussions and produced several reports for involved organisations and policy makers concerning the way to start dealing with VPL in any given context.

With this book we hope to show the existence of a strong foundation for establishing a more customer-oriented approach in learning and working; the goal is to empower individuals by offering learning made to measure, using a VPL-approach. In other words, a personal strategy for lifelong learning. This book tries to catch a glimpse of this nearby future. Therefore, implementation of VPL is still an unfinished story!

The editors

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Introduction: VPL it is!
Valuation & Validation of prior learning as a new perspective for life-long learning

Ruud Duvekot
Kees Schuur
Jos Paulusse

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that initial education is no longer enough for the whole of an individual's social-economic life. It is more important to develop your competences throughout your life. How? By accepting that 'your glass is already half filled'!

Personal competences can be developed in formal learning processes (classrooms, training situations). Competence-development, however, also takes place in non-formal and informal learning processes: on the job, at home, in voluntary work and through hobbies. If these personal competences can be described and compared with formal qualifications, then it should be possible to recognise them as valid and if not, the value has to be recognised.
This valuation of competences has a positive impact on the individual, at organisation or sector level and at national or qualification level. It supports *formative* goals, focusing on personal and career-development, and this may include *summative* goals, aiming at certification. In both cases we define this way of dealing with 'your' competences as Valuation and Validation of Prior Learning (VPL).

It's about lifelong learning
In the knowledge society, interest is slowly but surely shifting from 'hard' production factors such as machines and instruments to 'soft' factors, the human capital. Of primary interest are human learning potential, capacity and flexibility, i.e. the individual employability-potential. It makes no difference whether one is working, learning or seeking work. Employability is about getting or keeping the opportunity to perform, to contribute to society, by having a paid job, being a valued volunteer or contributing in other ways to society; in short, employability is about getting or keeping a job. Learning

is at the heart of being employable as an individual, while working encompasses all kinds of activity, from paid work to voluntary work and active citizenship.

In order to be employable you have to define all your competences such as knowledge, ambition, skills and attitude. A competence is actually 'to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from the act'. The modern knowledge society has a major interest in capitalising on this. In part this already takes place, since more formal educational pathways can be followed in the school system during certain periods in life. Non-formal and informal pathways are followed in other periods.

The knowledge and/or network society, with its increasing speed of change, needs besides the validation of the competences, a process of valuation ánd a market place that supports the changing needs in the flexible market, contexts, and the social-psychological changes of the human being.

So, lifelong learning is about making use of personal competences. Everyone should be aware that people are always learning everywhere, and above all, not always in a conscious or self-chosen learning situation. The degree in which individuals and the knowledge society consciously build on this is still strongly underexposed and under-utilised.

In the knowledge society, the focus is or should be on the individual learning process.

A complicating factor in dealing with this focus is that the formal procedures of training and testing describe only a very limited part of the individual learning potential or competences. Competences acquired in informal and non-formal situations are also essential for optimal performance on the labour market or social functions.

This complexity of individual learning and the opportunities it offers for the knowledge society were already recognised in Europe in 1995 in the White Paper of the European Commission: *Towards the Learning Society*[1]. While learning within the formal systems for education and training is a distinguishing factor of a modern society, learning that takes place outside this sphere is much more difficult to identify and value. The White Paper intended to utilise that the 'life-long learning idea' received renewed incentive and that these efforts with the help of VPL could also be recognised, valued, accredited and developed.

VPL

Since the White Paper the invisibility of all sorts of learning processes has been problematised. This problem was related to all levels of the individual (different employability-potential, knowledge and application levels) and society (all levels: international, national, regional, local, sector and organisation).

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[1] White Paper on Education and Training – Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society COM(95)590: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/lb-en.pdf

With that, the focus in the life-long learning policy slowly shifted from the traditional approach of 'learning in the classroom' to the wish to utilise 'other learning environments' such as work environment, independent learning, remote learning, implicit learning and leisure activities. This actually meant making use of non-formal and informal learning. This started up the general process of identification, assessment, valuation and accreditation of the total of formal, non-formal and informal learning. But still the valuing itself is pulled into the formal accreditation system, mainly directed to the formal job descriptions, instead of becoming an individual means to personal ends focusing on one's career-opportunities. Lately, for instance in the Common Principles, we see a shift to the valuation of competences developed in all possible learning environments. We refer to this as the process of Valuation of Prior Learning. VPL therefore is in a way *dealing with half-filled glasses instead of the old, traditional half-empty ones!*

VPL has two main roads, a summative and a formative one. The summative approach aims at an overview of competences, recognition and valuation. Its goal is certification.
When VPL goes one step further and includes practical learning and/or personal competence-development we call this the formative approach of VPL. This approach is pro-active and aims at development by designing a personal learning, career and development path.
With that, VPL is a practical strategy to demonstrate and develop your employability-potential for many purposes. It actually bridges individual learning processes and any kind of their social-economic utilisation of individual competences.

VPL on national level
VPL focuses on the implementation of life-long learning. In Europe there is a large variety in policies, learning cultures and systems that can be characterised as (parts of) VPL. It is known under a different name in each country. The binding element is that the insight exists in each European country that the valuing of the combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning processes is an important contribution to the building up of the knowledge society.
The differences between countries are caused not so much by definitions but more by differences in the structure of the labour market, the level and the method of co-operation between the responsible parties, the civil effect, socio-economic factors and all sorts of implicit elements that we call *national, traditional learning culture*. Accreditation of any kind of learning is predominantly based on the accredited units in mainstream education (modules, curricula, competences); a system that differs from country to country!

There are at least six interesting functions of VPL or VPL-like strategies:
1. The development, realisation and self-respect of the individual,
2. The (re)entry into the labour/volunteer market and improved flexibility through greater deployment potential from one sector to the other sector,
3. Company-specific objectives (e.g. internal training, job evaluation),
4. Planning instrument for training and instrument for further learning,

5. Enrichment of the company/society through valuation of non-formal and informal learning,
6. The reduction of unemployment and the increase in the number of individuals who work at the proper level and the proper place by matching competences that are in demand with those that are available.

In all six approaches there is usage of both summative and formative goals. The formative goals are in most cases dominant; as they should, since certification isn't a goal in itself but just a means to show the employability of the individual.

VPL in practice

A VPL procedure in general consists of five elements: commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences, identification of personal competences, valuation and/or validation of these competences, (advice on the) development of one's competences and finally structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy. Together these fives elements constitute the whole VPL-process.

The use of VPL strongly differs between countries, sectors and even organisations depending on the specific needs for valuation of learning. In the healthcare sector one mostly wants to solve the problem of getting new, competent employees, in the metal and process industry the moving on and further training of staff, and in the building industry the problem of moving on to related sectors. In some sectors it is obliged by laws to have a specific diploma. In general most VPL procedures aim at providing people with a nationally recognised diploma (the aim is to certify; the summative approach). In a growing number the procedures are followed up with concrete steps aimed at learning and the development of individuals (VPL as a formative approach).

VPL is usually limited to a specific branch or sector; however, sometimes activities stretch beyond branches. A nice example can be found in the Dutch healthcare where a homecare organisation thought of ways to fit a group of farmer's wives into their own work processes on the basis of competence-valuation. During the VPL procedure, this target group could prove to have the required competences for certain positions within the home care organisation on the basis of competences acquired outside of the regular learning paths.

Regarding the level of education, VPL is aimed particularly at competence development on upper secondary vocational level. The reason is not only that most of the positions on the labour market are on this level, but also because of the availability in most countries of a workable standard – a qualification structure – to measure competences. Such a general standard for measuring an individual's competences is not always available on higher vocational education level due to the fact that each school on this level can make and use its own standard. The use of the VPL system on this level is mostly limited to a VPL intake to provide exemptions to students.

Sector training funds often take the initiative for VPL. For instance in collective labour agreements the social partners agree in specific sectors that training funds can be used for the valuation of personal competences of employees. Sometimes they even agree on using the fund for giving learning vouchers to the employees. The training fund provides the portfolio models, internal assessors and guidance.

VPL in non-paid or voluntary work is widely spread, among others in sports clubs, Scouting and the Red Cross. Apart from the need for these organisations to show that they work with qualitatively accredited staff, VPL is also used to profile the organisation as a solid learning environment. This supports both the recruitment of new volunteers and the possibilities to move up for "current" volunteers.

The use of VPL in employment offices and the reintegration sector is limited until now, but there are strong signs that this will be caught up. Initiatives show that although the investment in time is limited, customer-friendly procedures are possible. The benefits differ from country to country. A precondition seems to be general legislation that offers the individual the right services tot take control of their individual learning in the past and design their future career-path, based on their specific, individual competences. The individual involved fills the portfolio him/herself on the basis of which accurate mediation is possible. The success rate is rising for these organisations and therefore the social-economic effects of VPL.

The challenge for the near future

In the lifelong learning arena four players will have to connect their perspectives:
- The individual has to take control of his/her own learning and career,
- The organisation has to be able to connect these individual paths to the needs of the organisation itself; this means connecting personal development plans to organisation development plans,
- The knowledge-infrastructure (public and private services; education and training; guidance) should be able to meet the needs of individuals and their organisations; i.e. operate customer-oriented and demand-steered,
- The authorities and social partners should support these three levels by means of legislation and arrangements so that lifelong learning or the individual employability-potential will not face obstacles but only favourable preconditions to take up one's career for the sake of organisation and society.

The European Commission took the lead in this challenge by formulating a proposal on Common Principles for VPL [2]:
- The overall aim of validation is to *make visible and value* the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired. The purpose of this validation may be supporting an ongoing learning process as well as aiming at certification.

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2 EU Commission expertgroup. Final proposal for a set of common European principles for validation of non-formal learning. Brussel DG EAC, 2004.

- *Validation* of non-formal and informal learning must serve the needs of individual citizens. This means that individual entitlements have to be clearly stated, in particular in relation to issues like privacy, ownership of results and right to appeal.
- *Institutions and stakeholders* (public organisations, private enterprises and voluntary organisations) face certain responsibilities when they initiate validation, for example in terms of providing proper guidance and support. These obligations will differ according to the specific field of activity.
- *Confidence* is a necessary pre-requisite for successful development and implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This requires well-defined standards, clear information on how assessments are conducted and on which basis conclusions are drawn, clear information about the purpose of validation and how the results will be used and clear and accessible information on conditions for validation, for example time and cost involved as well as support/guidance provided.
- *Impartiality* is a crucial feature of validation and relates to the roles and responsibilities of the assessors involved in the validation process. It is important to avoid undue mixing of roles as this will negatively affect overall confidence and credibility to validation results.
- *Credibility and legitimacy* must be based on the inclusion of the relevant stakeholders at all appropriate levels. The social and professional credibility of validation reflects the inclusion and commitment of relevant stakeholders.

These principles aim at setting up a lifelong learning system in which learning or personal development is encouraged instead of slowed down. The individual is central in a successful implementation of life long learning and the existing learning-market is focused on individual learning needs, regardless of age, environment, organisation and level.

The future?
Learning in a knowledge and/or network society means learning in a community in which knowledge is being developed constantly and where the competences have to be connected constantly to all kinds of activity in society. However, until now, learning has been directed to a limited form of knowledge development: cognitive knowledge and related to a formal qualification system. We now know that knowledge is a social and cultural phenomenon that is always available in the outside world. Learning is getting hold of that knowledge and work on it. The workplace (paid work, unpaid work, voluntary work, at home, hobbies) is always an environment in which competences are present, and waiting to be used and further developed. The problem is that we only unconsciously value, appreciate and use these competences because our thinking is mainly based on formal and institutionalised principles.

There is still a long way to go before VPL will be fully implemented for personal and organisation usage. This means that there is still a lot of work to be done by especially policymakers, human resource and educational advisors and teachers. It is important that

they are aware of portfolio models, independent assessment, formal and informal valuation, available sources of finance and most of all that they are able to verbalize the desired effects for their own organisation, sector or country. Personal development can be made to measure for the individual and organisations/societies can use this to strengthen themselves.

VPL supports the competence development of people. This investment is profitable for individual, organisation and society. The organisation is always suitable to be used as a learning environment, no matter how great the differences in learning possibilities within and between organisations are. With proper investments personal development of people can be shaped in any workplace itself. Therefore, the question is not whether there will be learning, but how to value and use this. Because no matter what: *people learn anyway!*

VPL it is!

In this book we aim at showing the variety of the use of VPL in the main European learning cultures. The main learning cultures are: Anglo-Saxon, East-European, German-dual, Mixed, Scandinavian and South-European. By learning from each other's culture and practices in this way we hope to create a strong incentive for the knowledge exchange between different learning cultures.

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the possibilities for designing a competence-based learning-infrastructure in which on national, sectoral and even organisational level all the existing services will be offered in due time in an integral approach to individuals & organisations. All contributions tell either a more general or specific story concerning this integral approach.

The first two contributions present general views on VPL.

In the contribution entitled 'VPL in 10 steps' a process model for implementing VPL on organisation level is presented. This model was used to start up a discussion on the different responsibilities that have to be taken up in order to build up a VPL-system that is quality-proof, highly accessible and offers portfolio-based learning made to measure. The model is designed to be a road-map for organisations. Since the discussion on this topic hasn't ended yet, it seems appropriate to publish the model as it stands now. In this way the author aims at generating a broader debate and thereby making the model more user-friendly and organisation-oriented.

The second contribution gives an overview of Europe's different learning cultures and the way national learning systems can make use of VPL-systematics. The critical success factors and learning issues are described. It's up to countries, regions and sectors to make use of this knowledge.

In the other contributions the focus is more on specific national approaches.

The article by Anne-Marie Charraud informs us on the innovation the 'Validation des Acquis de l'Experience' since 1992 brought about. Special attention is given to the major

role of the National Vocational Certification Committee in establishing a National Vocational Certification Register. This register is the backbone of a reference tool for all actors involved in training and certification and especially for those involved in VAE.

In the contribution of Torild Nilsen Mohn the progress in the implementation of VPL in Norway is elaborated. The background is sketched, together with a description of the roles the different stakeholders – authorities, social partners, education – play in the process of implementation. Furthermore, a national approach is described, recommending a procedure to make use of. The road ahead directs at implementing attitudes related to learning outside the formal education system on an individual level by offering them good examples, on an organisational level by challenging the stakeholders and furthermore on the policy level by inspiring to take action.

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The contribution of Ruud Duvekot and Jana Eggert focuses on the use of VPL in the Dutch voluntary sector. Lately there has been increased attention for the validation or valuation of prior learning in The Netherlands. During the 1990's the first national policy outlines were presented, following from the attention that was already given to the concept of lifelong learning. Nowadays, several branches and companies have started initiatives in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The voluntary sector, or the 3rd sector, with more than 3 million workers in the Netherlands is rapidly becoming an important player in the field of VPL. Why and how is explained in this article.

Anita Calonder Gerster gives us insight in the way VPL is very actively promoted and supported in Switzerland. In her contribution she explains the role that CH-Q plays in this development. CH-Q is the name of an integral concept for the valuation of acquired competences in Switzerland. It consists of a wide package of different services in the entire chain of VPL: portfolio, assessment, career formation, quality assurance and accompanying trainings programs. The target of CH-Q is twofold: the individual development or career formation in training and occupation and the development of the flexibility and mobility of that individual on the job market. In this sense CH-Q is a truly formative approach in which the valuation as well as the validation of prior learning is integrated.

Arjen Deij deals with the development of VPL in a wider perspective. He focuses primarily on its usefulness in the labour market and the educational systems of the countries on the borders of Europe. These are the countries that the present immigrants to Europe's labour market come from, and most probably the future immigrants too. Some of them are the new and future EU member states. At the same time, he also attempts to describe the broad context within which VPL has been developed. Furthermore, he gives a personal view on the question how useful the existing European experiences and objectives are for promoting VPL to the countries around the EU as part of a European "foreign education policy". In asking this question, he is also attempting to gauge the future role of VPL in Europe. The questions here are: Is what is good for EU countries good for our neighbours

too? Or is the lack of interest in VPL outside the EU perhaps an indication that the importance of VPL is being overestimated?

1 VPL in 10 steps

Towards a process-model for the use of VPL by organisations

Ruud Duvekot

Organisations can invest in their people in many ways. Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) offers the possibility to strengthen the benefits of this investment. The essence of VPL is first of all to acknowledge that the development of learning takes place not only through formal education but also at other learning environments and in a number of other ways. Secondly, VPL paves the way for creating development-opportunities for any kind of organisation on a 'made-to-measure' basis. Crucial is the understanding that VPL only comes to full bloom if the organisation formulates a clear vision on and creates real perspective for human capital. The purpose of this article therefore is to show that organisations do the right thing by starting to work with VPL. After all, people learn anyway and why not use this learning for the sake of your organisation?

In the first part the focus is on the meaning of lifelong learning and the benefits of using VPL within any given organisation. The actual use of VPL on the Dutch labour market lays the ground for this part, being a pluriform labour market with all the stakeholders present in active roles; as such it reflects the workings of the European labour market.
In the second part a general process-model for the use of VPL by organisations, regardless of their character or goals, is presented. It is intended to stimulate discussion and raise awareness on the level of organisations. Crucial is the understanding that this model shows the way to shape the VPL-process to the own needs of the organisation, whether it deals with a profit, non-profit or voluntary organisation.
The last part offers a proposal for a way to bring the implementation of VPL a step further within Europe.

I. The meaning of learning

Everybody learns constantly and everywhere: during work, study, hobbies, leisure time and at home. VPL shows the quality of the competences of an individual – no matter where and how acquired – and gives insight in the autonomous development of knowledge of an individual. VPL is focussed on the learning individual and through its broad view on learning and knowledge development it is promising for the knowledge society. It can lead to a more effective and more meaningful way of learning for individuals and society.

There is a great deal of interest in VPL. It is more and more used within human resource management of organisations or career development. The development in the Netherlands fits therefore right into the development in thinking about and usage of VPL in Europe. The timing for implementing VPL in the Netherlands seems favourable. Employers are highly interested in employability and are aware of the diversity of the labour market. Especially VPL is a way to be able to deal with individual differences in learning biography and styles[3].

What is VPL?

VPL is short for Valuation of Prior Learning. VPL aims at recognition, accreditation/ validation and further development of what an individual has learned in every possible learning environment: in formal environments such as school and non-formal or informal environments such as the working place and at home. The narrow or *summative* approach VPL focuses on an overview of competences, the recognition and validation. This is called the retrospective approach of VPL. When VPL also includes stimulating actual learning or knowledge development we call this the broad or *formative* approach of VPL. The broad approach is prospective and aims at development[4].

Point of discussion is how to define competences. Based on the study of the broad Dutch Education Council[5] it is evident that a generic definition of the concept of competences cannot be given. What is clear however is that competences form a cluster of abilities, knowledge, attitude, characteristics, ambitions and insights. Often one competence is conditional for the other. Furthermore, the development of competences always takes place in a certain context. That specific context is of crucial importance for changes in one's competences. In other words, competences are constantly developing. A short description of competences therefore is: 'a competence is to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from the act'[6].

3   Bjørnåvold, J. (2004). *Better use of individual knowledge and competence*. Oslo: 8th conference European ministers of education.
    Duvekot, R.C. & J. Brouwer (red.) (2004). *Het brede perspectief van EVC*. Utrecht: Lemma.
    http://ecotec.com/europeaninventory2004

4   Duvekot, R.C. (2004). EVC is van mij! In: *Leren in Ontwikkeling 4*, 2004, pp. 26-30.

5   Onderwijsraad (2002). *Competenties: van complicaties tot compromis*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.

6   Lyotard, J.F. (1988). *Het postmoderne weten*. Kampen: Kok Agora.
    Klarus, R. (1998). *Competenties erkennen*. (dissertatie) 's-Hertogenbosch: CINOP.

The origin of VPL in the Netherlands

In 1993 the Dutch government felt that regular education should be more accessible for adults. The report "To acknowledge quality" showed that this could be reached through the valuation of prior learning. The national qualification structure for vocational training was used as a basis for valuation.

The national action programme on Lifelong Learning incorporated VPL into the education policy. The working place as such should be used more as a learning place. Experience gained should be made visible as competences otherwise acquired. The social partners contributed considerably by making VPL functional for the unemployed and employed with or without basic qualifications. The publication of 'The Glass is Half Full!' completed the circle. It expressed a vision on VPL as a valuable system for education and the business community.

In order to stimulate the use of VPL on the labour market, the Dutch Kenniscentrum EVC was founded in 2001 as a independent knowledge centre on identification, recognition and valuation of competences. Next to the existing qualification structure for vocational training, the value of other standards with a civil effect was recognized[7].

To support implementation and in order to be able to learn from existing practice on non-formal learning, the Dutch government decided to establish a national knowledge centre on VPL. The Dutch Kenniscentrum EVC started in 2001. It doesn't interfere with existing activities but seeks to tie in as closely as possible with existing knowledge infrastructure and initiatives. The main focus is on addressing the benefits of prior learning assessment on the level of targetgroups, organisations and sectors. The major goal of the centre is therefore to stimulate the use of VPL in the Netherlands, in any given context.

The knowledge centre involves gathering knowledge and examples of good practice, disseminating and explaining, encouraging and advising those concerned to set up their own assessment procedure. Its main functions are:

- to collect and classify relevant national and international information on current and planned training courses that make use of *VPL*;
- to act as a support point to facilitate and help existing and potential processes;
- to provide information on developments relating to non-formal learning;
- to promote the exchange of knowledge on/between projects and to match theory with good practice;
- to bring together potential project partners and prevent duplication of efforts;
- to advise the government on policy measures and especially develop cross-sector policy to promote the utilisation of *VPL* that can be operational on the labour market.

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7   Werkgroep EVC (2000). *The glass is half full !* 's Gravenhage: Ministerie van Economische Zaken.

Dutch practice
The actual use of VPL strongly differs form one organisation to another. It always depends on specific problems that need to be solved, concerning recruitment, up-skilling of staff, cross-sector mobility, outplacement, etc. In all sectors the awareness grows that it is vital to offer a good learning environment within the organisations themselves to be able to tackle these problems of the modern knowledge society.

Due to the many names for VPL-like procedures, exact numbers of the use of VPL in the Netherlands are hard to give. The VPL monitor in the Netherlands in 2002 showed a minimum of 6000 people from 500 organisations that participated in a VPL procedure in that year. Furthermore, it was confirmed that almost every organisation in the report was looking into VPL more closely6. Almost 40% of these VPL procedures aimed at providing people with a nationally recognized diploma. The aim was to certify: the summative approach. In approximately 30% of the procedures there were already concrete follow-up steps aiming at learning and the development of individuals. VPL as an active, formative approach. The rest was aiming at the possibilities of promotion, the selection of staff or a division of tasks.

It is known that VPL is usually limited to a specific branch or sector. However, sometimes activities stretch beyond branches. A good example is the cross-sector mobility of military personnel. Many military functions resemble civilian occupations but lack the required (civilian) diplomas. VPL helps out by identifying competences acquired in the military working – and therefore also learning – environment. So, in certain civilian functions already a possibility exists to move on from a military function to a civilian occupation without having your 'paper-work'. This cross-sector mobility occurs for instance in transport and logistics, administration and different technical functions[9].

Negative experiences
As is pointed out, VPL can be applied in many situations. However, it does not always automatically lead to the desired results. Factors and circumstances that can have a negative impact are:
• The lack of possibilities for learning made to measure whereas VPL is implying just that;
• Not enough confidence of the participants in the quality of the assessments. Confidence forms the basis for further decisions about validation, valuation, certifying and future steps;
• Fear of VPL from the side of the employers that more diplomas lead to higher salary demands or the competition hiring their employees;

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8 Hövels, B. & C. Romijn (2003). *EVC-monitor 2001-2002*. Houten: Kenniscentrum EVC.
9 ESF-EQUAL 2004 Project 'Scouting your competencies', Dutch Ministry of Defence.

- Rigid legislation that complicates flexible custom made procedures;
- Last but not least, cyclical problems can restrain the essential precondition for VPL: offering real perspective for using the outcome of a VPL-procedure, especially career-opportunities on the labour market.

Positive experiences

The positive experiences with VPL are[10]:

- Thanks to VPL, recruitment and selection of staff can also take place among (non-traditional) target groups without formal qualifications but having appropriate non-formally acquired competences.
- VPL is useful for keeping personnel motivated and for prevention of disability. Employees in the building sector, for example, are offered new career possibilities on the basis of competence recognition and comparison with related sectors. This way, employers can actively work on disability prevention.
- Moving on and upgrading of people are stimulated. Especially up-skilling or training to a higher level can be efficiently designed on the basis of insight in existing competences.
- There is a positive influence on outflow and outplacement of personnel. For example in the army, there are many employees on a contract for a definite period of time. In order to replace them on the labour market more successfully, VPL offers both development and qualifications and therefore new career-opportunities.
- Within the competence management of organisations, VPL proves to be useful as a controlled instrument for individual accomplishment. It strongly relates to judging and education, on the basis of competence profiles or otherwise. With VPL, more success can be booked, especially when the objective is both development and qualification. The surplus value of VPL compared to traditional competence management lies mostly in the recognition phase. The stimulus coming from recognition of competences is enormous. This can be found in the personal motivation to learn and to work. Instead of finding out what you cannot do, VPL emphasizes what you can. Employees can make far better use of their talents.
- In the field of human capital accounting VPL is helping as well, especially when European laws require companies to put 'human capital' on the balance sheet. VPL fills this gap and expresses the value of competences of individuals and organisations with regard to a standard that is accepted and understood by all parties involved. However, for the present, the quality of current standards is the weak point in VPL procedures.
- VPL also gives financial advantages. Not so much in the form of a reduction in educational costs, but more through a decrease in the time employees are absent from their work. In the VPL procedure of companies like Corus, Rockwool and Friesland Coberco Dairy Foods the implementation of VPL already in the pilot phase showed a return on investment for the company.

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10 Verhaar, C.H.A. (2002). *Wat kan EVC opleveren?* Utrecht: Lemma.

Duvekot, R.C. & J. Brouwer (red.) (2004). *Het brede perspectief van EVC*. Utrecht: Lemma.

• VPL procedures give confidence to people. It contributes to the motivation for further development, which makes VPL valuable as a contribution to change processes within organisations.

What to do next?

VPL addresses the modern knowledge society in which knowledge is being developed constantly and the reality that people learn anywhere ands anytime in formal, non-formal and informal settings. The problem is that we never learned to value, appreciate and use this knowledge because our thinking is based on formal and institutionalised principles. In order to tackle this problem on a European scale we have to focus more on exchanging information concerning national practices, instruments and policies. Learning from each other will show the advantages and possibilities for individuals and organisations to take up their own responsibilities in the field of lifelong learning.

A first step is the description of the VPL-process, on the level of organisations since that's where the different roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders can be seen. It will take however a lot of time before VPL will be a common procedure for the development of individuals and organisations in any given social-economic context. We do know however that individual knowledge development with the help of VPL can be far better used for the needs of the organisation. This has at least two advantages:

• the effectiveness of training efforts increases by making use of non-formal learning (retrospective and prospective) as well,
• by understanding the results of implicit, autonomous learning individual learning processes can be related to the HRM policy of any organisation (profit, non-profit, voluntary).

II. The VPL-process in 10 steps

Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) is the designation of a broad outlook on the implementation of lifelong learning. The challenge is to change the social-economic system into a flexible and fast-adapting system to the quickly changing need for competences on the labour market. In the context of the knowledge society VPL addresses this need by showing the real human potential on the basis of the analysis and valuation of personal competences. VPL offers a personal development-strategy in which the organisation-context and public/private services are crucial for keeping up with the speed of competence-development in the knowledge-society.

Considering this context, VPL focuses in general on the need of:

a. the **individual** to be able to take control of his/her own learning and career in order to become or stay employable. This goes as much for young as for elderly people! This is what I call '*the I-level*' or 'my level'.

b. **organisations** – profit, non-profit or voluntary – to be able to facilitate these individual learning paths and make use this within the context of their own mission/goals. This I call '*the we-level'* or 'our level'.
c. the learning **system** – VET, guidance and counselling – and other services to individuals – labour agencies, local communities and welfare – to adapt itself to rendering flexible services to these individuals and organisations. This is the level of all general, public and private, services available to individuals and organisations. I refer to this as '*the us-level'*, being the level of collective services that is or should be accessible to any citizen.

More specific, the needs on the labourmarket for the implementation of VPL concern the problematics of revitalising ageing people, the necessity to upskill all personnel and the flexible adaptation of different people entering the labourmarket (young and qualified or elderly reintegrating). VPL is aiming at offering all these target groups new or better career-opportunities! VPL is therefore a vision as well as a 'toolbox'.

In this part a general process-model for the use of VPL by organisations, regardless of their character or goals, is presented. It is intended to stimulate discussion and raise awareness on the level of organisations. Crucial is the understanding that this model shows the way to shape the VPL-process to the own needs of any kind of organisation.

VPL in 5 phases

A VPL procedure in general consists of five phases: commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences, recognition of personal competences, valuation and/or validation of these competences, (advice on the) development of one's competences and finally structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy. Together these fives phases constitute the VPL-process.

Phase 1: Commitment and awareness

An individual has to be aware of his/her own competences, of the value he/she is giving him/herself to these competences and the value it has for others in certain contexts at certain moments. Being able to keep up your competences in a 'made-to-measure way' is vital for this understanding.

For organisations it is vital to understand that investing in people means investing in the goals of the own organisation. This awareness should culminate in setting specific targets for the investment in individuals and the support the organisation can give to this *human resource development*.

This phase consists of 2 steps: raising awareness and setting the targets for VPL within the context of the organisation. This phase is the real critical success factor for VPL since if an organisation doesn't experience the necessity to think or rethink its mission and connect the results of this to the need to strengthen or even start up a pro-active form of human resource management. In other words, it takes a lot of effort to see the benefits of lifelong

learning on the level of an organisation and activate these benefits by supporting an individual VPL-process. In general this phase takes as much time as the other four phases together!

Phase 2: Recognition

Identifying or listing competences is usually done with the help of a portfolio. Apart from a description of work experience and diplomas, the portfolio is filled with other evidence of competences acquired. Statements from employers, references, papers or photos undeniably show the existence of certain competences. The evidence can be aimed at the profession or position the VPL procedure is developed for. In other cases it can be an 'open' portfolio or a complete overview. Evidence is sometimes aimed at valuation, in other cases at personal profiling. The participant compiles the portfolio him/herself, with or without help.

This phase is made up of a preparatory and a retrospective step. The preparation aims at articulating the actual need for competences in the organisation in the different function-profiles. In the retrospective step the involved individuals fill in their portfolios and acquire the necessary proof of their learning in the (recent) past.

Phase 3: the valuation or assessment of competences

Then the content of the portfolio is being valued or assessed, when necessary, followed by an extra assessment. With employees, this usually takes place by observation during work or by means of a criterion based interview. Assessors compare the competences of an individual with the standard used in the involved organisation. That standard will be used to measure the qualities of the participant. The path followed is unimportant, only the result counts. This second step results in a certain valuation: a validation on an organisational, sector or national level in the form of certificates, diplomas or career moves, or a valuation in the form of an advice on career-opportunities.

This phase therefore needs different steps:

- setting the standard of the specific VPL-process. This standard can in principal be any standard that meets the need of the organisation, e.g. a national or sector vocational standard or an internal standard. Together with the standard a choice can be made of the way the assessment will take place;
- the valuation itself, being the assessment of the portfolio and valuing it with correspondence to the given standard and targets of the organisation;
- the validation of the learning evidence within the given standard.

After this phase the retrospective part of the VPL-process is concluded. The next phases concentrate on the prospective power of VPL.

Phase 4: the development plan or the actual valuation

This phase of the VPL procedure aims at the development of the individual by turning the validation and/or advice into an action plan. On the basis of the valued competences and clarity about the missing competences or available strong competences, a personal development plan is made up. This plan is about learning activities that will be done in

formal or non-formal learning environments, in work situations, during a change of position, by offering coaching or by creating an environment in which informal learning is stimulated.

This phase has tow steps. First of all making a match between the individual development plan and the goals of the organisation. This match can already be made by simply stating that any kind of individual learning is also for the benefit of the organisation. Mostly, however, the match will be agreed upon by making the personal development plan a formal part of the broader organisation plan.

Secondly, the actual learning or development of the individual will be started up. In this step, the individual learns/develops his or herself on a 'made-to-measure basis', which means learning/developing irrespective and independent of form, time, place and environment.

Phase 5: structural implementation of VPL

The last phase of the VPL-process focuses at the structural implementation of VPL in the training and personnel policy of an organisation. The results of a VPL-pilot have to be evaluated in order to show the way the implementation can take place on a 'made-to-measure basis'. An organisation should be able to use VPL structurally for the specific goals that had been set in the pilot. Any new goals should also be added easily to this new policy.

This phase comprise just one step: evaluating and embedding the results of the VPL-pilot in the human resource management (HRM) of the organisation. By doing this the organisation will turn its existing training and personnel policy into a competence-based lifelong learning policy in which learning made to measure is the cornerstone of its HRM. The positive benefits of VPL as shown in the preceding part of this contribution can come to full bloom in this phase.

Internal input

Every phase in the VPL-process needs internal input from the organisation. The main effect of VPL as a chance to construct a tailor-made strategy to use the individual's lifelong learning also for the benefit of the organisation, will otherwise be missed. This means that an organisation should be aware that a lot of the efforts that have to be made can and have to be supported by the organisation itself. This internal input is in fact one of the main preconditions for a successful VPL-process. VPL can only have its best effects if it is based on the context of the organisation itself.

Taking your own context seriously means taking responsibility for internal input:
- formulating a clear vision on the future of the own organisation and its goals;
- making an internal analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT);
- articulating the demand for specific competences within the different functions of the organisation;
- stimulating the people within the organisation to start investing in themselves;

- making sure that the context of the organisation is also used as a powerful learning environment;
- offering real perspective for individual VPL-procedures, given the goals that were set for the whole process.

Some of these actions can of course be supported by external advisors as long as the organisation itself stays in control. A SWOT-analysis for instance can be made with external help but shouldn't be an exclusive external activity! So, all internal input is intended to create empowerment on the level of the organisation, on the so-called '*we-level*'.

External services

Of course, there is always a need for external services, in every phase or step of the VPL-process. Any organisation can benefit from the expertise that is available in 'the us-level'. So, why not use it if it is available to strengthen your own VPL-pilot and implementation. Especially in SME's this help can be used since there are simply too few hands to help out on the level of companies. This also goes for voluntary organisations and representants of specific target groups. And then there is the role of financing pilot-projects, especially by training funds in SME's.

The external services or '*the us-level*' can be very helpful for all kinds of organisations when it comes to:
- raising awareness,
- offering (information on) finance, legislation and collective arrangements,
- advice, guidance and counselling,
- setting standards for valuation and validation,
- offering examples of VPL-projects, portfolio models and function-profiles,
- giving access to certification and learning services,
- training of internal staff members,
- quality assurance of the whole VPL-process, including offering second opinion and handling complaints,
- national or sector services like setting up independent assessment centres and portfolio-databanks.

The VPL-process in a matrix

Reviewing all these aspects of a VPL-process on the level of an organisation, it is possible to put all the questions and roles of *I*, *we* and *us* in a matrix. All the information in this matrix should be considered as general information. Once it is used on the level of a specific organisation the own context will help clarify the specific process that the organisation has got to go through.

In the 1st column the five phases are present: commitment, recognition, valuation, development and implementation/empowerment.

The 2nd column makes clear which step should be taken in each phase. Each step corresponds to a crucial question that an organisation will have to be able to answer.

The 3rd and 4th columns show which actions should be taken once the questions start being asked and why these actions are necessary.

The 5th column shows the possibilities of an organisation to organise internal input to support the use of VPL. The precise input depends of course on the character and the goals of the organisation.

In the 6th column all the possibilities of external help are presented in the field of information, finance and legislation or rules. The specific responsibilities of external services are also mentioned, like quality-assurance of VPL, possibility of independent assessment, guidance, public or private learning services and guidance and job-counselling.

The end result of the matrix shows an organisation that is empowered and self-steered when it comes down to invest in their people, make them aware that their glasses are already half-filled and that they can invest in themselves – and thereby also in their organisation – in an easy way because no matter what happens: people learn anyway!

'VPL IN THE ORGANISATION'					The VPL-process in 10 steps
PHASE	STEP BY STEP	WHAT TO DO?	WHY?	INTERNAL INPUT	EXTERNAL SERVICES
I. COMMITMENT	1. AWARENESS *what kind of organisation is this & do we want to invest in human capital?*	• Vision of "the glass is half full": focusing on all kinds of learning • responsibilities of organisation • mission	Creating a vision of organisation targets and opportunities	• Giving space to 'future-watching' on levels of management and work floor • Using social events of the organisation • Getting knowledge on formal, non-formal and informal learning, incl. summative and formative goals	All stakeholders organise information campaigns on the topic of pro's and con's of lifelong learning within any given organisation; On macro-level they also offer an analysis of society and its development & trends, including demonstrating why and how organisations should/could react (or better 'pro-act') - stakeholders formulate general principles for VPL concerning: quality, access and transparency
	2. STARTING UP & SETTING TARGETS *what are the aims of the organisation? & what are the needs of the organisation in relation to the aims?*	• Inventory • Swot-analysis	Making the vision concrete	• Description of context organisation, ambitions and opportunities • Identifying the leaders/pioneers	Advice on existing public/private services available for VPL-aspirations of organisations
		Organisation Development Plan, incl. planning and budget	Demand articulation organisation level	• Setting the goals for an internal VPL-process • Putting together an internal VPL-team • Organising an informative meeting for all	Information on: • how to do this • supply of external services • available financial back-up • ownership of VPL

PHASE	STEP BY STEP	WHAT TO DO?	WHY?	INTERNAL INPUT	EXTERNAL SERVICES
II. **RECOGNITION**	**3. PREPARATION: DETERMINATION ORGANISATION PROFILE** *how is the organisation going to determine the need for half-filled glasses?*	• Function profiles • Portfolio format	Demand articulation individual level + instrumentation of one's half-filled glass	• Making up your mind concerning 'language' • Description of function profiles • Competence catalogue • Setting the portfolio • Setting the budget (time and money) • Intake of candidates	Information on: • how to do this • generic list of competences • information on portfolio formats
	4. RETROSPECTIVE, connecting to the organisation profile *how to demonstrate the individual profile or the state of the art of one's half-filled glass?*	Filling in portfolios by candidates	Working on the individual contribution to oneself and the organisation	• guidance of candidates • quick scan or self-assessment • formats for eligible proof/ evidence • setting up a portfolio-databank, including access to a 2-yearly update (voucher) • examples and role models	Information on: • how to do this • examples • usable standards and assessment tools • quality assurance

PHASE	STEP BY STEP	WHAT TO DO?	WHY?	INTERNAL INPUT	EXTERNAL SERVICES
III. **VALUATION**	**5. SETTING THE STANDARD** *how to match individual profiles to organisation profiles?*	Choosing the assessment-method	Making a choice is part of the 'made-to-measure' approach	• setting the actual standard according to the goals • self-assessment • assessment-protocol • showing perspectives (summative/formative)	Information on: • how to do this • access to assessment facilities • external assessors
	6. VALUATION *valuating the half-filled glasses*	Assessment	Finding out personal abilities and ambitions, within the organisation context / Setting formative goals	• organising assessment • internal assessment • filling in formative perspective(s)	Information on: • how to do this • external assessment • advice on certification • 2nd opinion facility • right to appeal
	7. VALIDATION *validating the half-filled glasses*	• Certification (summative goals) • Personal advice on development	Capitalising on personal abilities and ambitions	• organising summative perspectives & filling in internal summative goals • portfolio's taken up in portfolio-databank for 2-yearly update	Information on: • how to do this • filling in external summative goals • advice on personal development plans (PDP) • mutual recognition (crossing borders of sectors/regions)

PHASE	STEP BY STEP	WHAT TO DO?	WHY?	INTERNAL INPUT	EXTERNAL SERVICES
IV. **DEVELOPMENT**	**8. PROSPECTIVE: CONNECTING THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE ORGANISATION'S FUTURE** *How to make up a personal development plan (PDP)?*	Formulation of PDP	Organising 'learning/ developing made–to-measure'	• matching PDP with Organisation Plan • proposal for financing PDP • contract with public/private services • guidance • information on individual rights & duties	Information on: • how to match • how to finance • how to guide • sectoral/national rights & duties
	9. WORKING ON PDP's individual action: developing/ learning made to measure	Learning/ developing made to measure	People learn and develop	• making sure services offer 'made-to-measure' • individual guidance • quality-control by VPL-team	Information on: • how to do this • quality-assurance
V. **IMPLEMEN- TATION / EMPOWERMENT**	**10. STRUCTURAL IMPLEMENTATION & EMPOWERMENT** *How did it go?*	Evaluation of the pilot	Making a decision on structural embedding VPL	• evaluation form for candidates • VPL-team advises organisation on future use of VPL	Information on: • how to do this
	If ok, how to embed VPL structural in the organisation policy (training/ personnel-policy)	Embedding the results in HRM	Structural embedding VPL	• VPL embedded in HRM • Knowledge how to use (demand-steered) public/private services • Vouchers for 2-yearly update of portfolios • PDP replaces 'classical' personell-cycle • VPL also sets the norm for customer-oriented guidance	Information on: • how to continue this with flanking public/private services • using national portfolio-databank

III. Next stop: matching model and practice

The next stop in the implementation of VPL should be strengthening the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning on a European level for both summative as well as formative purposes in a qualitative and quantitative sense: more use of the validation-principles by individuals and organisations, supported by demand-steered and customer-oriented learning systems. This calls for a match of VPL-practices in different learning cultures and different contexts with the model of the VPL-process.

This goal can be served by working both top-down and bottom-up. Working bottom-up means making visible the specific needs for lifelong learning of organisations and individuals; top-down refers to showing the services that national and sector learning systems are already offering or designing the services that these systems should be able to offer to the potential users, i.e. the modern, lifelong learners within the given context of any kind of organisation.

The match should be made simultaneously in different key-sector levels and the different European learning cultures. These key-sectors could be:

• the metal-sector as an example for profit-organisations. This could be a good sector since there already is a lot of VPL-practice available in many countries. There is also a good and solid cooperation on the European level between the different national sector organisations for large companies as well as SME's;

• the health-care sector as an example for non-profit organisations. This sector has the same advantages of the metal sector: a lot of different practices in different contexts through Europe, including an available European diploma-infrastructure;

• the voluntary sector as an example for voluntary organisations. This sector can be analysed since a lot of voluntary organisations operate with national organisations (Red Cross, Scouting, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, etc.) on a European scale or share voluntary activities in national settings (sport, welfare, target groups, etc.)

The 7 learning cultures are: Anglo-Saxon, East-European, German-dual, Mixed, Romanic-French, Scandinavian and South-European.

The analysis of good practices and experiences in the key-sectors and the main learning cultures in Europe should be organised according to:

• gathering, analysing & comparing of VPL-practices,

• identifying critical success factors,

• knowledge exchange on strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT),

• formulating an approach to implement the validation-principles in any given learning culture on a national level,

• showing specific forms of implementation through role models,

• disseminating the results within all learning cultures.

Working in this way (two approaches, 3 key-sectors and 7 European learning cultures) could help enforcing the empowerment of individuals and organisations in Europe's knowledge-society as well as making national learning systems more demand-driven and

customer-oriented. In a sense, top-down and bottom-up could meet each other halfway thus empowering individuals and organisations to serve their summative & formative purposes on a sector level in different European learning cultures.

The aim is to show individual learning-routes to qualification, certification and career-opportunities that can be generated by individuals themselves on the basis of their non-formal & informal learning, portfolio and available 'valuation-services'. The vision is that in the European knowledge-society:
- 'I', or the citizens, will have to get a better grip on my career and an awareness that I too have a responsibility and should invest in myself,
- 'We', or organisations in Europe (profit, non-profit, volunteer, communities) have to develop a better articulation for our need for competences and a willingness to invest in people and open up career-opportunities,
- 'Us', or our learning system, should become more custom-oriented and demand-steered, give better access to validation and learning, ensure that the VPL-process is quality-proof and make sure that learning made to measure above all means that no one has to learn anything twice so that the glasses are always half-filled.

In this way a contribution will be made to closing the gap between the learning system and the labour market for the sake of individuals and organisations, with respect to different European cultures and at the same time maybe even working on making the Lisbon-agenda a reality.

2 European learning cultures & VPL

Kees Schuur
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During the past ten years, a majority of the European Union (EU) member states have co-operated with countries outside the EU in working on methods and policy to enable the identification, assessment and accreditation of learning that takes place beyond formal education and training.

France, England, Norway and the Netherlands, in particular, have played a pioneering role in this, all from their own tradition and with their own approach:

- England, in particular, with its market-oriented approach in which the APL[11] system provides for accreditation of competences acquired elsewhere.
- In France, the Bilan de Competence of 1985 and the laws of 1992 and 2002 on the accreditation of skills acquired through work experience, VPL, have received a lot of attention.
- Norway, with its right to assessment and training, had already been organised long ago.
- The Netherlands where the 'polder-model' – a major consensus seeking model amongst all stakeholders – led to an approach based on the metaphor of the glass is half full.

Learning cultures

Each country has its own culture, identity, history and practices on education and training. It goes without saying that each country also has its own approach and system for education and training. We describe this specific approach as the learning culture in a certain country. Since the learning cultures – and therefore, also the policy on VPL, which

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[11]   APL = Accreditation Prior Learning.

is based on this learning culture – can vary widely within Europe, the systems for VPL also vary. Many countries have been involved with VPL in one way or another, and it is also interesting to study the various approaches in more detail. The common development in VPL may be a reason to show the weak and strong points of each other's system. This enables you to reach mutual knowledge exchange in which all countries can have an interest. It can be called benchlearning, since the active learning of each other's strong points takes place on the basis of benchmarking.

Europe in clusters

In the book, *Making Learning Visible*, by Jens Bjornavold[12], a cluster model is used to describe the various learning cultures. Mutual learning takes place through geographic proximity and institutional similarities of the countries within each cluster. This has led to the fact that VPL approaches within each cluster often resemble one another on the whole. In this report, we have adjusted this cluster model somewhat better reflect the current situation in Europe. For example, Switzerland has been added to the dual system. We have placed France, Belgium and the Netherlands together in a new cluster: the so-called Mix model. The Mix model is characterised by a combination of specific elements from a number of different clusters.

DUAL SYSTEM	MIX MODEL
Germany Austria Switzerland	Netherlands Belgium France

MEDITER-RANEAN	NORTHERN EUROPE
Greece Italy Spain Portugal	Norway Denmark Finland Sweden

ANGLO-SAXON	EASTERN EUROPE
United Kingdom Ireland	Bulgaria

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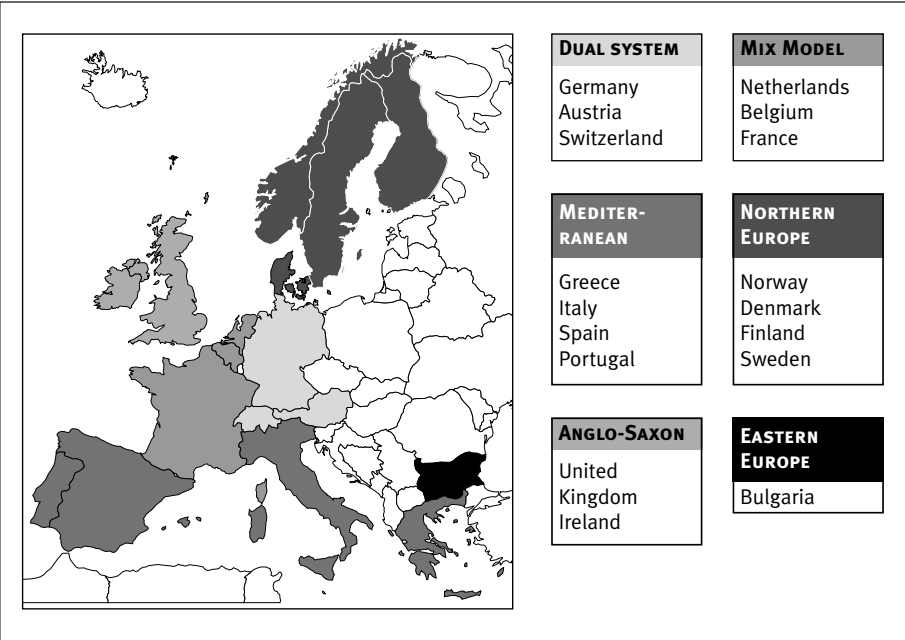
12   Bjornavold J, *Making Learning Visible*. Cedefop, Thessaloniki, July 2000.

We are limiting ourselves to the 'old' EU member states and some contiguous countries. The new EU-member states and EU-candidate states in Eastern Europe are, apart from Bulgaria, not yet described. In the article by Arjen Deij more information on VPL in the new EU member states is presented. In this contribution we only present Bulgaria as part of the Eastern European learning model.

We first present a general overview of the learning cultures, excluding the Eastern European model. The following questions are answered:
- What are the features and essential system elements of learning in this cluster?
- Does the cluster primarily focus on academic education or on vocational education?
- How is adult education organised and are concepts such as 'life-long learning' translated into practice?
- What status does a completed vocational training course or an academic education provide?
- Is the policy focused more on individual development, on strengthening sectors or on consolidating the educational concept?

Based on this description, we will indicate the critical success factors and learning issues for each learning culture. An overview is offered of the VPL approach within the clusters based on a number of countries.
The concept of the learning culture leads us to the VPL approaches that are developed within various clusters or are still largely in development. Between and within the clusters there is a lot of variation on the VPL need, realisation and methods. The national case-studies in the last part show this clearly.

The Learning cultures in short

The dual approach: Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Learning culture
Learning based on work experience, i.e. the combination of learning and working, is systematically integrated in the educational systems of all three countries. The dual system is generally considered to be a success, in a pedagogical sense thanks to the combination of formal and experimental learning, quantitatively (large numbers pursue this education) and qualitatively (short distance between education and the labour market). The disadvantage of the dual system is that it focuses on young people and on reproducing competences and knowledge. Therefore, the dual system can only partly respond with flexibility to the demand for innovation of these competences and knowledge.

VPL approach

For a long time, VPL played a subordinate role in *Germany*. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the formal system and the accompanying qualifications are highly valued. The actors have little need for new forms of assessment and potential new structures.

Second, unemployment in Germany is high. Therefore, companies and sectors have long been reserved in investigating other programmes. Recently, however, more regular meetings and projects on VPL have been held. Academic research into competency-oriented learning is also beginning to take shape.

The last reason for the limited attention for VPL is the formal system that is highly complex, leaving almost no room for VPL. It is weighted down with a multitude of regulations and has a strong base in large collective labour agreements. Therefore, the system is strongly focused on 'initial' education and training, not on other programmes. For vocational education, the dual system enjoys a high status and is based on a combination of learning at school and practical training. This implies that part of experiential learning is already incorporated in the official model. The system is based on job profiles that clearly reproduce the competences and qualifications. Since the job profiles indicate where the learning should take place, they exclude other programmes such as VPL. Occupations are linked to wages, rights and responsibilities and therefore, the formal system indicates not only the knowledge and competences, but also the implicit value of what has been learned. The result is an approach that is weighed down under rigid regulations and too many interests among the various parties.

Interest in VPL recently increased thanks to a number of factors. It was proposed that the educational system created an excessive focus on initial education, is inflexible and rigid and therefore cannot offer the proper support to 'life-long learning'. The development of continual vocational education has not kept pace with the structured and formalised model of initial education and training. A sector as learning environment is heterogeneous and only has a limited public or tripartite co-ordination. Solutions are needed to link the increasing attention for life-long vocational education with the current dual system. During a meeting held in Karlsruhe[13], much of the emphasis was placed on discussions of what competency precisely implies. The rigid learning culture in Germany may be more difficult to break through than in Austria and Switzerland.

Until recently, VPL played a limited role in *Austria*. The VPL issue is always linked to the demand for the modularisation of education and training. In the initial system for education and training, there was still hardly any talk of modularisation, but it was introduced in vocational education to a certain extent. The Austrian system for vocational education is highly advanced. The system is also dual, promoting the relationship between formal learning and learning at the workplace. This creates a strong foundation

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13 GTW Conference "Kompetenzentwicklung in Unternehmensprozessen", Karlsruhe, 23 and 24 April 2002.

for the link of formal and non-formal competences at later moments in someone's life. The importance of learning based on work experience is clearly understood and valued. This potential for VPL, however, is not yet fully utilised. The lack of bridging mechanisms between initial vocational education and life-long learning in vocational education makes a horizontal or a vertical shift between professions and/or educational level complicated. Systems for the accreditation of prior learning competences are still underdeveloped. In point of fact, Austria can be described as one of the EU member states where the introduction of methods and systems in this area are perceived with the most scepticism. However, the need is slowly growing, in this country as well, to a more open approach to education and training that can make the closed system between professions and educational levels more accessible. The dual system insufficiently meets this need due to its rigid rules and inflexible responsibilities.

In Germany and Austria, the discussion on VPL is closely related to the discussion on the modularisation of the system for education and training. In Switzerland, this modularisation has already taken place. A VPL system has been developed on top of that, which will be discussed further in chapter three.

The Mediterranean approach: Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal

Learning culture
These countries have an educational system that is strongly based on a scholastic programme that leads to academic education. These countries have a weak tradition of vocational education. Learning for a profession primarily consists of experiential learning at the workplace, almost entirely non-formal or informal and therefore without certification and diplomas.
Initiatives to strengthen vocational education have only been taken in the last decade. Examples are the efforts to create a professional qualification structure in Spain and the development of regional assessment and learning centres in Portugal.

Formal certificates are highly valued. These particularly include academic diplomas, despite the fact that academic education offers no job guarantees, high income or high status. Over the past 10 years, these four countries have worked hard on reforming their vocational education. Non-formal learning (particularly through work experience) is the predominant form of development and innovation of (vocational) competences. This means, particularly for Greece, the Southern regions in Italy and the less developed areas in Spain and Portugal, that a solid reservoir of non-formal competences, based on work experience, has been created. This should be made visible as a basis for a stronger economy in these countries. If this reservoir were to be opened up (qualitatively and quantitatively), however, the weak and the strong factors would have to be identified. The question not only regards the access to this reservoir, but how the quality of these competences can be improved. As long as large parts of the competences in society are invisible, it is practically impossible to indicate where improvements could be introduced.

From this viewpoint, VPL methods can be seen as means for quality improvement in complete parts of the European economy, not for individual employees and companies. This illustrates the need for VPL, perhaps even more so than in Northern Europe. But there is still a long way to go.

Greece can be described as the country within the EU where the role of non-formal learning is the most dominant. According to the General Confederation of Greek Workers, only 30% of the Greek vocational population has a professional qualification. This means that a significant part of the vocational competences in Greece are still acquired and innovated outside the formal institutions. Nevertheless, few initiatives have been developed to recognise and accredit these competences.

The greatest point of special interest in Greece is the development of a national and comprehensive system for qualification profiles, which is still needed at the present time. The future system will be tested, based on pilots from the United Kingdom, in which the NVQ system[14] will be used as a model. The objective is to develop job profiles (and the accompanying educational modules), in co-operation with the sectoral organisations and the social partners. The difficulty is that the prevalent culture in Greece is a system of vocational/diploma protection maintained by the trade unions. The question is whether wage levels and protected rights can be acquired through new forms of accreditation as well.

Italy is strongly oriented by region. The rich regions can make major advances more easily than the poor regions. The lack of a national standard is a problem in Italy. The lack of (financial) resources also makes the introduction of VPL difficult. This problem can be traced back to the low regard for vocational education, compared with the high status of an academic education. The basis of the Italian reform is tripartite and this may appear to be important in future if political decisions must be made at the national level. Here, too, the predominant value attached to academic diplomas and the lack of suitable standards may hamper the implementation of VPL.

Non-formal learning has played a limited role in *Spain* and *Portugal*. The development of methods and initiatives to recognise non-formal learning in Spain depends on the parallel development of a national qualification system. In Portugal, individuals have access to the national system for vocational certification to deploy their prior learning competences. The problem, however, is that the average educational level in Portugal is so low that the threshold to utilise that access is already too high. Therefore, hard work is being performed in Portugal to use ESF resources to set up a regional infrastructure with centres where assessment and training can be acquired, based on non-formally acquired competences. However, this approach must still prove itself in practice.

14 NVQ = National Vocational Qualification.

A Bottom Up model

Large numbers of individuals and institutions of EU countries have participated in VPL-related projects and programmes in these Mediterranean countries. A 'Bottom Up' approach has been created through this project-based approach. After all, these projects are based on the interests and needs of the individuals and institutions involved, each with its own objective, not on national policy and regulations in this area. Therefore, a support base is created for progressive initiatives and to broaden the reach of the experiments. What remains is the implementation, distribution and its accreditation.

Moreover, the majority of the projects are related to specific target groups, such as women, long-term unemployed, risk groups and high school drop-outs. An impressive variety of methods and instruments for accreditation and recognition has been proposed and developed, based on three directions for development:

1. To a certain extent, structured individual discussion where personal explanations have the upper hand.
2. Self-assessment of personal features, using ad-hoc instruments.
3. Self-assessment for group exercises.

Since neither a framework nor a formal reference point exists, these systems for VPL are left to their own devices, and the assessments have acquired acceptation and legitimacy to a varied degree. It appears that the main objective of these projects is to serve as a collection of experiences, with the possibility of reaching a more integrated VPL system from the practices that have been introduced.

These countries are still clearly in the development phase of a system for vocational education. Despite their common challenges, they all deal with the methodological and institutional aspects and with various intensity and dedication in their own way. The general attitude toward the introduction of methods and systems for VPL, is positive. The value of VPL has become clear both in the public and the private area. Legal and political steps have been taken as educational reforms in various areas, but the true introduction of VPL practices is still not very advanced. In the years to come, we will see whether the positive intentions that have been brought forward nearly unanimously by the four countries will also be translated into practices that will be of value to individuals and companies.

The Northern European model: Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden

Learning culture

A strong learning culture predominates in the Scandinavian countries. On average, the inhabitants of these countries (along with Great Britain and the Netherlands) have the highest level of education in Europe.

The four Northern European countries also have common traditions in education and training. Learning from each other's achievements in education and other areas was (and still is) important for the development of their own national educational systems. The

shared Northern European labour market has ensured that transfer of competences beyond the borders is normal and accepted.

Education and training are highly institutionalised and formalised within this geographic unit. Significant numbers of people from all age groups participate. Moreover, education, particularly vocational education, is a tripartite concern of the government, the employers and the employees. Nevertheless, during the last decade, these four countries have opted for their own road in the development of education and training, within the common traditions. We can now distinguish four different models, particularly at the level of higher vocational education. The institutional and organizational differences in the four countries were created by the different emphasis that was placed on learning at the workplace and the definition of the workplace. Finland and Norway recently implemented reforms that emphasise the importance of informal learning and learning at the workplace by introducing institutional changes that support this way of learning. This is less clear in the Swedish context. In Denmark, the focus is on initial education and training within a dual system, in which it is assumed that learning at the workplace is guaranteed in the system.

The influence of Grundtvig

The influence of Grundtvig on educational philosophy, specifically adult education, is important in understanding the developments in the Scandinavian countries, particularly in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, during the past 150 years. Grundtvig's philosophy is 'public enlightenment'. A system of adult education centres have provided for a positive attitude towards adult education. The adult education centres have consciously avoided formal examinations and certification, placing the emphasis instead on the value of the learning process and the development of the individual, as something that is important in all strata of the population and in all stages of life. From the beginning, Grundtvig investigated the possibilities of broadening the individual and social competency base. This strategy has slowly become embedded in the educational system of the northern countries and is primarily financed from public budgets. The fact that non-certified learning is just as important as certified learning has been supported and developed for some time. This is one of the factors that may help to explain why the Scandinavian countries have developed VPL quicker than Germany and Austria. Finland and Norway are working on having the institutional integration of non-formal learning and particularly informal learning becomes an important part of the life-long learning programme.

VPL in the Northern European countries

In Finland and Norway, VPL appears at the foreground of public discussion on education and training. Far-reaching VPL-related experiments and reforms have already taken place.

The responsibility for validation in Sweden is divided between the education system and the social partners. In December 2003, the Swedish government set up a special commission in order to develop the processes of quality and methods for validation during the next four years. The tasks of the commission are to:
• Develop legitimisation and equivalents,

- Carry on and support development,
- Strengthen regional co-operation in order to reach well adapted working methods for development, consultation and evaluation,
- Inform,
- and work out proposals on which measures to be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

The Danish Government stated in November 2004 in their policy paper on Recognition of Prior Learning that "the Government will take the initiative to provide better access to having all forms of prior learning assessed and recognised within the education system". This Government initiative will be implemented by:

- Introducing better opportunities for recognising prior learning within the education system, where such provisions do not already exist. The improvement is to be implemented gradually, starting in the adult education and vocational training area taking effect from 1 August 2006. Legal amendments are not generally required, only within a few areas, such as the introduction of a joint concept for individual competence assessment across the areas of adult vocational training (AMU) and Basic Adult Education (GVU).
- Preparing action plans for the improvement within the individual areas of education before 1 January 2006.
- Initiating development work at educational institutions with a view to developing methods and principles etc. ensuring reliability and quality.
- Developing tools that support documentation of prior learning. The Ministry of Education will take this initiative in co-operation with the social partners and stakeholders from the liberal adult education sector, voluntary organisations etc.

At the same time, the Government will take the initiative to:

- Ensure that information and guidance on the recognition of prior learning will form part of the guidance system and be included in the work undertaken by the tripartite committee on lifelong skills enhancement and education and training for all on the labour market, which the Government has appointed.
- Provide information and advice initiatives for citizens and companies and access to IT supported information on the new guidance portal 'The Education Guide'.

The 'master-apprentice concept' was recently reinforced in the **Norwegian educational system**. Work experience is now a mandatory and integral part of all courses in vocational secondary education.

In Norway, vocational education can begin with a general introduction of topics comparable to two years of mainstream education. This is followed by two years of working and learning within a company or an institution, the objective being the specialisation and development of competences through work experience. The final examination (trade or journeyman's examination) is the same regardless of whether training has taken place at school or at a workplace.

The educational system has been reformed. The system integrates methods and institutions for recognising and accrediting non-formal learning (Realkompetanse).

The emphasis lies on offering individuals the opportunity to participate in education, based on prior learning competences. This is interesting and has not yet been applied in this way in many other countries.

Presumably, this is a result of the strong role of the social partners within the VPL debate in Norway. Both employees and employers see the importance of methods that not only follow the mainstream route within the educational system but also meet the needs of employees and employers. For years, there has also been a right to assessment and training, which has been virtually unutilised until recently.

Danish vocational education is dual and based on the master-apprentice relationship. Initial education is supplemented with a system of continuous vocational education and is strongly integrated in the labour market. Denmark is embroiled in a debate about reforms within adult education. These reforms are similar to those of Norway and Finland. They emphasise that the role of non-formal learning must be revised to link the various programmes and levels of the educational system and the training system to one another.

Finnish vocational education is based on competences (output-oriented) while the structure is based on modules. Knowledge and skills, regardless of where they are acquired, can be accredited and recognised.

Thanks to a new law on vocational education in 1994, the system is divided into three qualification categories: a vocational qualification, a continued vocational qualification and a specialised vocational qualification. The Finnish qualification system based on competences is still under development.

The **Swedish** system for vocational education and training is more institutional. To be sure, it is open for an apprentice system, but the majority of the candidates pursue vocational education at specialised schools. Officially, the objective is to have practical training within companies, but this appears difficult to realise. There are few Swedish initiatives in VPL, and the examples focus more on specific target groups (immigrants, the handicapped, the unemployed) than on the entire community.

Conclusion

The relationship in the Northern European model is derived from the state directives in the Scandinavian countries, the fact that education is considered as a collective good and the influence of the business community.

But there is also diversity. In Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden, work is based on a different organisation of education (policy). They have chosen various approaches and work according to different agendas. These differences do not alter the fact that all four countries have booked practical progress by linking legislation, institutional initiatives and formal education and training to learning that takes place outside formal education.

The reciprocal learning between the four countries has become stronger over the past few years. The influence of Finnish and Norwegian approaches on recent Swedish developments illustrates this effect. Norway and Finland are at the forefront, and the

strategies and plans that are proposed in Sweden and Denmark can show that these two countries are moving in the same direction and that non-formal learning will be emphasised more in subsequent years. In all four countries, the role of social partners is extremely strong. There is a common tradition of tripartite consultation. The willingness to implement quick changes in the Scandinavian context is diametrically opposed to the reserve that appears from the Austrian and (to some degree) the German context. The Scandinavian countries have highly structured systems for formal vocational education, just like Germany and Austria, where the apprentice system is an important and integrated part of these systems. This is the most evident in Denmark and Norway and to a lesser degree in Finland and particularly Sweden. These similarities have not led to the same decision-making process. The willingness to integrate non-formal learning processes in the formal system is much stronger in the Scandinavian situation than in the German or Austrian contexts.

The Anglo-Saxon approach: Great Britain and Ireland

Learning culture
The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) that were introduced at the end of the 1980s have become a central basic assumption, for which there is a lot of international attention. The system appears as if it is modularised and flexible and meets demand from the public, the private existing order and demand from individuals and companies. That is why many countries have used the English system to see whether and how this system, or parts of the system, can be used in their own context. There have been many experimental projects, certainly within the European *Leonardo da Vinci* programme, which have used the NVQ system as a model.
Other countries appear to use the system as a model of what they wish to avoid. They place the emphasis on the problems that may exist if modularisation is too strong.

The system was faced with the challenge of accrediting many different programmes, which has resulted in approaches such as APL and APEL (Accreditation of Prior Learning and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning). These developments have strongly influenced the European developments of VPL methods.
However, the formal and nationally organised and co-ordinated approach now leads to a rigidity, so that the following steps toward accreditation of formal and informal learning consist of compliance to the (scholastic-oriented) NVQ system.

National vocational qualifications and VPL
From the beginning, the NVQ system has been the most explicit and clear example of a system for vocational education that is based on competences, achievements and output. Although it was a point of discussion in Great Britain, the NVQ system has served as an alternative for the traditional scholastic model of education and training. The system is basically open for each programme, with special emphasis on learning at the workplace.

Through the presentation of the system and other countries that think the same way, the important thing is what you have learned, not how or where you have learned it.

It is no coincidence that the assessment and accreditation issues have become critical in the discussion about the current NVQ system and its future.
The four assumptions are:
a) There is a near perfect match between national standards and labour competences;
b) A high validity of assessments is reached thanks to training and assessment in the work context;
c) Acquired competences are transferable;
d) Validity and reliability are guaranteed by detailed specifications and educated assessors.

VPL in Ireland is based on the same achievement-oriented approach of assessment as in the UK. Nevertheless, the Irish have tackled matters differently than the English. They were able to learn from the rigidity problems in England.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999 takes a broader look at how knowledge, skills and experiences are acquired. The organisation is still under construction, but in addition to the English model, the FAS (Irish Training & Employment Authority) is also working on the individually oriented approach of identification, matching, assessment, accreditation and documentation.

The Mix model: France, Belgium and the Netherlands

In *France*, certification and formal diplomas are highly regarded. This has to do with the national and homogeneous nature of the educational system. Education, including vocational education, is documented in complete national learning programmes with little room for personal differences or differences per institution. The stability of the system contributes somewhat to the transparency. Individuals and employers are usually familiar with the various national qualifications.

France was at the forefront in introducing VPL through the 'Bilan de Competences' (1985). The objective of the Bilan is to enable identification and assessment of non-formal learning.
In 1985, the first French attempt was made to introduce an identification and assessment system for non-formal and experimental learning. France is an example of a country that is extremely focused on certification. Like in Greece and Italy, a certificate not only implies a formal competence, but also indicates someone's qualities and co-determines the position that someone may fill.
The certificates have three functions:
a) An internal standard for the educational system;
b) An external standard for the labour market;

c) A personal and hierarchical identification.

Retaining certification is most clearly observed in the *grandes écoles*, but can also be seen within vocational education and training.

Like the English NVQ system, the experiences from France have also had their influence on the European debate on VPL.

In **Belgium**, certification and formal diplomas are also highly regarded. But in contrast to France the educational system, including vocational education, are decentralised. Representative associations of governing bodies of (vocational) schools have autonomy and draw up their own curriculum and timetables within certain borders defined by the governments at community level.

Belgium has learned mostly from France and the Netherlands and has given the VPL developments in Belgium direction in their own way.

In Belgium, the VPL is seen as part of life-long learning. However, the French-speaking part of Belgium follows the French approach.

On the basis of the experiences and lessons taken from bottom-up projects initiated by the Flemish Government, a coherent APEL-policy has been put in place, in line with European developments (LLL, Copenhagen process, common principles for non-formal and informal learning, ...). The implementation of new assessment centres for certain professions is underway. At the same time and in synergy, a new guidance system for adult workers is already operational which is a necessary compliment to every APEL-policy.

In **the Netherlands** VPL is considered as a procedure for the formal recognition of learning through non- and in-formal processes. This can lead to both summative as formative opportunities.

The desired effects of VPL are:

1   To improve deployability: improved deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying EVC. It increases the opportunities open to the individual on the labour market by highlighting the skills he or she already has and how those skills can be used and strengthened. This can apply both to those already in employment and to job-seekers. For employers, the emphasis lies on improving the deployability of employees within the company.

2   To create a demand-led labour market: improving the match between education and the labour market is essential for the organisation of EVC. In order to improve deployability, labour market functions must be expressed in terms of skills. These skills must in turn be linked to a demand for learning. The education infrastructure must be transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required.

3   To make learning more flexible: the recognition of informally acquired skills will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the additional skills could lead directly to the award of certificates or exemption from

diplomas. The recognition approach can also make visible or recognisable existing skills and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The customer, i.e. the student, will not only want to learn independently of the preliminary training circuit but will also understand better how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.

4 To optimise other forms of learning: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since EVC also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. The recognition of skills and qualifications will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification structure in professional education. The existing description of exit qualifications in the current qualification structure for professional education does not always tie in with the skills required on the labour market.

Responsibilty for reaching these goals is taken within the Dutch 'polder-model', a consensus-culture in which all stakeholders (authorities and social partners) have to agree on proposed actions.

To summarise, the features of the mix countries are that they have their own approach, that they learn from mistakes in other models and that they use what they see as the good components and create their own model from a combination of components.

Learning points

Introduction
In the previous chapters it has been made clear that VPL-strategies and approaches in Europe in relation to Life long learning are strongly based on national learning cultures and systems. These learning cultures can be divided in five European clusters.

The clusters that have been described are:
1. The dual system   Germany, Austria, Switzerland
2. The Mediterranean model   Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Portugal
3. The Scandinavian Model   Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark
4. The Anglo-Saxon Model   United Kingdom, Ireland
5. The Mix Model   France, Belgium, the Netherlands

Each cluster has its own dynamics and different key points within its own learning system. Between the countries clearly difference can be noticed.
Each country has its own specific needs to let the VPL-system and approach follow the social, economical and educational developments in the country itself. The national, societal development determines the broad outline of the learning system.

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For instance, different political cultures are visible, when comparing the clusters. The same is visible comparing the countries within a cluster. In a number of countries specific responsibilities are delegated at regional level, where at national level through laws and regulations favorable conditions for transparency, exchange and co-ordination are created. In other countries a more centralistic approach can be found.

In short, a learning culture follows existing societal conditions in a country.

In and outside Europe a variety of learning cultures exists. Each learning culture has its own set of solutions and approaches. Each choice and solution has learning points for other countries. These learning points can be positive and can be used as guide for further strategy and approach. A learning point also can be negative and can disclose not feasible or into applicable directions for solutions. But this can also be seen as positive because other countries don't need to put energy in something that would not work in their learning culture. For each system element it has to be determined what the benefits would be. In the next chapters is a summary of these learning points.

Learning points

It is essential for each comparison to understand the VPL approach and utilization if one realizes that each country only can develop certain items when it fits within the political and learning context. An instrument, law and regulation, etc. in each country cannot be copied as such. It has to be adapted to the national (and regional) context.

The learning points are grouped in seven categories:
1. Approach,
2. Law and regulations,
3. Validity and independent assessment,
4. Form of recognition at national level,
5. Transparency and civil effect,
6. Accessibility,
7. Responsibility and accountability (dealing with complaints).

The first four categories relate to the general aspects of the VPL systematic; the last three categories relate more to the quality and form of these systematic. The two groups of categories also influence each other. For instance the ways of recognition also influence the civil effect.

Approach

The approach how to improve the recognition and valuing of competences and the transparency differs per cluster, per country and even per region. Also ideas differ about how the ideas about the individual potential (self-assessment), the own development and the contribution that can be made to the society.
- In Belgium emphasize is more on the law and regulations regarding the recognition of acquired competences. The Flemish government has developed 10 initiatives in the field of life long learning and employability. The focus within these initiatives is also on

(recognition of) competences. Learned form the results of these initiatives, the government wants to develop law and regulations. In the meantime these initiatives offer a guideline to the developments, as long it not has been regulated by law.

- In Great Britain the NVQ system is base for further developments. Government and social partners are less involved. It seems that the system itself has become the goal instead of offering structure as a service to the individual.
- In Switzerland the starting point is a (widely accepted) model for becoming aware, after which the recognition of acquired competences can take place. But it is not yet clear which possibilities are offered to the individual, to maintain and improve their competences. The emphasis is more on op becoming conscious than on qualifying and certification.

- In France is within the centralistic approach in the form of rights for the individual much space left for the approach for the individual at sector level. This leaves the problem of comparison and exchangeability of individual competencies and a wild growth of certificates and diploma's.
- According to the law in Norway every individual has the right (and possibility) for assessment and employment advise, independent from the education-/training organizations and institute. Assessment methods differ and it is not clear which method is the best for describing the competences of the individual and the relevancy for the individual, the society, the company and the sector.
  Norway has the most open approach closest to direct stimulating the utilisation of the available facilities by the individual.
- In Denmark sme's use the SUM-method. This is a diagnostic model that offers instruments and guidelines for systematic determining personal need for competence development, planning of education/training and strategic development of employees.
- Portugal uses more a top-down approach. With aid from European subsidies, a complete infrastructure at regional level is build. Aim is that in each region a kind of career center will become available for recognizing and development of competences. These are provisions with a low threshold for upgrading in general terms of the population.

Learning points

- The continuing development of the individual and the further development of his or her portfolio/career formation should be emphasized. The facilitation and the creation of favorable preconditions for this lie with the authorities and the social partners.
- The acknowledgement process of acquired competences, including the continuing development of the individual portfolio should be for the target group employees an obliged part of the annual staff appraisal. The employee can have then once per two years a right on assessment of his/her competences. This can imbedded in a personal development plan. An example of this is the SUM-method in Denmark
- In Norway this possibility have been offered to everybody (thus also jobseekers and unemployed) and also becomes, like in Portugal, an assessment done by another

organization than the – direct economic – interested parties (for instance the business or educational institutes).

- Next to the possibility of an assessment there should also be a possibility for an independent second opinion. Next to a second opinion an ombudsman person is needed who can report about the use and abuse of VPL
- At sector level VPL need to be strengthened by the branch associations and training funds. But it needs to be well transparent and to be coupled with a civil effect, like in Switzerland, Norway and Ireland
- Within a P&O department of a firm a position of 'development or career co-ordinator' can be created, who gets the task to stimulate the development of the competences of the individual employees and to give them advice and guidance. The position of Union Learning Representative in England can serve as an example.
- A national approach, with recognized regional VPL-assessors offers reasonable independence for the different levels in VPL-development in the different sectors. Portugal develops such a structure.
- At national and European level a comparing survey needs to be done to the different methodologies that are used to assess competences. Essential in every case is the support and guidance in the assessment. This can be done in different ways. The choice is to put the responsibility at the level of the individual, the trainings institute, the company, and the sector or at the level of the national or regional authority. It seems that a separation of the functionalities of training/education and assessment offers the best chance for an independent VPL route.
- Quality can be guaranteed by having done the quality control at the level of the accrediting authority and assessors, via a special regulation for accreditation. See for instance the CH-Q approach where this system is in development or in UK where this already exists.

Law and regulation
Acknowledgement of acquired competences and therefore the improvement of the capacity and availability at individual, company-, sector, regional and national level should happen through the improvement of the law and regulations in different areas. Possibilities for this are amongst others:
1. To stop the formal separation between learning environments;
2. A national service for complaint handling, the start of the work of an ombudsman and a second opinion facility;
3. The break down of the walls between the branch effect and the civil effect. Example is the French research that currently is done to the mutual recognition of sector standards;
4. To rebalance the financing structure for education and training, possibly through an individually law on VPL. The English examples of Individual Learning Accounts could serve as an example.

In these law and regulations the responsibilities in the entire VPL-services chain should be divided in:

A. The authorities:
  – Need to create frameworks and preconditions and to support;
  – Need to take care that the independence of VPL is guaranteed, that the interests of the individual, society, business and education/trainings proportional are divided;
  – Can make the implementation and application of VPL more attractive with fiscal stimulations for the individual and/or concerned organizations;
  – Can stimulate VPL with a financing system.

B. The education:
  – Should offer measure work via modular education and acceptance of all learning environments (formal, non-formal and informal); the functions of assessor, certifier and trainer should be separated like in Norway and Switzerland;
  – Assessment of acquired competences must lead to an independent advise on further development of the competences without connecting these immediately to formal learning. An example is stimulating the individual via a voucher system, which he/she can spend in modular learning routes like is done in Belgium.

C. Business:
  – Training funds should have an important responsibility for the effect in the branch, but furthermore to have an eye for the inter-branch effect. See for instance the efforts in France to realize this effect, where collective labor agreements form the legal frame at sector level for this.

  Where formerly the emphasis was to get competent employees for the sector, the knowledge economy requires high flexibility, also for the exchangeability of competences and thus individuals between branches.

D. The individual:
  – The law on individual competence development should become legally facilitated and put to effect in Collective labor agreements. See for instance France;
  – For jobseekers it is necessary to have independent assessment facilities and documentation possibilities for the portfolio at their disposal. See for instance the Portuguese and especially Norwegian examples.

Validity and independent assessment

In Europe different methods are in use in order to get to an independent and valid assessment of competences. In Norway the assessment is done at national level and each individual can submit at region level their portfolio for assessment once per two years. In Norway this is regulated through the person who is responsible at regional level, instead of the sectors. This offers the advantage of an exchangeability of employees between sectors. France uses another approach. The CIBC has set up in each region an independent assessment center where the individual can go. Switzerland focuses more on the source: the training of assessors, which are then available for judging the individual portfolio' s. These assessors are available at many places: school, employment offices, companies, volunteer groups and others.

In short, there are roughly four approaches:
1. Through general legislation offering frameworks and then let the development go and leave the organization at sector level (example France; partly also Ireland and England)
2. Top-down (via legislation, Belgium)
3. Individual and bottom-up (Switzerland, Norway, Sweden)
4. Design of independent assessment centers (Portugal)

Learning points
1. The authorities should take a more stimulating role in the area of quality assurance, second opinion and complaint handling.
2. A clear separation of the different roles is necessary. In the model of CH-Q the roles are separated:
   – consulent/counselor,
   – examiner,
   – certificier,
   – subject matter developer,
   – trainer/instructor,
   – trainer of assessors,
   – portfolio guide.
3. The bottom-up method offers assurance for the separation of individual and system. The individual, worker or jobseeker, has more possibilities for development when he/she starts to make use of the available services.

Ways of acknowledgements at national level
Also by the acknowledgement on national level we can identify different strategies and approaches. In the dual system in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and in the system in England the competences are described in a qualification structure. That same structure can also be found in the environments which the competence has been gained. The class and the workplace are only learning environment that count.
Switzerland works towards a widening of the dual system by offering the right on a vocational/professional training in spite of the place or environment where the required preparatory training has been followed. It is sufficient, if all required competences by means of VPL can be demonstrated.
Only in Norway all learning environments are open for acknowledgement at national level: then you can learn demonstrable in each learning environments which are at the disposal of the individual.

Learning points
1. Acknowledgement at national level of competences motivates persons considerably; that value should be increased by having the right and sufficient training facilities available. In Norway a modus is found to use all learning environments for VPL; in Switzerland this work is under construction.

2. Branch levels needs to be connected to a national valid acknowledgement of all learning environments. VPL-procedures must take this into account. Connectivity between national acknowledgement and at sector acknowledgement level is than also more simple to realize.

Transparency and civil effect

Minimizing the division between formal, non-formal and informal learning has a positive effect on as well the transparency of the learning possibilities as on the civil effect that someone can acquire through the acknowledgement of acquired competences.

An example of a dividing line that impedes the transparency and the civil effect, is the recognition of competences at sector level that at national level offers however no clear recognition for a national recognized diploma.

Another example of such a separation that impedes the interaction between formal, non-formal and informal, can be found in the dual system in Germany. This system has as an disadvantage that the flexibility is missing to release quickly work capacity to address the need for employment in new sectors, as well in good times as in bad times. In economic bad times the formal approach offers insufficient flexibility to shift work capacity in and between sectors. That same counts however also for good times, when the regulation at sector level prevents a flexible exchange between sectors with shortage and surplus of personnel.

In France and in the Flemish part of Belgium they try to offer to the individual a transparency towards a recognizable civil effect. The occupation register ROME in France and the of that derived COBRA in Belgium offer a clear link to the civil effect. The availability of COBRA via Internet (http://www.vdab.be/cobra) offers extra transparency because it offers direct insight in the possibilities for development of a person.

Although not yet completely worked out, the occupation registers as ROME and COBRA offer the possibility of emphasizing the inter-branch and branch specific competences demanded for certain functions. This can lead to a better exchange of employees between branches and thus to a more flexible offer of employees.

However through the sector approach, or through the introduction of qualifications on sector level as in France, the whole has become intransparent again. It has led to a wild growth of sector qualifications of which the effect has become invisibly by the large variety. Beside it is not clear what the value is of a qualification, because most of them are not formal recognized. The practice is now that the use by the individual remains far behind by the potential of ROME or COBRA. The learning point is thus present, but immediately is reflected through the point that intransparency immediately leads to less efficient use by this prominent part of a VPL-system.

Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have chosen for a more at (the development of) the individual directed approach. The implementation and execution lies as close as possible near the individual lay (region, kanton, 'municipality') and on higher level the conditions are created and by law or regulation regulated. Every individual has the right for at least

one possibility per two years for an VPL-procedure. Although the transparency of the individual competences within the whole, complex field of competence remains limited, the motivation and the clarity at individual level take care that the learning system by the individual more actively is approached with learning questions. This approach offers many possibilities for the individual, but puts again much pressure on the one's that are responsible for the system to meet the concrete questions of the individual through learning made to measure.

Learning points

1. Transparency and civil effect have more effect when the recognition of competences is exceeding branch-level. The efforts like in France of a national commission supported by authorities and social partners to all put the used standards (sector and national) next to each other and to compare, earns copying.
2. Systematization of the field of competences costs much energy, time and money. Through the complexity it is difficult to reach 100% transparency for an individual competence survey. The emphasis must be put on the possibility to judge the individual capacity via branch-level exceeding recognition of competences. This should also be demonstrated by independent learn paths for the individual. The combination of the French ROME and the Norwegian documentation center system offers maybe a solution.
3. A bottom-up approach will have a bigger effect because of the strong motivation to recognize competences at all. Precondition is that the individual gets stimuli to take part for a longer period in the VPL-approach.

Accessibility

In France and Belgium we see that ROME and the derived COBRA-system are free accessible to the individual. Especially for jobseekers this offers a good possibility for starting up themselves with the career and self-assessment. But career advising need to be attached to these free accessible registers.

In Norway an independent system for assessment has been set up. Every individual can have his/her competences tested through simply sending in his/her portfolio and then be assessed. He/she gets advice, as well by writing the portfolio as after the assessment. The assessment is regionally executed, but a national assessment takes place at distance. The national documentation center offers through that unequivocal advising and offers thus a guide for important solutions. Also the individual availability in the whole country, as well on national as regional level a picture can be given of the present competences.

Just like in Norway Portugal has a public institute (ANEFA) that develops the system and the methods on national level. In Portugal there has been started in the meanwhile via public tender 42 independent centers, where the individual can go for assessment and guidance.

Learning points

1. Occupation registers, in which the individual self can look for appropriate availability on basis of the given personal competences, stimulate the use of VPL. This openness must however been followed by an even open possibility for advising over the outcome of consulting the register. Introduction of an occupation record is only than to consider if it is a stand-alone initiative.

2. In connection to this the example in Norway can be used where on national level a monitoring of results for each case have been put up. On the one hand this serves as an instrument for control of the developments in the VPL-implementation and on the other hand it becomes an instrument for monitoring the present competences at national, regional and local level.

3. A central organization is responsible for the unity in approach and the independent regional center takes care for good accessibility for every individual.

Responsibilities and justification (handling of complaints)

Clear difference has to be made between responsibilities and power. Responsibilities arise when they are delegated by a fixed (or higher) authority or more specifically as one gets a task to fulfill. The initiative can be taken as well by the one that delegates as well as the one that executes the task. Power arises when these responsibilities are used to exercise to other a particular view.

In a number of countries one can see how the distribution of responsibilities can lead to rigidity of the system and to hold on to particular rights, while in the meantime the dynamics of the society asks for flexibility. An example of this is the NVQ-system in England. The conformation of the total system to these NVQ-standards, co-ordinated by one institute has led to a rigidity that prohibits a dynamic development of VPL. Ireland on the other hand has spread more the responsibility of the system and is therefore better able to address the need.

In the Netherlands, an equal situation arise where from the qualification structure and the delegated responsibility for examinations, vocational centers can put all sorts of demands for VPL-candidates only from their powerful position of offering only a fixed program or approach for furtherer development of the individual and no measure work.

Also the employer has her responsibilities. However by discord between the learner and the employer, the responsibility of the employer can turn around towards a dominant position of which the employee can become the victim.

In countries like France and Norway with a right on VPL in the form of a right on assessment an employee can still independently develop further in a VPL-procedure.

Next to these limitations in the application of VPL-procedures, responsibility means also that one can be hold responsible if it goes wrong. Therefore it is necessary to have a good, independent handling of complaints. The complaints must give in principle points for improvement for the developed system of VPL. Like in Norway it is possible to get a second opinion through an assessment on regional level. In France is this regulated via so-called independent jury's that judge assessment outcomes.

Learning points

1. A distribution of responsibilities with in every case a separation between assessment and training offers the individual a more independent assessment. Examples of this are found in Norway and in the CH-Q-model from Switzerland.
2. An independent system of handling of complaints, coupled to procedures for improvement of the VPL-system, is a requirement.

Summary and recommendations

In this report of the VPL network experiences with VPL from 15 Europeans countries are described. From these descriptions learning points have been described, that could be relevant for the situation in other European countries and that offers a guide offer for strengthening of the policy and to stimulate of development routes for VPL in the different countries in Europe.

The diversity of learning points is big. The cause of this diversity is amongst others:
* The national and (sometimes) regional approach
* The different perspectives of VPL approaches (individual directed, flexible job market, company specific, planning instrument for education, acknowledgement non-/informal learning, decreasing unemployment
* (National) policy and law and regulations
* The game of power/combined action of the actors
* The ruling learning cultures
* Socio-economic factors
* Historical developments and duration of these developments.

Despite this variety all countries have the same conviction that bringing together formal, informal and non-formal learning processes will offer a considerable, individual and above all social benefit. The red thread through the diversity is the view (and often already in practice) that the acknowledgement of acquired competences always – from a positive or proactive perspective – can offer a multiplicity of targets without too many changes of the traditional approach.

Summarizing the learning points from the country descriptions:

1. Increase transparency and civil effect

Branch-level exceeding acknowledgement of competences is a necessity. An individual competence-survey must become possible to be demonstrated independent of the learning path. A national commission/organization supported by authorities and social partners must put the used standards next to each other and indicate which exchangeability exists between these standards. Only than a independent learning path can be insured. The French Commission of State that at present works to regulate the wild growth of sector standards should be carefully monitored in order to see if this top-down approach can work.

Another learning point in this field is to be found in a combination of the French ROME (and the of that derived Belgian COBRA) and the Norwegian documentation center. All put the emphasis, each in is own way, on the assessment of the individual capacity via branch-level exceeding competence recognition. Condition for a large effect of follow-up of this learning point is a good consciousness campaign to strengthen the bottom-up approach. This leads to clarity and a strong motivation by the participants of VPL.

2. Acknowledgement (learning environments) on national level

Norway and Switzerland have found a way to utilize all learning environments for VPL, independent of the (combinations of) learning path that one has followed. Acknowledgement of this at national level gives a high appreciation and motivation to the individual and leads to an active participation at VPL, continuing-learning – on basis of mdae to measure – and a better and more motivated employability of the individual.

All learning environments must be utilized and recognized at national level. Coupling of VPL at sector or branch, education, society, organization and individual at a national acknowledgement will be easier to realize.

3. Responsibilities and justification and handling of complaints

The delegation of responsibilities of execution towards a specific organization assures unequivocality and recognition of VPL-procedures. Beside it sees to it for an independent assessment. This organization must be supported by the authorities, social partners and other actors as for instance education who also take care of the formal learning path. An independent system of complaint handling with procedures for improving the VPL-system is a good priorcondition.

4. Accessibility

The accessibility of VPL is helped by as much as possible self-examination by the individual of the own targets, wishes and possibilities. The search for acknowledgement and possibilities to further develop ones own competences can be picked up by the strong involvement. It is required that there is an openness of information and connections to more job specific parts. The motivation needs to be stimulated and inspired through an enthusiastic national approach from inspire, inform, guide, advise, assess and documenting. Norway shows the success of such a broad approach. In Norway also a national result monitor is been used. The documentation per individual is centrally stored and used as national data bank for the personal development and as instrument to connect national, regional and local competence development to the need.

5. Approach

The most successful approach is the one where the emphasis lays on the continuing development of the individual and the further development of his or her portfolio/career formation. The authorities and the social partners can facilitate this and create favourable preconditions.

The process of recognition of acquired competences, including continuing development of the individual portfolio should be a right and possible even an obliged part of the annual staff appraisal. The employee should have the right to an independent assessment of his/her competences once per two years.
Examples of can be found in Norway and in the model of CH-Q in Switzerland.

Branch associations and training funds can support and strengthen these approaches, but it need to be transparent and to be connected to a civil effect as for instance in Norway, Switzerland and Ireland.
Companies should make use of this by creating within the personnel department a position of 'development or career co-ordinator', who can stimulate the development of the competences of the individual employees and give advice and guidance. In England the position of Union Learning Representative has been developed. This certainly needs a follow-up.

At national and European level a comparing survey needs to be done to the different methodologies that are used round assessment of competences. A possibility could be to give at European level a stimulus to strive to unequivocal procedures. The mobility of persons with their personal portfolio does not stop at sector limits neither at national borders.

6. Law and regulations

The authorities can create favorable preconditions by taking care of the independence of parts of the procedures and by stimulating the implementation financial and legally. A complaints regulation, law on training leave, law on assessment, law on portfolio-assessment and a second opinion facility are many of the examples which are possible.

The education sector can offer more made to measure solutions through for instance the offer of modular learning routes like is done in Belgium.
Training funds have an important responsibility for the branch, but furthermore also for the branch-level exceeding effect. Where formerly the emphasis lay on obtaining competent employees for the sector, the knowledge economy requires a high extent of flexibility, also for the exchangeability of competences and thus persons between branches. Examples of a branch-level exceeding approach with basis within the sector can be found in the Netherlands. Examples are to be found in the sectors building, metal and horticultural trade.

The individual has the right on individual competence development by facilitating this legally and to bring it under collective labor agreements. An example of this is can be found in Belgium where by law it has been fixed that each collective labor agreement should have provisions for an independent assessment for older employees (40+) in case of forced discharge.

For jobseekers it is necessary to have independent assessment facilities and documentation possibilities for portfolio development at their disposal. In Norway this is under development.

Independent assessment

The separation of the functions of training and assessment and a good guidance during the assessment offers the best chance for an independent VPL path and a high participation with a high output.

An example of this is the role of the Zentralstelle/Berufsverbande in Switzerland. This can be done in different ways. The choice is to put the responsibility at the level of the individual, the training institute, the company, the sector or the national or regional authorities. It appears that it does not matter so much who has the responsibility, as long as one can support all approaches and choices which have been made by all. In the practice it will often be a combination of shared responsibilities.

Of interest are in any case:

- The quality guarantee. This can be guaranteed at the level of the accrediting authority and assessors who executes the quality control, as by CH-Q in Switzerland is done.
- A clear separation of roles is necessary. In the model of CH-Q the next roles are distinguished:
  – consulent/counselor,
  – examiner,
  – certificier,
  – subject matter,
  – developer,
  – trainer/instructor,
  – trainer of assessors,
  – portfolio guide.

VPL per country

The information in this chapter has been drawn – mainly in the period 2002-2003 – from different information sources, from reports and from websites and is partly mixed with the information supplied by the VPL Network members. The information is not complete and the situation in the different countries changes continuously.

A. The Dual system

1. Germany

Context

The German educational system is dual, like the Austrian and Swiss systems. The system has acquired a strong position and is supported by employee and employer organisations. Training consists of 'berufsprofielen', which provide clear descriptions of competences.

The social partners and the governments are jointly legally responsible for the system. Due to the strong qualification structure, each profession requires a specific qualification, the system is inflexible and no mobility can take place between the sectors. On the other hand, rights can be derived from completed vocational qualifications, e.g. right to schooling when unemployed and higher benefits in the event of disability.

There is no complete separate procedure for VPL within this dual system. Part of the education consists of learning through working. Prior learning competences are often not considered in training programmes. The dual system is difficult to reform and modernise, leaves fewer opportunities for VPL. The dual system is also linked to labour relations, which makes changes difficult to implement.

The most striking feature of German education is that it makes no distinction in levels between the training programmes. Therefore, modularisation is not desired. The link between initial and adult education is too weak. However, adults indicate that they would like to see their prior learning competences accredited.

The system and standards
The dual system stood for accreditation by the government, which in turn guaranteed employment. Now that Germany is also faced with a worsening economy, an initiative has been developed in VPL: the 'Weiterbildungspass'. 'Weiterbildungspass' is a form of career portfolio. VPL will become part of this pass.

Who makes the policy?
The client for the project is the German Ministry of Education, 'Bundesministerium fur Bildung und Forschung'.

Who implements the policy?
The project is implemented by the Deutsche Institut fur Internationale Pedagogische Forschung (DIPF), DeutschesInstitut fur Erwachsenenbildung (DIE) and the Institut fur Entwicklungsplanung und Strukturforschung (IES).

Comments
The Ministry of Education advises a top-down approach in order to learn from successful and less successful projects. Germany can also learn a lot from other EU countries. In the context of life-long learning, a framework for a portfolio (and VPL) must be in place.
• In Germany, work is underway on a (European-oriented) portfolio with status, which, like in Switzerland and South Tirol, is supported by important players in the market of education, labour and politics.
• The German-speaking countries are working on the development of a career portfolio. The individual owns the portfolio and there is a lot of attention to reflection, career development, self-awareness, etc. One of the applications of the portfolio can be VPL.

A major advantage of this approach is the fact that a broadly supported, recognisable portfolio will be developed first.

2. Austria

Context
VPL has played a limited role in Austria until recently. The VPL issue is always linked to the demand for modularisation of education and training. Modularisation played a minor role in the initial system for education and training, but it has been introduced in vocational education to a certain extent. The Austrian system for vocational education is highly advanced. The system is also dual, promoting the relationship between formal learning and learning at the workplace. This creates a strong foundation for the link of formal and non-formal competences at later moments in someone's life. The importance of learning based on work experience is clearly understood and valued. This potential for VPL, however, is not yet fully utilised. The lack of bridging mechanisms between initial vocational education and life-long learning in vocational education makes a horizontal or a vertical shift between professions and/or educational level complicated. Systems for the accreditation of prior learning competences are still underdeveloped. In point of fact, Austria can be described as one of the EU member states where the introduction of methods and systems in this area is perceived with the most scepticism. However, the need is slowly growing, in this country as well, toward a more open approach to education and training that can bridge the gap between professions and educational levels more. The dual system insufficiently meets this need due to its rigid rules and inflexible responsibilities.

Comments
The accreditation of non-formal and informally acquired competences is more the exception than the rule in Austria. The reason may lie in the very formal, highly developed system of vocational training.

Proposals have been made to develop portfolios to guarantee acquired formal and non-formal qualifications, so that the minimum requirements for proof of qualification would have to be determined. Various practical explanations could be included within these portfolios.
Like Germany, Austria recognises that formal learning by itself will be inadequate within the context of life-long learning. However, like Germany, it remains a plan for the time being.

Concepts
- Informal learning is designated as non-pedagogical 'Gelegenheitslernen' in the living and working environment.
- Non-formal learning is designated as learning that takes place outside the schools and training centres accredited by the state.

3. Switzerland

In Switzerland vocational education and training provides two thirds of young adults with a solid professional basis for lifelong learning and opens up a wealth of job prospects. Training in industry and vocational colleges is the most common form of vocational education and training. There is a choice of over 200 careers. In addition to standard training in businesses an apprenticeship can also consist of full-time schooling such as training colleges and colleges of commerce. The courses are tailored to professional qualifications for which there is genuine call and to available jobs. As a result of this direct relation to the work environment, Switzerland has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates when compared with other European countries. Vocational education and training takes place at upper secondary and tertiary levels. It is based on clearly defined vocational opportunities. Typically, it is very flexible: it is possible for people to follow up further vocational opportunities and change course in their professional life relatively simply. Further training opportunities are available at all levels.

Advanced vocational education and training is the next step after basic vocational training. Training opportunities at non-university tertiary level (tertiary level B) provide specific professional qualifications and prepare the ground for middle management jobs. The professional baccalaureate is a passport to universities of applied sciences. Conversely, the vocational education and training scheme is open to graduates from general education schools.

Vocational education and training is a partnership, a joint task for the Confederation, cantons and professional organisations. These three partners are jointly committed to vocational education and training of the highest possible standard and aim at providing a sufficient number of apprenticeship places.

Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET)
OPET is responsible for vocational education and training needs at federal level. Quality assurance and further development of the overall system Comparability and transparency of courses. The strategic management and development includes:
• Quality assurance and further development of the overall system,
• Comparability and transparency of courses throughout Switzerland,
• Enactment of over 200 ordinances on basic vocational education and training and recognition of courses,
• Promotion of innovation and support of particular services in the public interest.

Organisations from the working environment
The trademark and strength of vocational education and training is its close relationship to the working environment. This is reflected in the various training arrangements:

- Professional associations: these define the curriculum, organise basic vocational education and training and create placements in higher vocational education and training.
- Social partners, other relevant organisations and providers of vocational education and training: together with the professional associations they are also involved in the further development of vocational education and training.
- Companies: where possible they provide traineeships in the chosen profession, thereby ensuring the next generation. Their involvement in vocational education and training is voluntary.

Cantons

- Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education (EDK): schooling and training in Switzerland is usually the responsibility of the cantons. National co-operation in connection with the EDK complements and supports the canton's sovereignty as regards schooling,
- 26 cantonal vocational education and training offices; executive agencies for vocational education and training at cantonal level. They co-ordinate their activities through the Swiss Conference for Vocational Training Offices (SBBK), one of the EDK's specialist committees. The SBBK is organised into specialised regional conferences,
- Career and study advisory services: open to young people and adults,
- Vocational colleges: they provide basic training in business as well as full-time schooling.

Reform of vocational education and training – new VPL legislation

The new Vocational Training Act came into force in 2004. The transitional phase lasts for five years (www.berufsbildungsreform.ch). One of the outstanding reforms in the new legislation is the one on the VPL legislation. Its objectives include among others the promotion of individual development in training and vocation and encourage flexibility and mobility in the labour market. Through this system, the basis can be laid for:

- Target-oriented development and career planning;
- Advancement of personal development;
- Support of self-guided learning and being responsible for one's own actions and encouraging youth and adults to document their vocational and personal qualifications on a continuous basis.

To make VPL function, there is the necessity of a close partnership of bottom-up and top-down stakeholders on the one hand and a clear separation of duties and roles between them on the other hand. One of the leading bottom-up stakeholders in Switzerland is the Association CH-Q. It has developed a system concerning the individual management of competencies (fore more information see annex). The Association CH-Q as a non-profit umbrella/roof organization on the bottom-up level is responsible for the quality and the control of self evaluation procedures within its own CH-Q System of managing competencies.

The focus of the activities of the Association CH-Q lies on the combination of Validation and Valuation of formal and informal learning. The Validation procedures so far function as a top down approach. The fact that it gives or could give at the same time a "value" to the learning process brings the bottom-up approach into focus. The question is how to bring the two approaches into a due balance. Validation should not be considered only as a final goal with a summative outcome. By including a formative procedure it can lead to individual and personal development. The Association CH-Q claims that if this aspect it considered as worthy it should be an issue in the setting up of a national frame of VPL and qualification.

Long before the new Vocational Training Act came into force the Association CH-Q established the basis to be in line with the main principles for VPL (in 2004 the European Commission published a set of common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning). Among these the strict separation of roles and functions by the power players on the different levels of procedures.
The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies is set up as a independent concept and features a comprehensive system of quality assurance, thus making it a system that meets requirements as regards independent character of career development and VPL. The system endorses current ideas and is based on a broad VPL approach, i.e. aiming not only at certification but especially also at career development and employing various standards. Moreover, it leads to transparency and quality of provision as well as autonomous management, supervision and control. One of the success factors of the System is the consistent linking of the institutional and the individual level. The respective principles combine the holistic approach with lifelong learning. They form the basics for a functioning transfer of individual competencies into the different fields of education (initial and post-initial, funded and non-funded), of the working world, of the return to work or preparation for work.

B. The Mediterranean approach

4. Greece

Context
Greece can be described as the country within the EU where the role of non-formal learning is the most dominant. According to the General Confederation of Greek Workers, only 30% of the Greek vocational population has a professional qualification. This means that a significant part of the vocational competences in Greece are still acquired and imporved outside the formal institutions. Nevertheless, few initiatives have been developed to recognise and accredit these competences.
The greatest point of special interest in Greece is the development of a national and comprehensive system for qualification profiles, which is still needed at the present time. The future system will be tested, based on pilots from the United Kingdom, in which the

NVQ system[15] will be used as a model. The objective is to develop job profiles (and the accompanying educational modules), in co-operation with the sectoral organisations and the social partners. The difficulty is that the prevalent culture in Greece is a system of vocational/diploma protection maintained by the trade unions. The question is whether wage levels and protected rights can be acquired through new forms of accreditation as well.

In Greece, more than half of the employees have no formal qualification and only a few initiatives have been taken to accredit the competences.
Most of the interest is focused on developments at the theoretical academic education level. Research has shown that the pursuit of an academic education offers no guarantee on the labour market, or higher income or higher status. A clear difference can also be seen between supply and demand on this market. Nevertheless, 70% of the youth value academic education over vocational education.
Second, due to less attention to vocational education, many individuals acquire their knowledge and experience non-formally or informally. This means that a large number of employees and job seekers have competences that are not described anywhere or for which they are hardly aware of their value on the labour market.

5. Italy

Context
In 1996, an agreement was concluded between the government and the social partners to attain a certification system to acquire certainty and transparency in life-long learning, to accredit training credits and to register acquired competences.
One of the main innovations during the last year is the setting out of a common standard system of competences, shared between the different actors involved and aimed at improving the geographic and professional mobility among Italian as well as European regions.
Furthermore, an important agreement was achieved by the "Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies" (29 April 2004), concerning the minimum standard of acquired competences/of performance, based on the French "Unités Capitalisables" methodology and affecting 37 professional profiles in Agriculture, Environment, Building, ICT, Manufacturing industry, Transport and Tourism.
At regional level, since 2002 several Italian regions have started a reform process based on the lifelong learning principles and priorities.

In 1997 and 1999, laws were enforced that require training until 18 years of age and which recognise that this training can take place in various ways. The certified competences at the end of a module in education, training and work placement give credits that are accredited in various learning systems.

15 NVQ = National Vocational Qualification.

In 2000, agreements were made between the national and regional governments to establish procedures for setting up a national vocational competency system.

Concepts
The term used is: 'Accreditamento o validazione delle competenze'. There are national laws defining the reference field of 'Accreditamento/valutazione delle competenze'.
The first legal expression of 'accreditamento e validazione delle competenze' appears in the Regolamento attuativo Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica superiore (IFTS), 31 October 2000), that says:

"Competence accreditation consists in the recognition of the abilities developed also on the job and in everyday life, as well as of training credits to be taken into account for defining the duration of individual pathways".
['L'accreditamento delle competenze consiste nella attestazione delle capacità acquisite in precedenza, anche attraverso l'esperienza di lavoro e di vita, e del riconoscimento di eventuali crediti formativi per la determinazione della durata del percorso individuale'.]

The objective
The aim of validation of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning is to give to all individuals the chance to access training opportunities and to assess different kinds of prior learning.
This has much to do with a new model of the 'welfare state' (access to competences instead of material assistance) and with the management and development of Italy's 'knowledge capital'.
The new model, brought forth by the "Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies" in 2000 (implying the reorganisation and the expansion of continuing adult education, in order to organise the different players between the centralised public services, the Regions and the Local Bodies), appears as an "integrated" learning system, in which schools, vocational training bodies at a regional level, enterprises, universities, several associations (cultural, charitable, health, etc.) work together in synergy. In particular this system articulates in three institutional levels with different competences and responsibilities as regards adult education:
i The national level, managed by a National Committee composed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and a representative of Regions and Local Bodies. The main functions of the Committee are:
   – to integrate systems,
   – to define strategies,
   – to identify resources to carry out programmes and projects,
   – to set up guidelines to build a national quality standards in education and training and shared criteria for the monitoring and the evaluation activities,
   – to identify and agree methods to certify and acknowledge credits.
ii The regional level, managed by a Regional Committee composed by Regional Governments, Local Bodies, the Representative of the Regional Education Office

(depending on the Ministry of Education, University and Research) and the Social Partners. The main functions are:
- to agree for the regional planning of an "integrated learning supply",
- to promote education and training activities according to a lifelong learning approach,
- to monitor and evaluate the system.

iii The local level, the functions and competences are shared between Provinces, Municipalities and Mountain Communities, Local School offices, Social Partners, agencies dealing with education, and local school Councils. The Local Committee main functions are:
- to promote the adults' education on their territory,
- to plan activities in line with regional criteria,
- to plan and the defining the criteria to allocate the funds,
- to carry out projects.

The common standard system of competences

One of the main innovations occurred during the last year has been the set out of a common standard system of competences, shared between the different actors involved in education and training, and aimed at improving the geographic as well as the professional mobility among Italian and European regions.

The objective of this system is to obtain transparency in the training and educational system, to better assess the individual experiences and to acquire a better match between supply and demand on the labour market.

Work is being performed by setting up national standards for vocational competences and by the use of three certification instruments: qualifications acquired through education and competences acquired through training and education, competences acquired at work or through self-study. These forms of certification should be recorded in a booklet/portfolio, which is arranged on a regional level.

In 2003 the Italian Government adopted the "Training Booklet", created by the decree 10/09/2003 and based on the agreement among the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, the Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies, and the Social Partners. The Training Booklet has been conceived as a tool to record competences acquired through formal, informal and non-formal learning, as well as to help the learning citizen in reflecting on personal and professional development.

The Training Booklet must not be confused with other tools/instruments, such as the European CV (which is completely self-managed by the citizen) and the Personal-Professional Card (which has an administrative nature/character).

The "Training Booklet" will be the key tool to ensure the transparency of lifelong and life wide learning and will assume the form of a synthetic device and portfolio of documents and proofs concerning individuals' prior learning, professional and personal experiences.

The Italian regions will play a key role in this process, since they can decide to delegate the management of the whole process to accredited bodies. However, the final responsible and owner is the citizen.

From the citizen's point of view this important communication tool aims at:
• Providing information on the citizen, her/his CV and formal, non formal and informal learning experiences to be used for finding a new job, for professional mobility and for mobility between different education and training systems;
• Making competences and prior learning achievements recognizable and transparent;
• Guiding people in professional development.
From the point of view of the Labour market and of enterprises, the Training Booklet represents an information tool useful for:

• Promoting the transferability of expertise and individual competences within the enrolment process and the labour mobility;
• Stressing the learning and professional path of each citizen, paying particular attention to the potentialities, the expectations and the excellence results achieved.
Finally, from the point of view of Regional and Local Governments and of the education system, this tool represents a guarantee for:
• Valorising the certification and acknowledgement which are carried out in education and training;
• Assuring transparency and transferability of learning and professional information of people at European level, fostering the flexibility and the individualisation of paths.
• Assuring the visibility of competences and of personal experiences in order to promote the geographic and professional mobility and lifelong learning of individuals.

However, the risk to generate confusion is very high, because even if the different tools are all citizen-focused and all aim at fostering the mobility and the possibility to recognise the acquired competences, each tool plays a different role/different function.
Consequently, the diffusion of these tools could generate problems because the same information are included in different tools with different formats (and consequently it will be necessary to adopt the same format and shared procedures to fill in the form), and because different actors own the tools: in some cases the full responsible is the citizen, in some other cases there will be a shared responsibility between the citizen and the institutional body.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
The legislative provisions and the main socio-institutional agreements entered into in recent years have introduced a number of important innovations in Italy's education and training systems, in particular with regard to the integration of the systems and to the certification and recognition of credits. Such innovations are considered a fundamental element to ensure individuals concrete opportunities of access to competences throughout their working life. In this respect, the implemented policy lines and initiatives have been designed in accordance with the basic elements characterising welfare reforms

in Europe today (as well as with the Lisbon and the Copenhagen goals), assuring access to learning and training opportunities for all citizens.

These delicate reforms have convinced the institutions and the social partners to set themselves ambitious objectives, such as: extending compulsory schooling and increasing the qualifications required to enter the labour market, ensuring the continuity and integration between learning, training and work pathways, and the possibility to actually capitalise work experience and learning.
In recent years, the different social, political and institutional positions have gradually converged towards the redesigning of training supply, the aim being to put into place a multiplicity of learning opportunities and places, guaranteeing the equality of the different pathways.
Today, this wide reform process with its common and strong principles and its set of institutional ruling tools can easily be considered a national policy toward validation of non-formal and informal learning, even if it is still limited to the aim of access to training.

A negotiated process has been carried out in almost all sectors of reform. The actors involved are usually the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Regions and the Social Partners. They work in a co-ordinated, 'concerted' way, mainly through technical/institutional commissions (such as the Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies) organised at national level by the Ministry primarily concerned with the specific subject (Employment and Social Affairs for vocational training, Education, University and Research for integrated systems).

Who implements the policy?
At national level the government itself is responsible for general trends and rules.
The Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, University and Research are responsible for the relevant implementation plans.
At local level, the governments of regions and autonomous provinces are responsible for the implementation of the policy set by the national government As a matter of fact, Regions have legislation power in the field of vocational training and have used this power by shaping very diverse VET systems, some of which clearly inspired by policy directives and planning principles of training initiatives, some others just giving some policy orientations and substantially trusting the initiatives of vocational training organisations.
A co-ordination of Italian Regions in the VET field exists formally, but it is not easy to find many consensual issues apart from the agreement to defend regional points of view and interests against the surviving national competencies.

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Procedural provisions

There are at four major types of procedural provisions for the development and implementation of policy decisions in the field of VET:

- Formal agreements with social partners.
  Agreements between the government and social partners contain several strategic guidelines for reforming the training system, among others '*a certification system as a suitable instrument to assure a unitary and visible pathway of life-long learning to every single individual, to allow the recognition of training credits, and to register the effectively acquired competences*'[16].
- National framework laws.
  In the past few years, there have been a number of important framework laws and reform laws affecting Education and Training. Just to name the most relevant ones:
  – In 1997 the Law n. 196 on Occupation. It tackles many subjects, particularly alternating training (apprenticeship and training-employment contracts), and continuous training, accreditation of training providers, certification and recognition of training credits.
  – In 1999 the Law n. 144 on Compulsory Training and Higher Technical Training. It has instituted '*the compulsory attendance of training activities until the attainment of 18 years of age is gradually introduced. This compulsory training may be gained also through integrated education-training pathways: educational system, regional vocational training system, apprenticeship, etc. The competences certified at the end of any segment of education, vocational training and apprenticeship shall form credits for the transition from one system to the other...*' and the Higher Technical Training and Education (IFTS) in which it is also possible to enter without a Diploma through an accreditation of competences procedure.
  – In 2003, the Law n. 30, known as the Biagi Reform. It disciplines the reform of the labour market, creating new instruments and solutions to promote more flexible working patterns. In this respect, the Reform is a comprehensive labour market reorganisation initiative promoted by the Berlusconi government aiming at improving the flexibility of labour contracts, adaptability of labour demand and supply, transparency of the system and its processes, including effective measures to combat undeclared and illegal employment.
  – Again in 2003 the Law n. 53, the so-called Moratti Reform. It has deeply changed the scenario of compulsory education, also introducing the possibility for students to move directly from the 4th year of Education and Vocational Training courses to Higher Integrated Education (FIS) and Higher Technical Education & Training programmes (IFTS).

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16 Employment Agreement between the Government and the Social Partners, September 1996.

- Agreements between the Government and the Regional authorities.
  An Agreement**17** defines, in a general way, the procedures for establishing a national system of *vocational competence certification*, stating that the Ministry of Labour (in co-operation and consultation with involved ministries, trade unions and employers organisations) formulates proposals in respect of the criteria and procedures for certifying the competences acquired by vocational training, in order to ensure standardisation of certificates throughout the country and their recognition within the European Union.
  According to the regulations in question, '*the vocational competences acquired through the regular attendance of vocational training provided by accredited training structures, through duly certified work, continuous-training activities, practice periods or self-training, are certified by the Regional Authorities, even upon request of the individuals concerned*' .
- Ministerial Decrees (on Compulsory Training and on IFTS – 2000 –, the "Certification of competences in vocational training system" – May 2001 –).
  The new competence certification system is aimed at the transparency of training programs, to assess individual experiences, to help matching between job offer and request in the labour market. Competences are defined as ' *(…) structured cluster of knowledge and abilities, normally connected to specific job profiles, acquirable through vocational training programs, work experiences, self learning, valuable also as training "credits"'* Three technical provisions are envisaged:
  National standards of 'competences' for certification, three kinds of Certification devices:
  – Vocational Training Qualification Certification,
  – Vocational Training Competence Certification and,
  – Accreditation of competences acquired on the job or on self-learning toward formal training or degrees.
  A citizen's training booklet (or portfolio) has to be instituted by the Region in order to document all these kinds of certifications.

Accessibility, quality, civil effect and responsibilities
Most of all in the vocational training system and in the integrated education/vocational training initiatives (compulsory training and IFTS). The issue of validation of non-formal learning has been approached starting from the principles on VET system integration, flexibility of training paths and transparency of competences, however acquired.

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17 The "Joint Conference State – Regions – Local Bodies" in March 2000 approved a document concerning the reorganisation and the expansion of continuing adult education, in order to organise the different actors between the State, the Regions and the Local Bodies. This system gives credit to the European Union requirements on training system, which have to respond to a new economic and social demand, and also to encourage knowledge throughout differentiated learning opportunities in which times, places and learning methods are not totally pre-determined and codified.

Civil effect:
- In the secondary school system, the final exam[18] foresees a certification that recognise training credits related to some kind of experience acquired or developed outside the scholastic courses.
- The new University system[19] foresees various categories of training credits at the entrance as well as during the studies: these credits (hours of training) are related to the acquisition of different competences and abilities or to prior training courses. The same system applies to the postgraduate courses.
- In the field of vocational training, the agreement between the State and the Regions related to the certification of competences and to the accreditation of vocational training centre. Annex B of the Agreement contains the procedures for the establishment of the National system of competency certification. The Ministerial decree no. 166/2001 (*Crediting the Training and Orientation Centres*) foresees the definition of vocational competences for trainers: the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs is now working at defining the minimum standards of these abilities, also using the training credits system.

Comments

The national institutional framework for VET used to be known as follows: a highly decentralised (Regionalised, but with significant responsibilities attributed to Provinces in several Regions) vocational training system, and a very centralised Education System (including vocational education) with very limited integration between them. In recent years a significant decentralisation process of education and a push towards integration of the different sub-systems are continuously changing the VET scenario, stimulating the interest of Regional politicians towards the increased competencies on education and sometimes neglecting the tradition of offering political leadership and specific innovation policies for vocational training.

However, the regionalised VET system brings about a number of backlashes and bottlenecks. For instance, one of the disadvantages of the system originates from the fact that the Regions have legislation power in the field of vocational training and have used this power by shaping very diverse VET systems, some of which clearly inspired by policy directives and planning principles of training initiatives, some others just giving some policy orientations and substantially trusting the initiatives of vocational training organisations.

Italy has always been well known for its regional diversity and stereotypically represented in terms of a rich and efficient North and a poorer and less efficient South. In fact the situation is much more complex and many declining areas can be found in Northern Italy

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18 DPR (Decree of the President of the Republic) no.323 23/7/1998, art.13.
19 Ministerial Decree 4/8/2000 and 28/11/2000.

as well as promising development districts are found in Southern Italy. Anyhow, the fundament of attributing VET competencies to Regional Governments rather than the National Ministry of Employment is to be searched in the very articulated degrees and models of socio-economic development of the Italian Regions (19 Regions and the two Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano).

A co-ordination of Italian Regions in the VET field exists formally, but it is not easy to find many consensual issues apart from the agreement to defend regional points of view and interests against the surviving national competencies.

Some regions have privileged public provision of VT, some others have reduced the public provision to very little, some are experimenting the so-called "demand support instruments" like "training vouchers", some others are simply relying on a well established group of National Training Bodies in their regional articulations. Finally some Regions have just delegated their policy role to the Social Partners and limit themselves to distributing funds – according to some uncertain rules – to accredited training bodies.

6. Spain

Context
During the past years, Spain has enacted three important laws, all with the objective of integrating the various existing systems of training and the various ways in which competences can be acquired. VPL has played an insignificant role in Spain until now. After all, obtaining higher diplomas often gave the right to a higher position, higher salary and a higher status. But the enactment of these three laws suggests that Spain has in mind an output-oriented system, based on competences for vocational education. The restructuring of the system for education and training may lead to more attention to VPL.

A central role in the development of a national qualification system is reserved for the national Qualification Institute. At the sector level, collective negotiation is used as an instrument to regulate the vocational classification system.

It is striking that differences exist between the views of the social partners. The employers' organisations CEOE-CEPYME believe that methods for VPL must be based on objective criteria: the qualifications and competences as used by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This is in contrast to the trade unions, the Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), which believe that the methods for VPL must be based on more qualitative criteria within concrete jobs, since that is the only place where the social partners have the opportunity to participate in the accreditation.

The system and standards
Spain has taken two important initiatives regarding VPL. The first, the 'integrated service plans for employment' (SIPE), is an initiative to develop procedures for competency

assessment among the unemployed. It is a combination of interviews and tests to make someone's professional and competency profile. The procedure does not lead to formal accreditation but has as its objective to improve the supervision and awareness of someone's own abilities.

In addition, there are certificates that prove professional competency, an attempt to certify non-formal learning. Since 1995 there have been 185 professional titles in 22 sectors. A certificate can be acquired through work experience, but the dominant pathway is through training. Despite the fact that each law indicates that the same value is attached to formal and non-formal programmes, the emphasis lies on formal learning. The Ministry of Employment is responsible for this system. Individuals are tested by an assessment committee that the comprised of seven external observers.

7. Portugal

Context
In Portugal the government has established an institution for adult education, 'ANEFA'. ANEFA is a public institute, under the joint responsibility of the Ministries of Education and Employment. One of its objectives is to design a system to assess and validate formally and informally acquired knowledge and skills, which can lead to academic and professional certification.

The purpose of this initiative was to create various opportunities to pursue adult education. The national system for the validation and certification of competences (RVCC) has established RVCC centres. These centres are created through a public tender. Portugal currently has 42 centres; it expects to have a total of 84 by 2006.

The competences are identified through a portfolio. In addition to the identification, the centres offer supervision and advice for further development opportunities. To become certified, the candidate must appear with his or her portfolio before a jury consisting of an employee from the centre, an instructor and an external assessor.
Fifteen hundred people were certified between December 2000 and August 2002.

The information below is taken from "Centres for recognising, validating and certifying competences: Guidebook. Anefa, Lisbon, 2002."

According to the data from 2000 (OCDE, Regard sur l'education, les indicateurs de l'OCDE, 1997) about 64% of the Portuguese working population does not have, to date, the compulsory 9 years of schooling. The OECD predicts that without taking measures to increase levels of education by 2015 less than 40% of the Portuguese working population will hold education levels equal to or higher than 9 years of schooling.
Therefore the national Plan for Action for Employment (PNE) suggests a partnership approach, so as to combine efforts and possibilities for 'reinforcing lifelong education and

training, particularly for the unemployed population, workers at risk of unemployment and workers with low qualifications especially young people.' (Pillar 1, measures 4 and 5).

Terminology
RVCC = Recognition, Validation and Certifying Competences

Who makes the policy? Responsibilities
The responsibilities are distributed. The main responsibility lies solely with the government. By setting up a single national project, with representatives of all parties in a steering committee, a workable approach has been created that is beginning to bear fruit. It also creates challenges, since the social partners link these activities to their objectives.

Procedural provisions
ANEFA believes in the participation and mobilisation of local social partners involved in the RVCC Centres structures. The centres emerge from public and private organisations with strong local roots and privileged contacts with adults.
Anefa started in 2000 with six RVCC Centres. By 2006 there will be 84 RVCC Centres all over Portugal.

Methods and services
The type of interventions by RVCC Centres are organised around the following activities:
• Local animation
• Information
• Guidance
• Support
• Counselling

ANEFA's Guidelines to Key competences includes four key-areas of competencies:
1. Language and Communication (LC)
2. Mathematics and Everyday Life (ML)
3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
4. Citizenship and Employability (CE)
The key-areas are structured in three levels (Basic 1, 2 and 3) and each level again is divided in four key-competency units (A, B, C, and D).

The three RVCC Centres Areas of Intervention are:
1. Recognition of competencies
   Adults reflecting and evaluating their life experiences, recognising their competencies, enabling to construct personal and professional projects.

2. Validation of Key Competencies
   The official act by a accredited institution attributing certification with school and/or professional equivalence, sometimes preceded by recognition of competencies, accompanied by an assessment of training needs.
3. Certification of Competencies
   The official confirmation of competencies and qualifications acquired through training and experiences, and presumably identified in the process of recognition, evaluation and validation of competencies.

Instruments and products used for validation and certification are:

Intervention Areas	Instruments	Products
Recognition	• Enrolment/application form	• Biographic record
	• Documents • Identifying competencies	• Personal Competency File (portfolio) • Application form for validation of competencies
Validation	• Application form for validation of competencies • Personal Competency File (portfolio)	• Application Dossier
Further Learning	• Guidelines to Key Competencies	• Confirmation document
Certification	• Confirmation document	• Personal Record of Key Competences • Certificates

From: Centres for RVCC: Guidebook (ANEFA, 2002)

Accessibility
It is easily accessible. The emphasis lies on individual responsibility and the opportunity that is offered to everyone to receive information and assistance.
Companies are responsible for the assessment, but an individual can also have himself assessed at a regional institution.
Directly or indirectly, the government offers various forms of support that can range from tax regulations, right to take leave to adjusted training programmes.

Quality
Quality is guaranteed through the implementation of a national project by placing this project under the responsibility of a single organisation and with the actors in the field of VPL as steering committee.

Quality is also guaranteed by placing the responsibilities for development and the implementation at various levels (national, regional, company, educational institution, individual).

Civil effect
Accreditation consists of a formal, non-formal and informal part. The civil effect is strengthened through the contribution in non-formal and informal learning, such as through self-assessment of the individual and through assessment of experiential learning by companies and educational institutions. This expresses itself further in the development of the education and the HRD.

The accredited competences are compiled at a national level. This information offers support in developing the policy, national and regional, in the further development of competences. In future, regional supply and demand of specific competences can be better matched in this way.

C. North European model

8. Norway

Norway is already going its own way in VPL. Prerequisites are continuously made for further development through laws and regulations, also since the three parties (government, employers and employees) play an active role in the process. The interests of the individual, the business community, the sector and national interests are taken into account. All adults have the formal right to secondary education in the Competence Reform.

Finally, Norway is interesting due to the approach in a country with a high average level of education.

Context
The Norwegian government presented the White Paper 'The Competence Reform' on post- and adult education in 1998. The basis for this change was the need for competences at the workplace, in society and individual. This change has been implemented as a process in which the government, the employers' organisations and employee representative organisations play an active role. This change has been gradual both at the workplace and in education.

The total Competence Reform consists of the following components:
- Flexible and specially adapted training
- Provision of funds and tax regulations
- Right on leave
- The competence building programme
- Tertiary education
- Higher education
- Non-formal learning

- High secondary education
- Lower and low secondary education
- Research and development

In the parliamentary discussion on the White paper, the 'Storting' (the parliament) asked the government to implement a system that gives adults the right to document their non-formal and informal learning without having to undergo traditional forms of testing and examination.

The Realkompetanse Project set up a Norwegian national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. This three-year project ran from 1999 to July 2002. In addition to the Realkompetanse Project, there are also various Pilot Projects whose emphasis lies on improving accessibility to studies. Restructuring toward competency-oriented learning has required sizeable government investment.

Concepts

'Realkompetanse' refers to all formal, non-formal and informal learned matter among adults. This means the sum of all skills that individuals have acquired through education, paid and unpaid work, work in organisations and family circle and society.

'Validation activities' in education means information, counselling, defining skills, identifying skills and assessment. The individual receives a 'public documentation' after assessment.

Validation activities at the workplace take place when someone applies for a job and the documentation is verified or with the documentation that is used internally at a company, as is documented in a quality handbook.

NEW ACT ON VOCATIONAL TESTING PASSED IN NORWAY

The new law ensures that adults who have obtained the right to free upper secondary education, but who wish to work instead, are given the opportunity to document their prior experiential competence.

Until now it has often been difficult for adults without diplomas to find work related to their skills and competencies. There has also been a challenge to assess education and work experiences obtained abroad, and immigrants have in many instances been forced to undergo new exams to achieve an education approved in Norway. One can also find examples of immigrants having to work in fields not relevant to their qualifications.

The changes in the Education Act were passed on 6 December 2002. The municipality, employment service or the social security office are required to offer vocational testing and issue certificates to adults who fall under the Act of free upper secondary education.

The concept of 'realkompetanse' refers to all formal, informal and non-formal competence acquired by adults, independent of study place and methods. Until the new Act was passed, the right to accreditation of prior learning was a part of the right to free upper secondary education, and was primarily used as a basis for applications and for selecting and composing courses in upper secondary education. The main idea behind the new Act is to allow accreditation of prior learning in instances when the individual goal is work, not education. This form of testing is particularly fitted to prove an adult person's skills in the area of trade and craft.

The system and standards
- Adults can acquire information, counselling and help with the documentation process in connection with 'upper secondary and vocational training' at 'province houses'. Adults can contact the universities or HBO (higher professional education) institutions directly for evaluation for 'higher education'. Professional assessors (regarding schools) are used when the curriculum must be assessed for the subject.
- At the workplace, the employees themselves are responsible in describing their skills. Employees are responsible for assessing and confirming that their employees have these competences (acquired and/or demonstrated in their current position).
- In the tertiary sector, the individual adult is responsible for personal declarations.

For the documentation at the workplace, the certificate (verified document/testimony) describes the individual's knowledge and skills. Skills based on tasks, working methods and co-operation receive special attention. The documentation gives formal access to the educational system or serves as proof of skill for exemptions for parts of the entire course, is used in applications for a new job and is a resource in career planning.

The objective
The objective is a national system for documentation of non-formal and informal learning, legitimised for both the workplace and the educational system.

Who makes the policy?
The assignment is given by the Norwegian government, in consultation with the employers and employees.
The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the Realkompetanse Project.

Who implements the policy?
Vox (National Institute for adult learning) was responsible for implementing the Realkompetanse Project. The project has terminated and Vox now has the responsibility of introducing the results.
The project steering committee consists of representatives of the social partners, the education and social groups. The steering committee was responsible for implementing the project within the boundaries of the assignment, laws and regulations and work plan. The parties were represented at various levels in the project.
Some 50 local sub-projects were responsible for developing and testing various methods and instruments.

Vox organises national networks and portals, conferences, workshops and courses for instructors in adult education. Vox also participates in international projects, networks and contacts, partly to acquire input from other new ideas, methods and instruments.

Procedural provisions

The individual right to accreditation of non-formal learning is guaranteed in Norwegian laws and regulations. Since 2001, all adults born prior to 1978 have the right to acceptance to higher secondary education (incl. vocational education and vocational training) based on assessed non-formal and informal learning.

In co-operation between the Ministry of Education and Research, VOX, the social partners and representatives from social sectors, an information strategy is prepared for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning.

The emphasis in the Realkompetanse project lies on:
- The documentation of non-formal learning at the workplace
- The documentation of non-formal learning in voluntary service
- Methods of assessment of non-formal learning (incl. testing of professional skills)
- The validation of non-formal learning regarding higher secondary education
- The adjustment and potential changes of current laws and regulations and rules
- Access for students to universities and colleges based on non-formal learning

The process consists of six steps:
1. Information: the distribution of knowledge and increasing interest
2. Advice/supervision: dialogue and supervision during the validation process
3. Writing CVs and drafting portfolios
4. Documenting skills
5. Assessment
6. Documentation

Methodology

Five methods are recommended for documenting skills:
1. Methods based on dialogue
2. The Practice Candidate Method
3. Vocation test
4. Assessment of written documentation
5. Self-assessment

The selection of the (mix of) method(s) depends on the objective and the individual. One method focuses more on strengthening self-confidence and the consciousness-raising process, while the other focuses more on formalising competences.

The European CV, developed by the European Forum on Transparency of Vocational Qualifications (see appendix 2), and combined with a skills certificate, is recommended for the written documentation.

Accessibility, quality, civil effect and responsibilities

Accessibility
The accessibility is great; the emphasis lies on individual responsibility and the opportunity that is offered to everyone to acquire information and help.
Companies are responsible for the assessment, but an individual can also be assessed at a regional institution.
Directly or indirectly, the government offers various forms of support that can range from tax regulations and right to leave to adjusted training programmes.

Quality

Quality is guaranteed through the implementation of a national project. This project is placed in the hands of a single organisation with VPL actors in the steering committee.
Quality is also guaranteed by the responsibilities in development and by placing implementation at various levels (national, regional, company, educational institution, individual).

Civil effect
Accreditation consists of a formal, non-formal and informal part. The civil effect is emphatically strengthened by contributions in the non-formal and informal area.
As with self-assessment of the individual and assessment of experiential learning by companies and educational institutions, this is also expressed in the development of the education and the HRD.
The accredited competences are compiled at the national level. This information offers support in developing the policy, national and regional, in further development of competences. Regional supply and demand of specific competences can be better matched in future this way.

Responsibilities
The responsibilities are distributed and the main responsibility lies only with the government. Through the organisation of a single national project, with representatives of all parties involved in a steering committee, a practicable approach is created that is beginning to bear fruit. It also creates challenges, since the social partners link these activities to their objectives.

Comments
The system focuses on accrediting acquired competences measured by the standards of formal education, the objective being the right of access to training and granting exemptions within training programmes.
There is less emphasis on the individual's path of development and on the optimal utilisation of the acquired competences in the work itself. The impression is that the formalisation plays a greater role than the implementation of the competences in the work itself.

The Minister of Education & Research has given Vox the responsibility for further developments and implementation. Vox will do this in co-operation with the current partners.

9. Denmark

Context
As in other Scandinavian countries, attention is focused on formulating and continuously adjusting the personal training plan. This plan is a framework that is drafted by a mentor and participant. The participant has a great personal responsibility for learning, which requires a flexible structure. Competences acquired elsewhere are recognised and accredited everywhere.

The Danish educational system still partly emphasises formal education as a preparation to the labour market.

In comparison with Sweden, the learner spends more time in the company. He spends less time in the company in comparison with Germany.

Who implements the policy?
Danish competency requirements, including a global curriculum, are formulated at the national level. Operationalisation takes place at the local level.

In November 2004 the Danish ministries of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation; Culture and Economic and Business Affairs presented a new policy paper on the recognition of prior learning. The main goal is to apply recognition of prior learning in all sections of the education system. The intention is to improve opportunities for individuals to acquire qualifications and competences that are in demand on a changeable labour market.

Procedural provisions
Many discussions have already been held on competences, but the formalisation of accreditation is still lacking.

However, employment policy offers a 2-week course for the unemployed, which is a combination of an assessment procedure, choice of career supervision and formulation of a training plan.

A system of basic adult education has been set up parallel to formal education, adult secondary education, higher and university education. This system only distinguishes between study competency (acquired in formal learning situations) and work competency, with the emphasis on study competency. Moreover, there are still uncertainties in the admission requirements and the assessment and selection method that is based on them (quota per training programme).

Methods and services
The accreditation of competences acquired elsewhere consists of acquiring exemptions. For apprenticeships of longer than a month, the exemptions are granted by sectoral committees. For apprenticeships shorter than a month, the exemptions are granted by the training programmes.

Denmark applies the SUM method. The purpose of this method is to systematically determine personal competency needs and to plan the training programme, thereby contributing to the employee's strategic development. This method is included as a recommendation in the collective labour agreement. The method is offered with instruments and assistance and includes a function analysis, personal interviews and tailor-made POP development. PC software to provide plans, registration and printing of programmes for the individual employee is offered.
In and of itself, SUM is a diagnosis instrument; it does not certify. The follow-up training, after which consultation on possible exemptions is given, certifies.

An example of a regional initiative is the 'Educational spiral'. Its purpose was to reduce the future shortage of health care employees. First, the employees had a competency analysis of their competences and the competences that were needed to fulfil their duties. Second, the unemployed were examined to see what they needed to 'upgrade' in order to find work in the health care system. Third, meetings were organised at various locations in the region in order to acquire interchangeable documentation and a co-ordinated offer of courses.

Accessibility
The school or the training institute evaluates the participant's practical and theoretical competency. The school determines the transfer value, i.e. the value represented by the experience and training within the educational programme.
This evaluation method fits within the Danish quota system. The limited number of positions in higher education (quota) is distributed among the future students with the highest results obtained in the preparatory training. However, other learning experiences are accredited by adding a multiplication factor to the results achieved. This factor is determined by factors such as:
• Longer than six months paid work, minimum of 25 hours/week;
• Military service;
• Foreign experience, minimum of six months, regardless of the type of experience (work, travel, language course, etc.);
• Course at the Danish Adult Education Centre (minimum of 16 consecutive weeks);
• Courses and modules taken at the open university;
• Other completed programmes.
A degree of heterogeneity in the courses is created through this accreditation. The disadvantage is that a number of recent graduates in the business community were much older and still had little work experience at that level when compared with graduates who

had immediately earned their diploma. Another disadvantage is that a number of participants were much older than their counterparts in other European countries.

Comments
Learning issues:
• VPL can strengthen further learning in the formal educational system.
• VPL via schools limits itself to a qualification system only through the educational system. Those that fall outside this system or do not wish to participate in the educational system have more difficulty in acquiring accreditation.
• Value systems for other activities (travel, military service, etc.) improve the individual's 'market value'.
• VPL demands a special form of acceptation (older recent graduates in the business community).

10. Finland

Context
In Europe, the Finnish population has a high level of education, on average. 32.5% of the Finnish population in the 25-64 age group has a tertiary education, 17.4% of all tertiary graduates in the 20-29 age group graduate in science and technology and 19.3% in the 25-64 age group participate in another form of life-long learning. The focus on training can be seen in the Finnish VPL system.

Finnish policy focuses on the transition to a knowledge society and life-long learning. This expresses itself, among other things, in the increase in the government contribution to the polytechnics, the colleges of higher education. Over the past few years, the role of the colleges of higher education has changed toward university, as research is also conducted there. This development can also be seen in the set-up of a system of individual examinations.
The examination system is divided into three parts:
1. High school and art school examinations
2. Basic and higher vocational education examinations
3. Basic vocational education, vocational education and special vocational education
In the basic examinations, the 'ability' to implement basic tasks in the industry must be demonstrated, in the professional examinations, the skills that are equivalent to what is expected from a professional in the industry must be shown, and in the special examinations, the most essential tasks in the industry must be demonstrated.

Concepts
Formal learning refers to a target-oriented, institutional system of study, which leads to a qualification and is part of an overall hierarchy. Formal learning is systematic with regard to its aims, the time spent on it or the financial support obtained for it. When completed,

the student receives some kind of certificate. Formal learning is intentional as far as the student is concerned.

Non-formal learning is systematic with regard to its aims, the time spent on it or the financial support obtained for it and has a target as far as the student is concerned. However, it does not form part of any formal educational system. In Finland, non-formal teaching is provided mainly by institutions specialising in adult education.

Informal learning takes place in daily activities related to work, family or leisure. Informal learning is not systematic with regard to its aims, the time spent on it or the financial support obtained for it and does not usually yield any kind of certificate. Although informal learning can be intentional, it is usually non-intentional (or random).

System and standards
In Finland, there are three ways of recognising non-formal and informal learning:
1) Skills testing,
2) Regulation of access to formal education,
3) Accreditation of earlier studies.
This tripartite division finds expression in the legislation and can be considered the chosen national policy.

The current laws on validation of non-formal and informal learning came into force in the mid '90s. However, provisions on validation have a longer history than that.
In special cases, it had been possible to apply for formal education even though the general educational requirements for entry had not been fulfilled. Even non-formal studies elsewhere could be granted accreditation in formal education. Under the law, adults were also able to complete a comprehensive, upper secondary or initial vocational qualification by passing tests as private students regardless of how they acquired their knowledge.
The main difference compared with the present situation is that the legal provisions have been further clarified, and actual validation of this nature now takes place on a somewhat wider scale. The current law also makes accreditation the student's subjective right to some extent.

The vocational competence-based qualifications and national language proficiency tests that came into force in 1994 are good examples of the new approach to acquiring qualifications through testing, regardless of how the knowledge/skills were acquired. The requirements are not tied to any course of study, but are demonstrated in practice, as vocational or language skills, in the test situation. In other systems, candidates are required to demonstrate that they have mastered the required level of skill in the subjects in the curriculum, regardless of how the competence was acquired.

The related policy is primarily defined in new educational legislation that provides a framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning at:
- Comprehensive schools (Comprehensive Schools Act 628/1998 and Decree 852/1998),
- Upper secondary schools (Upper Secondary Schools Act 629/1998 and Decree 819/1998),
- Upper secondary vocational institutions (Act 630/1998 and Decree 811/1998 on Vocational Education),
- In adult vocational education (Act 631/1998 and Decree 812/1998 on Adult Vocational Education).

This new legislation came into effect in 1998.

The other laws important for policy are those on universities and polytechnics.
- The general legislation on polytechnics dates from 1995 (Act 255/1995 and Decree 256/1995 on Polytechnic Education).
- There is a corresponding Act (645/1997) and Decree (115/1998) on universities.
- Individual Decrees on university degrees in the following disciplines:
  – Law (86/1996)
  – Education and teacher training (576/1995)
  – Humanities and natural sciences (221/1994)
  – Drama and dance (216/1995)
  – Degrees from the Academy of Fine Arts (381/1997)
  – Degrees from the Sibelius Academy (148/1995)
  – University-level degrees in industrial arts (440/1994)
  – Physical education (327/1994).

Another significant law for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is the Act on the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (668/1994).

The main lines of validation of non-formal and informal learning are also laid down in national policy documents at the strategy level, i.e. the Development Plan for Education and Research in the Administrative Sector of the Ministry of Education 1999-2004 and Finland's National Action Plan for Employment — In accordance with the EU's Employment Guidelines (NAP).

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
The validation of non-formal and informal learning cannot be entirely separated from general decision-making on education policy. Therefore, what follows briefly surveys the entire decision-making system in Finnish education, and considers the validation procedure against this background.

Education policy is defined by Parliament and the Government in various development documents and in the State budget, as well as in educational legislation.

The Ministry of Education is the highest authority and is responsible for all publicly funded education in Finland. It is responsible for preparatory work on educational legislation, all necessary decisions and its share of the State budget. The remit of the Ministry of Education encompasses education and research. Universities and polytechnics are directly subordinate to the Ministry.

The National Board of Education works in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education. It is a planning and expert body responsible for primary and secondary education and for adult education and training (though not for institutions of higher education). The Board draws up and approves national core curricula and guidelines for qualifications and is responsible for the evaluation of the Finnish education system, with the exception of the institutions of higher education. It also assists the Ministry of Education in the preparation of education policy decisions.

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The social partners participate in the planning and development of education through representation on the following committees:
• The Adult Education Council set up by the Government, which deals with matters concerning development, research and evaluation in adult education and training;
• The training committees operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, which have been created to develop contacts between vocational education and working life, and include representatives of the social partners;
• The examination committees operating under the National Board of Education, which have been established to organise and supervise competence-based examinations (see question 8b and 11) in vocational adult education and are responsible for arranging examinations, for example. These committees also have representatives of the social partners;
• The consultative committees operating at vocational institutions, whose function is to develop the operations of the institution and its contacts with local working life.

In the mid '90s, Finnish educational institutions were given greater powers to decide about their own activities. The National Board of Education formulated core curricula, based on which comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational institutes draw up their own curricula. In terms of the validation of non-formal and informal learning this decentralization in practice means that individual educational institutions are given a great deal of freedom in applying the framework provided by the legislation. There is also separate legislation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning at universities and polytechnics, which fall within the remit of the Ministry of Education.

Finland has about 4,000 comprehensive schools, 470 upper secondary schools, 200 vocational institutes, 29 polytechnics, 30 universities and some 1,000 institutions that provide adult education.

Various levels of education and types of institution can decide on the forms taken by validation of non-formal and informal learning (skills testing, regulations on access to formal education and accreditation).

The exceptions to this institution-based model are the various arrangements for skills testing, i.e. competence-based qualifications, National Certificate of Language Proficiency tests and Computer Driving Licence® test.

Responsible for implementing the policy are for:

Skills tests
- Basic education: Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- Upper secondary general education: Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- Adult education and training: Ministry of Education, National Board of Education, social partners and educational institutions
- Language proficiency tests: Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- IT proficiency test (Computer Driving Licence®): TIEKE (Finnish Information Society Development Centre), social partners and educational institutions

Regulation of access to formal education
- Upper secondary education (general and vocational education): Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- Higher education (polytechnics and universities): Ministry of Education and educational institutions

Accreditation
- Basic education: Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- Upper secondary education (general and vocational education): Ministry of Education, National Board of Education and educational institutions
- Higher education (polytechnics and universities): Ministry of Education and educational institutions

Procedural provisions
The law on free examinations was enacted in 1994. This law assumes that learning not only takes place in education.
All the earning must be seen as an entity. The law indicates that professional training for adults outside formal education must be focused on the examination at the three levels.
In vocational education, the objective is to develop examinations that are independent of the way in which one learns the professional skill. Adult competences can be better used

in this way. It also offers an instrument for people with less opportunity to acquire work to integrate better in the labour market and to continue to motivate individuals with a low education.

Setting up the system is established in co-operation with government, education, employers' and employees' organisations.

Areas in which initiatives on validation of non-formal and informal learning have been taken are:

Skills tests:
- Upper secondary general education
- Adult education and training
- National Certificate of Language Proficiency
- Computer Driving Licence®

Regulation of access to formal education:
- Upper secondary education (general and vocational education)
- Higher education (polytechnics and universities)

Accreditation of earlier studies:
- Basic education
- Upper secondary education (general and vocational education)
- Higher education (polytechnics and universities)

Methods and services
The principles of free examinations have been worked out in the ALVAR project (1999):
- Each individual can participate in the professional examination, regardless of how the competences are acquired;
- The basis of the professional examination defines the professional skills required and how they will be tested;
- Examination committees give an institute that has examiners with the proper competences the right to administer an examination;
- The individual receives a certificate in four languages, provided that he passes. The certificate is the same throughout Finland.

This approach fits with the Finnish educational system for adults. Each type of adult education has its own organisation with its own objectives, target groups and activities. These organisations are paid by the national and local government, volunteer organisations, foundations and companies. In total, there are more than 1,000 organisations that provide adult education.

The concentration in approach of the validation of acquired competences is therefore prompted from practical and economic insight. The limitation is that it still focuses on the higher educated (and access to higher education) and it is still unclear whether the lower

educated also find their motivation in this system and/or whether it leads to an improved integration of the less privileged on the labour market.

Accessibility, quality, civil effect and responsibilities
The system is accessible to everyone; however, the system focuses primarily on the higher educated.
The Ministry of Education is the highest authority and is responsible for all publicly funded education, encompassing education and research. Universities and polytechnics are directly subordinate to the Ministry.
The National Board of Education is a planning and expert body responsible for primary and secondary education and for adult education and training. It assists the Ministry of Education in the preparation of education policy decisions.
The social partners participate in the planning and development of education through representation on the following committees:
- The Adult Education Council,
- The training committees,
- The examination committees,
- The consultative committees.

Learning issues
- Government policy focuses on the higher educated. VPL also focuses on this group. The effect on the lower educated is still unclear.
- It is still unclear which calculations are at the basis of the emphasis on the higher educated.

11. Sweden

Context
In Europe, Sweden, together with the UK, leads in life-long learning. 21.6% of the population in the 25-64 age group participates in one or another form of formal or non-formal learning. In addition, Sweden still has many forms of informal learning that are often organised in communities by the population itself. Social learning holds an important position in Sweden.

Validation of the 'learned material' was introduced in 1996 in a national programme Kunskapslyftet ('raising of knowledge'). Since the word 'validation' was unknown, it was further defined. The definition that is now used by the 'Solverket' is: 'the evaluation of knowledge and skills by an adult acquired through study, living and working in a society, both formal and informal.' Validation includes the identification, evaluation and accreditation of both formally and informally acquired competences.

The 'Validation' of knowledge and competences can be used to:

A Acquire endorsements to pursue further education and training;

B Acquire a competency or sector certification to use in the labour market;

C Make (pedagogical) adjustments in content or better co-ordinate the approach of a training programme to the individual.

The education is decentralised by the Swedish communities and therefore also the 'Validerung'. A disadvantage is that the validation differs per region and it is more difficult to organise a national approach. The advantage, however, is that different methods are tested simultaneously and that slowly but surely the best (or most demanded/desired) methods will float to the surface through regular exchange. The programme is set up nationally. This is given more substance at the regional level. The tendency is that the parties wish to co-operate properly.

An example of an instrument is the portfolio. In the portfolio, the individual describes his learning and work experiences. Proof of competency is provided by validating the descriptions in co-operation with a representative of a validating institution.

Another example is the SESAM project, in which students in a joint venture are educated by 14 different professions. This project focuses primarily on immigrants. The objective is to recognise and accredit competences and to have the labour market employ these people more easily and quickly.

A group co-operates for each profession. Each group consists of representatives of employers, employees, the government and other organisations that are involved in activities in that sector. This group determines how, where, when and by whom the accreditation takes place.

Learning issues

• The approach for the policy and method of the iterative and adaptive development and of the learning from the basis at the regional and national level, should be further examined and compared with the top-down approach and/or or the approach focused on the link with existing educational systems.

Concepts

The Ministry of Education uses the term "Validering", similar to the English term 'validation'.

The government refers to *validering* as a structured assessment/estimation, valuing and recognition of knowledge and competence acquired both within and outside the formal educational system.

The objective

Three main objectives can be distinguished within this area:

• For the individual, it improves access to further education

- Also for the individual by competence certification or branch certification, it improves access to the labour market.
- And it is used for adaptation of training towards the individual need of a learner.

The system and standards
No real system is in place. The democratic approach of local and regional initiatives has led to different systems and standards.
Finally, there will be a government plan, a Government Bill on validation and guidance. A group comprising representatives of the ministries of education, industry/commerce and social affairs will prepare the Bill.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
The responsibility for education is decentralised to the communities. Therefore, there is no real national policy, but numerous policies.

Who implements the policy?
Different pilot projects have been launched. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket) is responsible for the further development of experimental practices as well as their evaluation. A report to the government will be delivered.

Procedural provisions
Since 1997, all municipalities in Sweden have participated in a special project called Kunskapslyftet, The Adult Education Initiative. Kunskapslyftet is a project, supported by the state, which gives thousands of Swedes access to competence development and the completion of their gymnasium exams (upper secondary level).
This project, initiated by the Swedish government, ended in 2002. The objectives for the initiative were to:
- Reduce unemployment.
- Develop and renew adult education.
- Reduce differences between educational levels.
- Increase conditions for growth.
This initiative has led to better attention toward the validation definition and to methods that reach the four objectives mentioned above.

Methods and services
Two models are identified:
1. Accreditation of an individual's competences and those that are formal. This is often part of a training programme.
2. Accreditation of formal competences through a link to a certain certification.
In both cases, careful documentation of the individual's competences is an important instrument.

The methodology that is generally used consists of 5 steps:
1. Information – recruitment.
2. Presentation of courses and course goals.
3. Self-evaluation/self-validation.
4. A plan for validation is established and
5. Validation is performed.

Many communities have developed models of their own and many have been able to follow the steps above.

In many cases, criteria used are goals set for the upper secondary level of the school system. But there are also criteria that are taken from branch level demands (bus drivers, welding, electricity, construction industry, etc.).

Accessibility, quality, civil effect and responsibilities
Each individual can have his/her competences tested. The employee organisations play an important role since the employees can take the initiative. The validating organisations also have to be impartial and reputable if they are to be taken seriously and accredited by the employees.

Quality is currently a very decentralised movement, which means that there is a lot of variation.

Working at the regional and local level improves motivation and shows opportunities for further development.

Accreditation at the regional and local level strengthens employee interchangeability between various companies and sectors.

Comments
Most of the Kunskapslyftet activities can be found at places with high population densities. And most of the validation was performed within the health sector, followed by general subjects and ICT, but all cover a broad spectrum of competences. Various methods were used.

D. Anglo-Saxon approach

12. United Kingdom

Context
The UK has a long tradition in structuring and formalising vocational education. The average educational level is high and together with Sweden, the UK has the highest percentage of participants (in the 24-65 age group) in life-long learning. In the early '80s, England had already started to accredit competences acquired elsewhere at the university level and the National Vocational Qualifications system (NVQ), for which a Scottish version (SVQ) also exists, was developed in the mid-'80s.

Concepts
Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL): Process that formally recognises a candidate's previous work or other experience, which can then be used towards a qualification.

The objective
The main aim is improved economic performance with supporting objectives relating to improving the transparency of recruitment, adjusting the supply and demand sides in the provision of education and training and, coming back to the main aim, measurement of progress of the workforce towards supporting improved economic performance.

There are a number of bodies – especially The Open College Network that validate programmes of non-vocational learning. These take place mostly in adult and community learning contexts and often relate to arts, crafts and leisure pursuits. The introduction of subject-based inspection to those adult and community learning programmes that do not have defined qualification outcomes has forced the development of different kinds of assessment and programme evaluation methods.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
A qualifications policy has been developed over some time in the UK. In England, the relevant aspect is discharged through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) through its process of accreditation. QCA was established under the 1997 Education Act. In Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has a similar accreditation function although at present these powers apply only to accreditation of work-based SQA qualifications.

NVQs accredited by QCA, with the advice of ACCAC, are adopted in Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish Vocational Qualifications are accredited by SQA, based on the same national occupational standards as NVQs, are available in Scotland and may also be used in England. NVQs are included in England's national targets.
The SQA also recognises APL in awarding its full range of qualifications. In Wales, the policy is undertaken jointly by the QCA and ACCAC, the Welsh curriculum and assessment authority.

All qualifications entering the national qualifications framework are submitted to the process of accreditation. This depends on a number of criteria. There are criteria common to all qualifications submitted and criteria specific to general, vocationally related and occupational qualifications. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) fall into the last category. One of the common criteria reads "…each proposal for accreditation must include…a statement, as appropriate, of recommended prior knowledge, attainment or experience." This means that APL could be an approach used in any of the three categories. In practice, it is predominantly found within NVQs. This is because NVQ assessment relies upon candidate evidence meeting requirements of performance criteria and not necessarily upon having followed any particular course or programme of learning.

Effectively, this means that NVQs do not distinguish between informal, non-formal and formal learning. A similar situation exists in Scotland through the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which was established under the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. These powers existed in one of SQA's predecessor bodies, the Scottish Vocational Education Council.

Who implements the policy?
Given the relatively long history in the UK, all of the above are involved. In the case of guidance and counselling services, it is those focused specifically on vocational education and training that are more likely to be involved than other types within this category.

The main partners are QCA (accreditation and overarching quality assurance), awarding bodies (certification and its quality assurance), training and education suppliers (assessment centres, assessment), and, in the context of public support, the funding and policies for funding of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England and of ELWa in Wales. In Scotland, there is a Scottish Further Education Funding Council.

Procedural provisions
Early impetus was provided by the 1986 White Paper Working Together: Education and Training. This supported the establishment of NCVQ and increased financial support for the development of occupational standards that form the basis of NVQs. Throughout the late 1980s, there was significant experimental and developmental activity on approach, producing methodological guidance. This guidance was used in the development and implementation of the Access to Assessment Initiative that ran from 1991-1994 via what were the Training and Enterprise Councils. This initiative aimed to improve, broaden and facilitate access to assessment for NVQs, including the assessment and accreditation of prior learning for individuals and employers. As the 80s ended, the assessor and verifier occupational standards that formed units within the NVQ system were developed. There is an assessor unit (D36) entitled "Advise and Support Candidates to Identify Prior Achievement". However, it should be noted that this is not as widely used as the main assessor units, D32 "Assess Candidate Performance" and D33 "Assess Candidate Using Diverse Sources of Evidence". Possible reasons for greater use of these two units are given shortly. As NVQs were accredited they were used as Approved Qualifications within publicly funded programmes enacted through the TEC Operating Agreement (the contract between the Employment Department as was in England and the Welsh Office as was in Wales and the TECs). This related to those training providers that were funded by TECs. Schedule 2a (Further and Higher Education Act 1992) dictated vocational qualifications to be funded in other institutions such as colleges of further education. Schedule 2a also supported D32 and D33 as "single unit qualifications" because D32 was the minimum requirement for being an assessor, and D33 was often specified in the case of particular NVQs. The funding of these two units was one of the major influences on the development of the infrastructure for NVQ implementation and also the vocational, education and training infrastructure now existing in the UK. The final likely reason for the greater use of

D32 and D33 units is that D33 often proves sufficient in most cases in that D36 majors on planning for achievement of the qualification. This is not necessary with many candidates, particularly for mature ones. In Scotland similar arrangements operate through Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Local Enterprise Companies.

Legislation
- *S1 1996/2374 (Implementation Regulations) Directive 92/51/EEC.*
- *Learning and Skills Act 2000, Section 96, Section 97.*
- *The equivalent legislation for Northern Ireland is The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, Section 81 – Approval of courses leading to external qualifications.*

Some providers (especially charitable or not-for-profit organisations) accredit informal and non-formal learning outside the NVQ framework through programmes that, for example, develop employability skills. [Note inspection reports on Foyer, Rathbone, YMCA and NACRO on website]

Methods and services
Competences are validated in two steps. In the first phase, the qualifications of what the individual had already learned and the experience he had gained are identified. A personal educational plan is formulated from this information. This has no official status but can serve as a basic assumption for the second step: the formal accreditation of acquired competences (APL: Accreditation of Prior Learning) in the form of a diploma or certificate. Assessment takes place in four areas:
- *Authenticity*: the individual has done what he has written down
- *Directness*: the learning was relevant, specific, has been identified and categorised
- *Breadth*: the learning took place in a theoretical and professional broader context, and is understood by the individual
- '*Currency*' presence: the learning is still relevant at the present time.

Accessibility
The initiatives have been taken in the area of:
- Vocational education and training
- Adult and community learning

Accrediting bodies, regulatory bodies, awarding bodies, education and training providers, funding bodies (particularly Learning and Skills Council and ELWa).

Assessment may involve guidance and counselling. Training and education may also be necessary for an individual to achieve the qualification, but while this may take place in the same institutional context as the assessment, it is separate to the assessment.
There have been 3.3 million NVQs/SVQs to end of June 2001. However, it should be remembered that it is difficult to say what proportion of individuals achieving NVQs draw on skills developed in the context of non-formal and informal learning.

Civil effect

The NVQ system has provided an important contribution to the development of flexible learning in higher education and has improved the partnership between universities and employers. Through the approach, it is possible to respond more quickly to 'new' and knowledge-based markets. It has also promoted life-long learning.

The emphasis in the APL system lies on the conversion of informal learning to certified learning and has important potential in equalising lost ground among individuals who, through experience, have built up equivalent knowledge, experience and capacities to the higher educated.

Disadvantages include the emphasis on the higher (knowledge) diplomas and training programmes based on them, instead of the development of the individual and the proven competency to fulfil certain professions or tasks. Another disadvantage is that the emphasis lies on monitoring quality and (financial) efficiency. The system is becoming a mass production system, where the efficient processing of a large number of participants is more important than the development and flexible deployment of the individual.

Learning issues
- The creation of a heavily national refined qualification system should be avoided. Insufficient attention is devoted to the awareness, development and motivation of the individual in the group, company and society.
- The emphasis of the NVQ primarily lies on the effect on higher/theoretical education and the partnership often takes place between universities/colleges and large companies.
- The NVQ makes insufficient systematic links with modern methods in adult education, particularly constructivist learning and learning at the workplace.

13. Ireland

Ireland is an interesting country because it uses the English NVQ system as a basis, but due to the limitations and shortcomings of this system, puts the objectives into practice in its own way.

In Ireland, an increasing focus on standards and frameworks for qualification programmes has developed, which has led to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). RPL is seen as a model that offers people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to acquire accreditation for the skills and knowledge that they already possess (FAS).

Concepts

The most common concepts are APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) and APEL (Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning). Both concepts imply the accreditation of prior learned knowledge and skills measured against a national standard. It gives the opportunity to acquire (parts of) academic credits at an appropriate level, based on competences gained through work, leisure activities, services, etc.

The system and standards

There is still no clear system. Ireland recently started with a national approach. At a higher level, the policy is implemented by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in co-operation with the Departments of Education & Research, Entrepreneurship and Trade and Employment. 'The Further Education and Training Awards Council' (FETAC) and the 'Higher Education and Training Awards Council' (HETAC) also co-operate. But no results are known as yet. The universities will also be co-operating.

These institutions will further develop the tasks of the NQAI, FETAC and HETAC, established as a result of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?

The Qualifications Act, in which the policy is described in general terms, was drafted in 1990. The policy is determined by the 'National Qualifications Authority of Ireland' (NQAI).

The objective

The Qualifications Act describes as one of the three main objectives of the NQAI: "The promotion and facilitation of access, transfer, and progression." The frameworks for this must be set up by NQAI. NQAI will also provide for the formation, maintenance and promotion of the FETAC and HETAC standards.

Who implements the policy?

The FAS (Irish Training and Employment Authority) is the initiator and promoter of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the vocational education level. The FAS certifies the quality and level of skills. It does not certify. Personal and practical skills and knowledge are assessed.

The FAS represents only part of the certification field, and the experiences with RPL are limited. RPL offers the opportunity for assessment in an open and transparent process. The process consists of five steps:

1. Identification: What does the person know/what can the person do? What experience does he/she have?
2. Matching: The knowledge/experience of the individual to the necessary standard vocational competences.
3. Assessment: Measuring the individual's competences against the standards.
4. Accreditation: of the competences.
5. Documentation: The accredited competences, the need for training/education.

The FAS specialises in certifying vocational skills (no courses), granting accreditation at the module level (or even parts of the module) with criteria that are based on the activities in the work.

At a higher level, this is further developed by NQAI, FETAC and HETAC.

Procedural provisions

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999:
The functions of the HETAC and FETAC are described in the Act. One of the functions is 'to make or recognise higher/further education and training awards given or have achieved to persons who apply for those awards and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the standard determined by the Council...'. The Council can request support from an educational or training institution. This offers the opportunity for a legitimate foundation for the provision in an APL system and an equivalent at the national level.

In the Act, a learner is described as 'a person who is acquiring or who has acquired knowledge, skill or competence'. Education and training are described as 'any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence and includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment...'.
Both definitions now offer the opportunity for a broader interpretation of learning and places to learn and offer the opportunity for accreditation of non-formal and informal learning.

Another function of the Councils is the validation of programmes from various providers, such as work-based training and e-learning. They will provide for the accreditation of work-based learning.

Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, 2000:
This White Paper accredits the role of social learning and learning at work and describes procedures to accredit formal and informal learning in this context. One of the three underlying principles for adult education is a systematic approach in which educational policy and the life cycle are included, and that learning can take place at various locations, both formal and informal. To stimulate learning, the policy should also ensure that adult education can take place by providing support, advice, day care and mechanisms to join the learning process.
Much of the policy and the recommendations have not yet been implemented.

Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, 2000
This is the national agreement between the social partners. The section on life-long learning states that one of the objectives is: 'to promote the quality, responsiveness and relevance of the education and training system, both formal and non-formal, in meeting personal, social and economic needs, and in promoting citizenship, social inclusion and community advancement'.
A key activity in the programme is providing mechanisms for accrediting work-based learning and Prior Learning.

The Strategy Statement 2001-2004 of the Department of Education and Science states that measures must be taken for special learning needs: 'Promote flexible entry, transfer

and progression, delivery and accreditation arrangements at further and higher education levels under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and provide mechanisms for the accreditation of prior learning and work-based learning'.

Methodology
A number of examples of the Irish approach include:

Skillnets
One example is Skillnets, an approach that is set up around the existing Training Networks, where companies in groups/sectors determine the type of training they would like to have, how to perform the training and who will provide the training. They develop courses, core competences and accredited training programmes that are relevant for the individual sector. The approach varies between a fully accredited course with accompanying certification and the regular accreditation of prior learning.
Half of the Skillnets co-operate with the FETAC and participants receive the same certification as those who pursue a formal school career.
Ireland currently has 58 networks with a total of 10,686 trainees.

APL for the construction sector
The FETAC, in co-operation with the National Training body, the Construction Industry Training Committee and specialists from the various professional groups, certify and offer new employees and employees who have already reached a certain level of skill and experience the opportunity to participate in training and assessment programmes that lead to formal certification and registration. More than 3,000 registration cards have already been distributed.

Accessibility
In its RPL, FAS provides access to individuals of all ages, backgrounds and position. The basic assumption is the competences necessary for work in the companies.
The HETAC and FETAC operate from the educational system and emphasise entry to the formal learning system. Their emphasis lies on accreditation of the courses or entry to the courses/training programmes.

Quality
The FAS system is set up in modular form. It offers the opportunity for full or partial credits. The focus is on skills and profession and is therefore well linked to practice. The system is also based on the industry and offers a good link for employment. Since the candidate is the focal point, quality is continually evaluated at the customer level.

Civil effect
The FAS offers a certification of skills (and not of courses) and intends to deploy this in all sectors. There are still a limited number of sectors, and the RPL has restricted itself to incidental accreditation procedures. A national approach is under development.

Responsibilities

The validation has been performed by the NCEA National Council for Educational Awards) and the NCVA (National Council for Vocational Awards). The task of the NCVA is to develop an assessment and certification system for secondary vocational education.

The TEASTAS (Irish National Certification Authority) advises the government on setting up an integrated certification system for the entire education and training, with the exception of university education.

The following have been established since 1999:

- NQAI (National Qualifications Authority for Ireland)
- FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council)
- HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council)

Once these organisations are set up and function, they will take over the task of NCVA, NCEA and TEASTAS.

Comments

- Like the UK, the APL, APEL, RPL are enforced from above. In implementation, there is a strong emphasis on the system and the responsibilities in the system, on what has already been acquired in a formal school career and on the transferability in the learning system.
- The validation of already available knowledge, skills or competences has not yet been provided.
- Programmes from other providers of courses/training programmes (commercial) are not accredited unless they can guarantee that there are alternative places in the mainstream system, there are sufficient reserves or are sufficiently guaranteed. It appears as if risky innovations will not/cannot be assessed, which will limit innovations in the system.
- RPL is primarily seen as 'Taking Credit' and less as an instrument for developing the individual.

E. Mix model

14. France

In a number of respects, France can be described as one of the most advanced European countries in documentation, assessment and accreditation of non-formal learning processes. The first French initiatives were already developed in 1985, with the introduction of the Bilan de Compétence system (an overview with results achieved). Afterwards, the number of statutory regulations only increased. With this enormous flight of developments in VPL, the system also became very non-transparent and inflexible. This chapter will attempt to make the system easier to understand.

Concepts
Bilan de Compétence: The 1991 act offers individuals the opportunity to document their competences in a balance sheet and receive career counselling. The balance sheet was created as an instrument to reduce the numbers of the unemployed. But the balance sheet is not the same as a certificate. The balance sheet only focuses on the recognition of the competences.

The *Valorisation des Acquis de L' Experience* (VAE) act focuses on accrediting the competences. The VAE was created from the Validation des Acquis Professionnels (VAP) act. The VAP enables individuals to have their professional competences validated and then to enter the process of a suitable training programme and examination resulting in a diploma. The VAE is now available for all individuals who have acquired the competences within the profession, but also beyond. Only the medical university professions are not accessible through this approach.

The objective
The objective of the Bilan is to help the employer/employee in documenting and assessing professional skills, both with a view to career development and deploying the skills within the company. In other words: to offer the individual optimal development opportunities and stimulate personnel policy. Using the Bilan, individuals can be deployed in the labour market with more flexibility while stimulating the development of competences.

The objective of the VAP was to increase the qualification level of the vocational population and to reduce education expenditures. Another objective of the VAE was to shorten the training period to make education more accessible.

The system and standards
The national governments in France play an important role, and the opportunities to recognise and accredit competences in France are therefore legally arranged and described as rights. The VPL system in the form of the VAP has its origins in the demand to provide individuals without a diploma access to the universities. The origin lies here, since France is one of the countries within Europe that strongly focuses on diplomas. The system was later expanded with vocational education and technical education. Through VAE, both job seekers and employees can pursue an VPL procedure with three years' work experience. The French government encourages high school dropouts to make use of the Bilan.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
The French government initiated the VPL policy through rights and laws. The VAE and the Bilan are prime examples of this. Aside from the government, social partners also play an important role in France. They have their own diplomas, in addition to the diplomas from mainstream education. They are partly responsible for establishing the French national

system of vocational education for skills acquired outside the official institutions through VAP and later the VAE. Since 1992, various levels of diplomas in vocational training (Certificat d'aptitude professionelle) can be acquired based on assessments of prior, non-formal experiences. The French Chambers of Commerce and Industry took an important initiative with the objective of setting up procedures and norms for assessment, separate from the established education and training system. The European EN45013 norm on procedures for issuing diplomas to personnel served as the basic assumption and the experiences gained with this have provided important information.

Who implements the policy?
The certificates are issued by a number of different institutions, i.e.:

- The national Ministry of Education can make the CAP/BTS possible by approving someone's prior learning competences;
- The Ministries of Agriculture and Food, Youth and Sport, Health and Social Affairs, Employment and Solidarity can also issue certificates;
- Universities can offer a procedure that can lead to access to education;
- The sectors can issue the Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle. These certificates were initially created by and for the sectors. Later, they were legally accredited by officially offering the opportunity to the business branches to define professional qualifications;
- At the present time, there are also experiments with the CCP, Certificat de Competences Professionnelles. These are issued by the Ministry of Employment;
- There are also the Certificats de Competences en Entreprise, which are issued by the Chambers of Commerce.

The various institutions should register the standards with le Commission National de Certification Professionnelle (CNCP).

Procedural provisions, methods and services
The competency balance sheets are set up by the public CIBCs, Centres de Bilan de Competences, or private centres. There must be at least one CIBC in each French department.

Accessibility
The Balance procedure takes place on a completely voluntary basis. While the (competency) balance request can be made by an employer, the employee can never be forced. The employee has the right to refuse. Moreover, personal integrity is paramount. Employees may not be misled and have the right to proper information. The employee does not have to keep the employer informed about the balance procedure.

Quality
The jury, which is accredited with the VAP procedure, must be composed according to certain rules. For example, the members may not have a hierarchic or functional

relationship with the candidate. They are also appointed by headmasters of academies or by chairmen of universities.

The fact that employees must acquire perspective with the balance procedure is seen in a number of aspects. For example, the balance procedure does not stand by itself. The employee can then enter a professional process. Using 'Rome' (job profiles and qualifications), the realistic chances on the labour market can also be examined. Professional supervisors must also be available. They need to be employed with professionally accredited institutions that satisfy certain quality criteria. The accredited centres are the CIBCs. It is striking that use can also be made of the non-accredited centres, which are private institutions. They do not have to meet the standard.

Civil effect

The system is experienced as positive when it comes to the assessment of experiential learning. The sectoral certification through the CQP is the certification that takes the changes on the labour market most into account, but is also the certification that is separate from national educational programmes.

Responsibilities

The responsibility lies with the individual, whether it involves the request for a Bilan procedure, a VAE procedure or a CQP.

Comments

The system still emphasises certification for the higher educational level, which is where the origin of the VAP lies.

15. Belgium

Belgium uses the same concepts for VPL as the Netherlands. There is a need for a new approach to assess and certify the learned matter (formal and informal). The accreditation of skills, knowledge and experience an individual possesses (not only the formal competences) offer future opportunities for people whose school career was less successful. VPL means accreditation of learning experiences that are acquired at work and may be an important incentive for intrinsic motivation of individuals to be open to new experiences and to learn more permanently (primarily with respect to professional mobility).

It can be a means to improve the formal low vocational level of the older population and to show the rich experiences of this group. It also offers prospects for job seekers who participate in 'activating measures for work experience' as well as for newcomers who can make their diplomas and/or their work experience visible and accredited abroad.

The objective

The basic assumption for VPL in Belgium is life-long learning.

The certification and accreditation of skills acquired elsewhere offer numerous prospects:

- It can optimise existing programmes and offer more tailor-made work. By examining the skills already acquired by the individual, programmes can be shortened and adjusted to the individual and therefore lead to better and more efficient training expenditures. This can also result in more focused expenditures of (government) resources.
- It can encourage the individual to start new learning experiences. Employees can improve their opportunities on the labour market by making their knowledge and skills visible through a portfolio.
- It can be integrated in individual career planning since it offers the opportunity to verify whether certain skills are sufficiently developed and whether an expansion of the portfolio is possible.

- It can be used as an instrument of HRM policy in companies, offering the opportunity to recruit people based on their skills and place them in positions that fully utilise their capacities. It is a clear instrument for companies to illustrate that the portfolios of individual employees are developed and adjusted gradually.

The system and standards
Flanders has opted for a divided bottom up model. The government would like to obtain an VPL policy from the practices that are initiated by the government.
It is postulated that the assessment and accreditation for skills that have been acquired elsewhere require a standard that includes knowledge, skills and experience.
There is an explicit desire to learn from the standards from other countries in order to be able to mould the good elements of those standards into a new Belgian concept.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
In Belgium, the policy is formed by the government, the Ministry of Employment and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Environment and Media, the Flemish SER (Socio-Economic Council) and the VLOR (the Flemish Education Council). The policy is designed from the Life-long learning in good jobs action plan of July 2000. The intention is to develop a recognition and accreditation system that satisfies stringent quality requirements. The instruments and service must also satisfy stringent quality criteria. In addition to the formal accreditation, economic and social accreditation are desired as well.

The action plan and the creation of a working group led to the document, ' *Ruim baan voor competenties, Advies voor een model van (h)erkenning van verworven competenties in Vlaanderen: beleidsconcept en aanzetten tot operationalisering'* [Make way for competences, Advice for a model of recognition and accreditation of competences acquired in Flanders: policy concept and impulse to operationalisation], that is endorsed by the various participants. The advice also formulates recommendations, one of which is that concrete pilot projects and initiatives must give shape to VPL. Since January 2003, five projects that take optimal consideration of the principles from the advisory report have been started.

The pilot projects focus on the following target groups: the public and private care sector, the secondary teacher training course and access to teaching, naturalisation of newcomers and old comers, professionalisation of the tourist sector in particular the profession of tour leader and guides and around the target groups of low educated, youth without starting qualifications and high school drop-outs.

The projects are started up and co-ordinated from the VPL project group. The project group works on monitoring and evaluating the projects, studies how quality assurance and supervision can best be given shape. It supervises the minimum basic principles for which each VPL procedure must satisfy and provides consultation between the different actors to realise exchange of methods and a joint framework of concepts. Based on the pilot projects, the project group will reach a final evaluation, for which the policy can be given shape from the government.

The GENT 5 agreement of 2000 between the Dutch Ministry of Education and the Flemish Department of Education explicitly mentions the need of information exchange for the identification, assessment and validation of non-formal learning. Co-operation and co-ordination can operate better through mutual learning.

Developments and future prospects
The VDAB (the Flemish Agency of Employment) is currently setting up a network of so-called competency centres. These centres will be set up in co-operation with Education, the VIZO (Flemish Institute for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses), the sectors and social partners. The most important objectives are supervision, training and certification. The target groups are the unemployed, employees and employers. There are plans to accept a procedure of accreditation/certification of non-formal learning in the supervisory activities.
This accreditation of non-formal learning is based on the competences that are described in COBRA (see appendix 5) – the Flemish version of the French ROME – and based on professional profiles. There are plans to use Cobra for people who have lived in the country illegally for years, and who were legalised last year. A new Decree for the universities is in preparation, in which shorter programmes based on non-academic competences will be possible. The university administration can exempt or provide shorter programmes based on non-formal learning and experiences acquired elsewhere or based on relevant work experience. The universities will be forced to develop their own rules and will be monitored by an independent committee.

16. The Netherlands

Context

The recognition of informally acquired skills (EVC) is intended to recognise and to value what people have in the way of visible and invisible skills. EVC is not designed to highlight the lack of knowledge and skills but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing knowledge and skills: in other words, rather than being half empty, EVC takes the view that the glass is half full!

During the early 1990s, the Dutch government felt that regular education should be made more accessible for adults. This led in 1993 to the establishment of the Commission on the 'Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills'.

The Commission published its report 'Recognising Informal Skills' in March 1994. This marked the launch of EVK: the recognition of informally acquired skills, and emphasised the need to increase accessibility to education traditionally based on formal qualifications or the award of certificates.

The Cabinet responded positively to the report. It accepted that EVK could make a useful contribution to the functioning of the labour and training markets, especially for individuals. The implementation of the scheme had to tie in with existing structures and the stakeholders had to pay the implementing costs. The Cabinet agreed to provide a set of instruments to assist EVK, including the necessary development funding.

The various stakeholders now actively got down to work. Schools, national professional education institutions, employment agencies, educational advisory bureaus, companies and other players began to work on the elaboration of EVK, either alone or in partnership.

This work was resumed following the unveiling of the national action programme of the first liberal-socialist coalition government in 1998. The programme states, among other things, that: "More should be done to ensure that the workplace is used as a centre of learning. The experience gained should be made visible as informally acquired skills and qualifications. The Cabinet wants to assist this by setting up a system in which informally acquired knowledge and experience, that is, knowledge and experience gained outside the formal education system, can be tested and recognised."

Finally, the STAR (committee of social partners) recommendations "Lifelong learning at work" (June 1998) made an important contribution to the further elaboration of the concept of lifelong learning.

In setting up the Kenniscentrum EVC (Knwoledge centre VPL) in 2001, the Dutch government's intention was to promote the application of the EVC system in the Netherlands. The Kenniscentrum EVC is a project by Cinop, Stoas and Citogroep.
The ministries of Economic Affairs; Education, Culture & Science and Social Affairs & Employment finance this knowledge centre for a period of four years (2001-2004).

The initiative also enjoys the support of the social partners and educational umbrella organisations.

The Kenniscentrum EVC operates largely on the basis of co-operation between various network partners. It has therefore consciously opted for a minimal staff complement. The Kenniscentrum EVC employs one full-time co-ordinator and three part-time assistants, responsible for documentation, communication and administration. In addition, one senior researcher/consultant and two senior consultants each work one day a week at the Kenniscentrum EVC.

The Kenniscentrum EVC studies, accumulates and distributes information on every imaginable aspect of EVC, such as national and international information pertaining to EVC projects, procedures, instruments, financing, yield and legislation. Incidental bottlenecks in the sphere of legislation and regulations are surveyed and discussed with the responsible authorities.

Research is carried out into the standard setting (= the yardstick for the definition and recognition of competencies), the civil status (= certification) for various parties and the level of accessibility of EVC provisions. Other activities include research into the various parties' interests in EVC, the profitability of EVC, the significance of EVC in the field of mediation and reintegration, into various assessment methods and validity, and the preconditions for the application of EVC in the small and medium-sized business sector. The centre commissions third parties to execute these projects and carry out further research.

Concepts

There are a number of basic principles underlying EVC:

• EVC recognises the fact that learning on the job or via other non-formal learning situations (learning through practical experience) can in principle deliver the same (professional) skills and qualifications as learning within formal (classroom-based) situations.

• Recognition means awarding certificates or diplomas on the basis of a generally recognised standard, such as the qualification structure for professional education. Obviously there are also other standards relating to the labour market which employers and employees regard as relevant. External legitimacy is the key requirement for recognition.

• EVC is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within companies. It is an important means for realising permanent labour market suitability and deployment potential.

• For people already in employment, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, EVC acts as a reliable yardstick for determining which skills and qualifications the individual employee already has. Based on this inventory, a tailor-made training or development path is formulated.

- Rational investment in training by companies and by society as a whole assumes an understanding of existing skills and qualifications, or the stock of skills and qualifications in the company, respectively. EVC procedures make it possible to identify existing skills and qualifications in order to be able to come to a decision about the investments needed in training.
- EVC procedures make it possible to visualise the profitability of training by expressing the results of training efforts in terms of a general standard. As when calculating the value of other economic production factors, the identification of the value of skills and qualifications assumes a common and reliable standard in which this value is expressed.
- The provision of flexible or customised training courses assumes that we can gauge a person's existing skills level. EVC can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.
- The EVC assessment is designed to assess professional activities. The assessment results provide valuable feedback on the content and methods of the formal learning paths. The training courses are given direct information about the degree to which they succeed in adequately preparing their students for professional practice. This effect is strengthened by the fact that a distinction is made between training and assessment.

The system and standards
EVC is a procedure for the formal recognition of learning through non- and in-formal processes.

The objective
The desired effects of EVC are as follows:
- To improve deployability: improved deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying EVC. It increases the opportunities open to the individual on the labour market by highlighting the skills he or she already has and how those skills can be used and strengthened. This can apply both to those already in employment and to job-seekers. For employers, the emphasis lies on improving the deployability of employees within the company.
- To create a demand-led labour market: improving the match between education and the labour market is essential for the organisation of EVC. In order to improve deployability, labour market functions must be expressed in terms of skills. These skills must in turn be linked to a demand for learning. The education infrastructure must be transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required.
- To make learning more flexible: the recognition of informally acquired skills will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the additional skills could lead directly to the award of certificates or exemption from diplomas. The recognition approach can also make visible or recognisable existing skills and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The customer, i.e. the student, will

not only want to learn independently of the preliminary training circuit but will also know better than now how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.
• To optimise other forms of learning: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since EVC also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. The recognition of skills and qualifications will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification structure in professional education. The existing description of exit qualifications in the current qualification structure for professional education does not always tie in with the skills required on the labour market.

Who makes the policy? Responsibilities
In its autumn debate on 3 December 1998, the Cabinet urged the social partners to jointly implement a series of measures and activities aimed at boosting the employability of the working population. The term 'employability' in this context is defined as 'obtaining and retaining employment'.

One of these activities was the development of the system for the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills and Qualifications (EVC) through pilot projects carried out in companies and branches. At the beginning of 1999, the Minister of Economic Affairs appointed a broadly based working party to address this issue.

The working party was chaired by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and included representatives of the social partners (VNO/NCW Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employer, MKB Nederland (the national association of small and medium-sized enterprises), the FNV and CNV trade union confederations and the Ministries of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fisheries, of Education, Culture and Sciences, and of Social Affairs and Employment.

The working party determined that EVC should not be used to highlight gaps in knowledge and skills. The opposite is in fact the case: EVC must build further on existing knowledge and skills. The scheme therefore uses the motto The Glass is Half Full! EVC shows that individual skills levels are in fact high already and suggests how they can be further enhanced. It is therefore not a goal in itself, but contributes to the development of individuals and the improvement of the human capital management of organisations and companies.

The government and social partners are responsible for EVC on national level ('poldermodel' or consensus-model). The social partners are responsible for the sectoral level.
It is a co-ordinated action involving several ministries and/or other actors. It is co-ordinated by means of the national employability-agenda.

Initiatives on validation of non-formal and informal learning have been taken in the following areas:
- Vocational education & training
- Higher education
- Guidance and career-counselling
- Central Labour Agreements of social partners
- Training-policies of government and social partners
- Labour-agencies
- Tax law system

Who implements the policy?

The following partners and stakeholders are involved by implementing the policy:
- The Government
- VNO/NCW and MKB-NL are the major national employers organisations
- FNV and CNV are the major national trade unions
- Bve Raad is the national association for secondary vocational education
- HBO-raad is the national association for higher vocational education
- Colo is the umbrella organisation of 21 national bodies for vocational education. As the interest group for and of the national bodies, Colo carefully monitors relevant social developments and the education and labour market policy of government
- CWI is the national labour agency

All parties are involved (in advisory board and advisory committee) in the Kenniscentrum EVC: a publicly funded knowledge centre for the validation of non-formal learning.
All parties have their own responsibilities in initiating and implementing EVC-policy in their own 'back-yard' and describe their progress in implementing a policy (policies) on validation of non-formal and informal learning in your country (if possible in terms of stages, input of resources, etc.).
The Netherlands is now in the process of disseminating the national policy and vision from the macro-level to the meso-level, i.e. the level of sectors and branches and regions. This step is co-ordinated by the Kenniscentrum EVC.

Comments

Given the major advantages that EVC offers employers, employees, educators, government and intermediaries, its practical implementation could be carried out much more swiftly than is currently being done. Various sectors of trade and industry both in the Netherlands and abroad have already set countless practical examples. What is still missing, however, is an exhaustive overview of the existing possibilities. Furthermore, the parties involved make insufficient use of each another's experience.

F. Eastern European model

17. Bulgaria

Concepts
The definition of non-formal and informal education was defined in the book published by the NIE – "Lifelong learning – definitions, dimensions, strategies", 2002.
Usually in Bulgaria non-formal education means all kinds of education outside the formal system. The informal education is understanding education as provided through seminars, hobby groups, conferences, etc.

A clear and approved definition will be specified in the future after the final upgrading of the legal system concerning education – it is now in the process of upgrading – and the development and approval of the strategies for Education for all and Lifelong learning.
There is a process going on of upgrading VET and continued training in Bulgaria.

Non-formal education is any organized and sustained educational activities that does not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education (the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitute a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education for children and young people, generally beginning at age five to seven and continuing up to 20-25 years old). Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions and serve persons of all ages. In this are included continued vocational training and non-formal general education.

Informal learning focuses on events that occur in the family, in the work place and in the daily life of every person, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially directed basis.

The objective
According to the data of the Labour Force Survey the major characteristics of the employed (2000) are as follows:
• Profile by gender: the structure of the employed in the country does not differ significantly from the one reported in overall for the EU member countries – predominates the relative share of men – 53.2%. The relative share of women is lower by 6.4 points.
• Profile by age: observed is relatively unfavourable distribution within the age profile of the workforce in the country. The highest relative share is that of the age groups of 35-44 years and 45-54 years (29.3% and 28.6% respectively). The relative share of the young people up to the age of 24 years is 10.3%. The highest is the share of the workers of the group 35-44 years (30.4%), and lowest of the persons from the group 55-64 years (6.8%) and above 65 years (0.9%).
• Profile by education: within the educational profile of the employed predominate the persons with secondary education – 56.8% (including: secondary specialized – 22.9%,

secondary vocational-technical – 12.8%, secondary general – 21.0%) The persons with higher education account for 23.0% and these with basic and lower – for 20.2% of the total number of the employed.

Data about unemployment in the country are available from the administrative statistics of the NES and the Labour Force Survey of the NSI. Although these two sources use the same indicators, they are not identical but complementing each other.
The National Employment Service reports the number of persons in active age registered at the Labour Offices, who declare that they are unemployed, that they are active bob-seekers and are available to start an appropriate job or to be enrolled in a course for vocational qualification.

According to the data from the administrative statistics of the National Employment Service, the key characteristics of the job seekers are as follows:
• Profile by gender: The relative share of women is continuously higher than that of men in the general totality of the registered unemployed. The proportion women : men is 52.7:47.3.
• Profile by age: Observed is an unfavourable tendency of highest share of young people up to the age of 24 years and persons aged over 50 years (16.5% and 18.9% respectively). predominate the persons with basic and lower education (55.0%). The persons with higher education are more demanded on the labour market. Their share in the overall totality of the registered unemployed is 6.5%.
• Profile by duration of registration: The highest is the share of the long-term unemployed (37.1%), and the lowest – of those registered for less than 1 month (7.6%). The problem with the long-term unemployed is one of the most acute ones in the country.

As a result of the inherited structure of the regional economies and the progress of reforms in the country major differences are observed between the individual regions with regard to the demand and supply of labour force.

Objectives

Basic objectives:
• Up-keeping the qualification of the labour force in line with the needs;
• Guaranteeing gender equality in relation to employment;
• Further decentralization/regionalization and social partnership in the initiatives for human resources development;
• Up-to date organization of work;
• Strengthening the administrative capacity on national and regional level for putting into effect the human resources development policy, as well as provision of employment and better conditions for work and life.

Specific objectives:
- To reduce the number and, respectively, the relative share of unemployed young people up to the age of 29 to 25% of the total number of registered unemployed;
- Provision of opportunity to those young people who drop out from the educational system to acquire respective level of education and of appropriate vocational training with view of their future employment.
- Ensure reduction of the number of long-term unemployed for more than 1 year by 6%, and of those above the age of 45 years – by 5%. In pursuit of this objective to provide training for additional qualification, for re-qualification or for development of a small business and entrepreneurship to 5% of the registered unemployed with period of the unemployment exceeding 1 year;
- Generating possibilities for upgrading the labour force quality and competence through enhancing the knowledge and developing skills, by means of additional qualification and consolidation/upgrading of the existing one with experience being gained immediately on the job through a period of employment or practice.

How is the policy formed and who determines it?
The process of upgrading of legislation basis is taking place now. The outcome is uncertain.

The main responsible institutions are:
- According to Art. 51 of that Act, the Ministry of Education and Science implements the state policy in the field of vocational education and training.
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is involved in pursuing that policy by identifying the needs for vocational education and training, takes part in the development, co-ordination and updating of the State education requirements (SER) for acquiring qualification in vocations, participated in the co-ordination of the List of Vocations for vocational education and training (Art. 52).
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy elaborates, co-ordinates and carries out the state policy for insurance against unemployment, promotion of the employment, vocational qualification and re-qualification of employed and unemployed and provides the protection of the national labour market. Basic principle in the work of the ministry in the process of elaboration and implementation of the employment policy is the partnership with the institutions and the non-government organizations.

A major fundamental mechanism of implementation of the state policy with regard to the labour market is the principle of social partnership, including of the tripartite principle. VETA states the functions of the ministries, municipalities and social partners with regard to vocational education and training.

Concepts
Framework of the programme of adult education
National action plan for employment for 2002

Continuing vocational training concept paper
National action plan "education for all

Legislation acts
Labour code; Public Education Act; Vocational Education and Training Act; Higher Education Act; Unemployment Protection and Employment Promotion Act; Commerce Act; Persons and Family Act; Tax legislation; Regional Development and Public Works Act.

Social partnership organization
In the new conditions of building a knowledge-based society and economy social partnership fulfils the following tasks with regard to:

- Consolidation of the efforts and resources for achieving high quality and social effect from education and training;
- Participation in and assisting, following the social dialogue and the respect for others' interests principle, the process of elaboration and implementation of the state policy in the field of education and training;
- Assisting the identification of the main trends and priority tasks at a national, regional and local level;
- Provision of a concrete current information concerning the needs of employees;
- Development of social dialogue forms, streamlining of collective bargaining forms and imposing collective bargaining agreements as a perfect form for achieving one-way actions aimed at improving the level of vocational qualification of labour force as a means for increasing productivity and incomes;
- Ensuring the implementation of the Vocational Qualification section in collective bargaining agreements and in the accompanying plan; monitoring, steering and correction, if necessary, of actions;
- Analysis of quality of education and training and as a result from that – labour force quality and social partnership quality in that field; launching suggestions and measures for improving organisation and management.

Who implements the policy?
The main responsible institution is MES – NAVET.
State education requirements and vocational standards assist the implementation of the policy in the field of training, qualification, and re-qualification of personnel. They have different aims, one of them being to provide a reliable foundation for the evaluation of achievements based on vocational competence assessment and quality assurance.

The Ministry of Health identifies the chronic diseases and physical handicaps counter-indicative for certain types of vocational education and training, identifies the requirements for healthy conditions in the practical vocational training (Art. 53).

The line ministries and the municipalities (Art. 54 and 55), in compliance with the specificity and the scope of their functions, participate in the development of the policy in

the field of vocational education and training and in the co-ordination of State Admission Plan. They allocate the funds approved in their budgets for the purposes of vocational education and training and control their spending.

The employers' organisations, the workers' and employees' organisations and the branch trade unions are partners with ever growing role in the process of linking continuing vocational education and training to labour market needs. They take part in identifying the learning content, in the development of the standards for acquiring qualification in the different vocations, in the different stages of examining the achievements of the trainees and in the certification at the exit of training (Art. 56, 57, 58).

Vocational schools, secondary schools, colleges and vocational training centres deliver continuing vocational training as well upon request of physical or legal entities. Six Train the Trainers centres – in the field of modern pedagogic technologies and foreign languages training – have been set up and successfully function within the system of vocational education and training (VET).

The national, branch and regional structures for social partnership regularly include in their working plans topics related to VPL as precondition for a constant maintenance and improving employability and, on this basis – for unemployment reduction and for overcoming its consequences.

Committees specialised in vocational qualification are set up at a company level and comprising representatives of employees. They are aimed at assisting the elaboration of collective bargaining agreements and the protection of the interests of employees for acquiring and maintaining an appropriate vocational qualification.

Quality is ensured by means of:
• Introduction by NAVET of standards for acquiring qualification in vocations
• The main measure for VET quality is the national standard for acquiring qualification in vocations. It is determined on the basis of the vocation profile, which, on the other hand, results from the analysis of labour activity in the particular vocational area and its decomposition to the level of a vocation. The structure of a standard allows taking into account changes emerging in the content and scope of a vocation, new requirements to the individual capabilities and key competence needed for the successful exercising of the vocation.

The standard includes requirements towards learning content and results assessment:
• Clearly defined training objectives presented as expected final results;
• Certain levels of qualification (in compliance with VETA) that might be gained as a result of training. Standards allow the successive acquisition of the levels of vocational qualification. Their gaining might take place within the VET system, in the form of training without a time-out or on-the-job training, individually or by means of courses

in vocational schools or in other training institutions. This opportunity serves as a proof for the guaranteed access to VPL to all willing to undergo training depending on their abilities, needs and in different periods of their vocational development;

- List of modules for vocational training with their values (expressed in number of credits); type of modules – obligatory and optional;
- Grouping of modules for acquiring a qualification level as defined by the respective standard;
- Description of modules, identification of a general objective and sub-objectives;
- System for assessing the achievements of trainees.

Learning content determines the level of correspondence between training and new technologies, vocational competence needed by the labour market and combined with personal qualities and key skills: team working, solving of problem situations, skills for knowledge transfer in new situations, economic culture, innovative thinking and skills for business communication, computer literacy and foreign languages command.

The development of new learning content should follow the principles of continuity between broad vocational training and further specialisation; succession and continuity between theory and practice; unity of objective, content and organisation forms.

Requirements towards the qualification of trainers
The training and the upgrading of qualification of teachers for the VET system in Bulgaria is carried out in the system of formal and non-formal education. Colleges, universities and alternative university education offer an education level and qualification of a teacher. Non-formal education is delivered as a in-school qualification, in centres for upgrading teachers' qualification, under international programmes and projects (PHARE, TEMPUS), by companies, associations, syndicates, federations and by means of self-education. A major part of teachers in the VET system act as trainers in qualification activities as well, that are conducted in vocational schools upon requests of physical and legal entities, in enterprises, and also in courses for vocational training delivered by different training institutions. A wide range of engineers, economists, software experts, agronomists and other experts also work as VPL trainers.

Dynamically changing requirements towards trainers demand both a permanent updating of their specialised and methodological knowledge and new training that is directly or indirectly related to core skills.

One of the components of the state policy is to guarantee the right of every trainer and trainee to upgrade his/her qualification. A change in the social and professional status of pedagogic staff is needed in order to provide the system with high-quality trainers. Changes should cover the quality of their basic education, their motivation for a constant qualification upgrading and tying of their payment to the quality of their labour.

The efforts for quality assurance should be directed towards:
- Improvement of the quality of training institutions – quality must be guaranteed by means of improving the activities of training providers; of norms and standards defining the requirements towards learning content, evaluation tools and certification; of adequacy of training institutions, trainers and trainees.
- Assessment of achievements (training outcomes) – by means of the respective methodology for vocational competence evaluation shown by trainees. In this case one should distinguish between the competence shown by trainees and the content of training programmes.

Comment

Vocational education and training works on:

- Ensuring the right of citizens to vocational education and training according to their personal interests and abilities. Satisfying the demand for skilled labour competitive on the labour market. Providing conditions for the functioning and development of the vocational education and training system based on co-operation between its institutions, the executive power and local government, and the social partners.
- Training for the acquisition of vocational qualification can be provided by ministries, municipalities, workers' and employers' organisations and individual employers. The acquisition of vocational qualification can be carried out on the basis of individual tuition.

Persons trained in the mode as set up can obtain the documents providing they have not less than 6 months of working experience in the vocation or have attended practical training the duration of which is determined by the training institution. In order to obtain a document it is required to have the completed education or completed grade that are necessary for acquiring the respective vocational qualification level.

The programmes addressed to persons who are 16 years of age and older shall be:
- Programmes for persons who have completed at least 6th grade, with duration of up to 1 year;
- Programmes for persons who have completed a grade from secondary education or secondary education, with duration of 1 year;
- Programmes for persons who have completed secondary education, with duration of up to 2 years;
- Programmes with a duration determined by the specific vocational training documentation;
- Programmes with a duration determined by the specific vocational training documentation.

The vocational training centres and vocational information and career guidance centres shall be state-run, municipal or private, Bulgarian with foreign participation and foreign. The state-run and municipal centres shall be legal entities holding a license to provide

vocational training or career guidance. The private centres shall be sole trader companies or legal entities set up as as commercial companies, co-operatives, partnerships or foundations holding a license to provide vocational training or career guidance. The foreign vocational training centres and vocational information and career guidance centres shall be foreign legal entities that act in the Republic of Bulgaria pursuant to international agreements and that hold a license to provide vocational training or career guidance. The license to provide vocational training or career guidance shall be issued by the National Vocational Education and Training Agency. The documents required by the Enabling Regulations of the National Vocational Education and Training Agency shall be attached to the application by which license is requested.

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Vocational education and training shall be provided for persons with special education needs according to programmes adapted to their health condition or social status

The National Vocational Education and Training Agency
The National Vocational Education and Training Agency shall be a state body for accreditation and licensing of activities in the vocational education and training system and also for co-ordination of institutions involved in career guidance and in vocational education and training. It aims to:
• Develop and approve criteria for accreditation in compliance with this Act and with the State education requirements;
• Issue and withdraw licences for provision of vocational training and/or career guidance;
• Contribute to the international recognition of the vocational education and vocational training certificates;
• Generate and maintain a register of the vocational training centres and the vocational information and career guidance centres.

The Labour Code covers the general norms for vocational training in the sense of initial vocational training (IVT) of persons in working age. The Labour Code provides mainly for the training of employed by employers or on an individual basis. In these cases training is conducted on the basis of an agreement between an employer and an employee resulting in the concluding of a respective contract.

Different kinds of contracts might be concluded that are dependent on the type of training and the particular conditions:
• Contract for acquiring a qualification;
• Contract for qualification upgrading and for re-qualification.

Other institutions that offer and/or conduct training outside the system of MES and MLSP are:
• Company centres for vocational qualification of their own personnel;
• Branch chambers;

- Syndicate organisations;
- Non-profit organisations, governmental and non-governmental;
- Private, co-operative and other centres, schools for training adults.

These institutions may carry out training, only after being licensed and having met certain legal requirements.

The diversity and specificity of training curricula in the context of life-long learning and the opportunity "to be a bridge, not a barrier" for the training and qualification of people include curricula for:
- training that assists personal growth (intellectual skills);
- training that assists vocational development (practical skills);
- training that assists the development of value system of individuals, of their perception of the outer world (evaluation skills training that assists the active participation of personality in the social and labour life of the community it belongs to);
- training that assists the development of the decision-making abilities of personality and its active involvement in the democratic processes by means of participation in the activities of political institutions;
- training that assists the provision of a "second chance" to individuals;
- training that assists people belonging to the "third age";
- module training;
- training for work in SMEs in branches that are in a recession;
- foreign language training;
- training related to the development of ICT – secondary literacy, Internet, exchange and dissemination of information;
- training that assists the improvement of learning culture;
- training related to environmental awareness – safe-guarding and correct utilisation of energy resources, etc.;
- studying the peculiarities and the character of relations among persons and between personality and society;
- studying the characteristic features of state system, structures and the functioning of state institutions, legislation related to the observance of human rights and freedoms;
- management and business training – organisation and management of enterprises and companies, elaboration and implementation of business plans, etc.;
- studying the peculiarities and characteristics of the development of local and regional units – utilisation of local resources, local and regional planning, networks for co-operation and interaction, regional development, etc.;
- training for participation in the management of civil society – how to organise and manage a local community, participation in a regional management, etc.

3 Validation in France: VAE in progress

Anne-Marie Charraud

France has one of the most advanced systems for the validation of prior learning in Europe, even practised on the level of higher education. Especially in the field of legislation France has a long history. The first legislation favouring VPL dates from 1934. The latest developments have been brought about by the 'Loi de la Modernisation Social' in 2002. Every citizen got the right to assess prior learning. This is called 'Validation des Acquis de l'Experience'. This VAE aims at validating competences irrespective of the learning environment and form. In this sense it goes one step further than the former law 'Validation d'Acquis Professionnels' (VAP) from 1992 in which only workexperience could be validated as a learning environment.

In this article the innovation the VAE brought about, is emphasized. Special attention is given to the major role of the National Vocational Certification Committee in establishing a National Vocational Certification Register. This register is the backbone of a reference tool for all actors involved in training and certification and especiallly for those involved in VAE.

Certification in the Law of 17 January 2002

The Law of 17 January 2002 has brought about significant changes in respect of the concept of certification in France. Articles 133 to 146 introduce three fundamental innovations:

1. a development of the 1992 law in the sense of an opening up to the principles of *validation des acquis d' expérience* (VAE – validation of experience learning) to all recognised certification at national level (diplomas, qualifications and professional sector certificates). Three years of experience can be sufficient to be a candidate via this procedure and full certification may be issued by this means. The application of this principle is based on two decrees: Decree 2002-590 of 24 April 2002 organising

VAE in higher education establishments, and Decree 2002-615 of 26 April for all professional certification.

2. setting up the *Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles* (RNCP – National Vocational Certification Register). This Register collates all certification identified at a national level. As a matter of course it records diplomas and qualifications issued by the State which have been created after the involvement of consultative bodies of which employers' and employees' representative organisations form part. It also registers other certification upon request and in accordance with the advice of the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP – National Vocational Certification Committee). Decree 2002-616 of 26 April lays down regulations for the establishment of the Register and the methods of registration upon request.

3. setting up the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle* (CNCP – National Vocational Certification Committee), which has the task of establishing the RNCP, overseeing the development of certification, researching bridges between certificates and providing information on certification at both French and European levels. Decree 2002-617 establishes the Committee's composition, tasks and methods of operation.

Taken as a whole, the basic aim of the initiative is to allow a greater number of citizens access to certification (over one-third of the French population does not have a professional qualification). Henceforth, gaining such certification may be the result of a programme of training or professional experience, and may also be the result of a combination of training and experience. Decree 2002-795 of 3 May 2002 provides the necessary means to introduce educational leave to gain certification to validate prior learning. Two decrees are in the pipeline for publication in order to define the conditions governing the financing of validation procedures.

Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle

In accordance with the Law and the Decree, the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP) has three basic missions:

i *To establish and update the National Vocational Certification Register (RNCP)*
   The establishment of the RNCP has the following objectives:
   – to make certification as accessible and intelligible as possible for all individuals who are responsible for providing information and advice or managing personal and professional careers, in particular for the general public;
   – to present a coherent image in the provision of certification;
   – to oversee the quality of the provision described by the RNCP.
   A consequence of these three considerations is the possibility of involving the issuers of certificates with a view to adapting certification to changes in the world of employment, as well as to updating certification, addressing any failures of coverage and taking new requirements on board. Furthermore, the initiative must facilitate work between advisory bodies, in particular when this relates to a common professional

field. By this means, relations can be maintained with employment observatories and regional, national and international qualifications as well as with observatories of professions.

The Law also confides the mission of contributing to international projects, in particular European ones. The CNCP is the national point of reference for the transparency of qualifications. The CNCP may also sponsor appropriate studies in order to achieve its missions. The CNCP is the French National Point of Reference within the EUROPASS scheme. Furthermore, the RNCP has been designed to correspond with the structure and contents of the "EUROPASS certificate supplements".

ii *Establishing a new nomenclature of certification*

The various forms of certification issued in France are based on three nomenclatures. The oldest (1967) was established by the Ministry of National Education and defines levels in terms of years of study after Baccalauréat. The second nomenclature (1969) uses identical numbering (V, IV, III, II, I) but instead each level refers to socio-professional categories in the employment market. The third nomenclature corresponds to a system of classification scales established by the social partners to define employees' qualifications. Each classification has varying degrees of content and indexing depending on the professional sector concerned. The CNCP's mission of drawing up a new nomenclature of the levels of certification is thus a considerable undertaking which cannot be achieved without appropriate preparation. This preparation work is all the more important as the nomenclature must relate to actual employment and must allow European and international comparison. An appraisal is already under way in order to envisage conceivable methods of articulation in line with both the scale of levels scheduled by the future European Directive on the Recognition of Qualifications as well as the European Qualifications Framework.

iii *Submission of an annual report to the Prime Minister*

The CNCP is structurally and politically the concern of the Minister responsible for employment and professional training, by the delegation of the Prime Minister. For this reason, the Chair of the Committee will submit an annual report to the Prime Minister on the work of the committee, the development of the field of certification and methods of access.

Composition

Decree no. 2002-617 of 26 April 2002 establishes that the National Vocational Certification Committee shall comprise the following persons in addition to the Chair:

- A representative of each of the Ministers with responsibility: Social Affairs and Health; Agriculture; Culture; Defence; Industry; Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Trades; National Education; Vocational Education; Higher Education; Environment; Equipment, Transport and Housing; Civil Service; Professional Training; Youth and Sport; Tourism; Work and Employment;
- Five delegates from the most representative employers' organisations at national level;
- Five delegates from the most representative employees' organisations at national level;

- Three representatives appointed by the standing conferences of Chambers of Agriculture, French Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Chambers of Trade;
- Three representatives appointed by the regions, namely the Chair of the Committee for Co-ordination of Regional Programmes for Professional Training and Apprenticeship and two others nominated by the French Regions Association.

The following persons shall also participate in the Committee's work as competent individuals with a consultative role: a general rapporteur, two persons appointed upon the proposal of organisations concerned with vocational training; two representatives from the National Youth Committee; the Director of the Centre of Studies and Research on Qualifications; the Director of the INFFO Centre; the Director of the National Office on Information on Education and Professions; the President of the High Committee on Education, the Economy and Employment; a representative of the Advisory Committee on the Social Economy; a representative of the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; representatives of the European Trade Union Confederation.

Operation

The CNCP operates in two committees, supported by a secretariat. In short:

I   The National Committee
    The National Vocational Certification Committee meets approximately five times a year. Its mission is to automatically register certification issued by official national authorities, developed within the scope of tripartite advisory bodies (the State, employees' representatives and employers' representatives). The Committee also registers other certification upon the request of public authorities, Chambers or private bodies after special investigation allowing identification of appropriateness to the employment market as a guide to the qualification. The Committee relies on the work of a Special Committee to allow it to reach its conclusions. The Special Committee comprises full members of the National Committee or their deputies.

II The Special Committee
    In addition to the Chair of the National Committee and the general rapporteur, the Special Committee comprises the following persons:
    – Ten representatives of the Ministers;
    – Five delegates of the most representative national employers' organisations at national level;
    – Five delegates of the most representative national employees' organisations at national level.
    Representatives of the Ministers are responsible for work and employment, agriculture, professional training, vocational education, higher education, youth and sport. They are automatically members of the Special Committee.
    Representatives of the other Ministers involved in the National Committee shall participate, up to a limit of four, in the work of the Special Committee each time that matters on the agenda concern them.

The Special Committee operates in accordance with the National Committee's internal regulations.

III Permanent Secretariat

The National Vocational Certification Committee can make use of the services of a national secretariat, acting under the authority of the Chair, as well as one or more correspondents in each region. The latter are appointed by the Regional Prefect, after consultation with the Chair of the National Vocational Certification Committee, from among officials or agents of decentralised services or establishments which act under the supervision of the State. They answer to the authority of the Regional Prefect for the duration of their mission. They utilise the decentralised services of the State in the region to investigate requests for registration.

Le Répertoire National des certifications Professionnelles

The National Vocational Certification Register forms the backbone of the VAE. In accordance with Decree 2002-616 of April 2002, the Register:

- makes updated information on certification available to the public (and intermediate institutions) and enterprises (Article 1). It offers a classification of certification by field of activity and level. The CQPs [*Certificates of Vocational Qualification*] are classified by field of activity.
- gives details of correspondence between certification and, if available, details of mutual recognition and the number of individuals awarded the certificate each year (Article 2). It describes the special conditions required for the award of a diploma or qualification when laid down by the diploma or qualification regulations (Article 3).
- There are two methods of inclusion in the Register (Article 4): automatic registration and registration by request. These two methods produce three lists of recorded certification:
  - Automatically registered diplomas and qualifications,
  - CQPs,
  - Qualifications registered upon request.

Contents of the Register: Three lists of current certification

First List: Automatic Registration

Professional diplomas and qualifications, issued in the name of the State and established after consultation with advisory bodies incorporating representative organisations of employers and employees, are registered automatically. This category includes all diplomas and qualifications for which systems of reference have been drawn up and/or validated by the following organisations:

I *Commission Professionnelle Consultative* (CPC – Vocational Advisory Committee). This applies to the following certification:
  - the Ministry of National Education (secondary education from CAP to BTS) organising 17 CPCs overseeing the production of in excess of 700 diplomas;

– the Ministry of Agriculture, organising one CPC for approximately 150 diplomas and certificates;
– the Ministry of Social Affairs;
– DGEFP (state organisation for employment and vocational training) organising five CPCs to manage approximately 300 qualifications;
– DGAS (state organisation for social affairs) organising one CPC for approximately 12 qualifications;
– the Ministry of Sports organising one CPC for approximately 100 diplomas and qualifications;

II *Commission Pédagogique Nationale* (CPN – National Educational Committee) for Technical University Diplomas. CPNs are organised to examine 25 specialist subjects for Technical University Diplomas;

III *Conseil National de l' Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche* (CNESER – National Council for Higher Education and Research) which accredits national diplomas (DEUG, degrees, masters, DESS, DEA, etc.), Approximately 10,000 certifications are involved;

IV *Conseil Supérieur des professions paramédicales* from Ministry of health (Higher Council for Paramedic Professions) for approximately fifteen diplomas;

V *Commission des Titres d' Ingénieurs* (CTI – Committee for Engineering Qualifications). Approximately 800 special subjects involved.

VI The Committee for approval of national diplomas, not including State diplomas, generally issued by institutions other than the Ministry of National Education.

A computerised link between RNCP and the ECTS system has been proposed, of a type that has already been instituted in countries neighbouring France. The proposal for the link between the two databases is being studied; initially it would allow duplicate listings if not duplicate description.

Second List: Certificates registered upon request

This category includes all certificates issued under the auspices of professional sectors. Currently 400 professional sector certificates have been established upon the initiative of over 30 sectors. Half of the certificates of this list concern the metallurgy sector.

Initiatives to set up special certificates for a professional sector generally come from the *Commission Paritaire Nationale pour l' Emploi* (CPNE – National Joint Committee for Employment) for that sector. However, there are currently no regulations on the designation, contents or objectives of such certificates.

The registration of these certificates is conducted upon request via the CPNEs after consultation with the CNCP. An investigation file allows the necessary elements to be considered on the basis of the consultation.

Third List: Qualifications registered upon request

Certification issued under the auspices of ministries not resorting to advisory bodies involving the social partners and by public or private training institutions and establishments.

Three categories of certification are included under this heading:

1. Certification issued under the auspices of a ministry not resorting to advisory bodies involving the social partners. The current systems are generally based on the principle of the approval of training courses conducted by establishments which have been endorsed for this purpose. This category covers:
   – qualifications relating to the Ministry of Defence (approximately 300),
   – some qualifications relating to the Ministries of Culture, Equipment, Transport, etc. (nearly 50),
   – University Diplomas or qualifications created by GRETA (nearly 100).
2. Chamber certificates, upon which rulings have been formulated by a ministry:
   – qualifications from Chambers of Commerce and Industry (approximately 250 qualifications),
   – qualifications of Chambers of Trades and Agriculture (30 qualifications).
3. Certification issued by private organisations and associations:
   – certificates issued by network establishments,
   – certificates issued in their own name.

Some 500 qualifications are registered in this way. Nearly half of these concern the special subjects of commerce and management.

These are what are known as "approved qualifications", a certain number of which are registered automatically in the RNCP up until the end date of their approval (under the scope of transitional measures described by the Decree of 26 April 2002).

Requests for registration in the RNCP pass through a three-stage procedure:
- investigation by the CNCP secretariat (responsible for CNCP's national or corresponding regional missions),
- examination by the Special Committee which will define appropriateness to the employment market and research correspondence with other certificates,
- examination by the CNCP which will express relevance within the RNCP.

The format of the Register

The register comprises three data resources:
- an official list giving details of all registered certification, whether registered automatically or upon request, and reference to the official publications (Official Journal, Official Gazette) establishing their creation or amendment,
- concise descriptions of each certification in accordance with a common format allowing entry into a database to be linked directly to the European database – "transparency of qualification",
- complementary information on certification (e.g.: definition of professions, possible places of training, existing training programmes, complete reference systems, statistics, etc.) for items which are already the subject of databases established by the certification bodies for their own requirements or those of their networks or by institutions which have the mission of dissemination to the general public (e.g. CENTRE INFFO or ONISEP) or to individuals seeking qualification (e.g. DPD or CEREQ).

The linchpin of the system is the second data resource. The certification descriptions which comprise this level actually automatically generate the official list and allow direct links to be established with the third data resource already in place by means of different existing databases.

A common information sheet allows identification of certification by its main components in terms of the competences or capacities accredited, sectors of activity, types of employment accessible and methods of access to the certification. Information concerning the administrative and legal environment is given as well as links to already-existing databases allowing complementary information on the reference systems or methods of preparation of the certification (training and locations, statistics, etc.).

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Exhaustive coverage of the references of over 15,000 certifications existing in France is not envisaged, particularly during the initial period. The 11,000 higher education diplomas cannot be the subject of a description based on target professional activities when such a reference system is not planned. The proposal is to progressively supply the RNCP with certificates linked to university higher education, with priority initially given to categories of diplomas such as DUT, professional degrees and masters, for example. A link between the RNCP and the system of "Europass certificate supplements" and "Europass diploma supplements" is currently being studied.

The RNCP has been freely consultable by the public via the Internet from the CNCP website at www.cncp.gouv.fr since May 2004. In excess of 2,000 certifications are currently described online. The RNCP is very widely used by advisers offering information and orientation to young people and adults, proposing vocational career paths including certification. It constitutes one of the basic tools for identifying certification accessible by means of Validation of experience learning (VAE).

Conclusion

The Law of January 2002 has had a significant impact on the world of vocational training. Best known for its amendments of the VAE tool (called *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* [Validation of Vocational Achievement] in 1992), it has allowed genuine progress in the principle of "lifelong learning". By focusing on "certification" and no longer on training, the emphasis is now for young people and adults to demonstrate their achievements and qualifications after experience as well as after training. Certification no longer represents an end in itself but rather is a genuine milestone allowing recognition of lifelong learning qualifications. The establishment of an inter-ministerial body comprising social partners and representatives of the regions and training establishments has facilitated inter-institutional dialogue to establish regulations for the use of certification and the environment for their recognition. The Register thus represents a reference tool for all actors involved in the employment-training relationship at a national and international level, both for the general public and for enterprises, bringing necessary clarity to the rather complicated landscape that is certification in France.

4 Validation in Norway: results and challenges

Torild Nilsen Mohn

Validation and valuation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the Norwegian agenda for many years now. A nation-wide project – with *Vox* as a national follow up co-ordinator – placed the documentation of non-formal and informal learning on the list of items in parts of the workplace and the voluntary sector, and not the least in the education system.

There is still a lot of work to do but it already produced results in relation to some important target groups. It spans from large groups of women who want to start working in health and social work, immigrants who want to qualify for the labour market and other groups which have traditionally found themselves in a weak position and require upper secondary education, to staff working in everything from the municipal sector to specialised private companies. Viewed in this manner, the work will have both important consequences for society and individuals.

In this contribution the progress in the implementation of VPL in Norway is elaborated. The background is sketched, together with a description of the roles the different stakeholders – authorities, social partners, education – play in the process of implementation. Furthermore, a national approach is described, recommending a procedure to make use of. The road ahead directs at implementing attitudes related to learning outside the formal education system on an individual level by offering them good examples, on an organisational level by challenging the stakeholders and furthermore on policy level by inspiring to take action.

Background

Even though Norway has a high level of educational attainment, it is not enough to satisfy the shifts in the demand for labour in the coming years. Social partners and public authorities have been preoccupied for a number of years with the risks of labour and skills

shortages and mismatches. Lifelong learning and educational opportunities for adults are important principles of Norwegian education policy. The aim is to provide suitable conditions in order to strengthen the competence of the adult population. Updated and new competence is necessary to improve competitiveness and increase flexibility in a changing working life/environment. New competence can give individuals greater freedom of choice and create opportunities which may help realise their wishes and needs.

Life long learning strategy: the Competence Reform

The Norwegian reform for life long learning, the Competence Reform, was launched in 1999.

The Competence Reform aimed to meet the need for new or changed competence in society, in the workplace and at individual level. The Competence reform was a result of collective bargaining and was based on close co-operation between many actors. It was both a workplace and an educational reform and it is targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. It has been designed and executed based on interaction between social partners, The Ministry of Education and Research, organizations and educational institutions.

The main elements of the reform were:

- To give all adults a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and to impose an obligation on educational providers to design the education offered in accordance with the needs of adults,
- To ensure the right for individual employees to obtain study leave of absence for further education,
- To provide state grants and scholarship for adults on equal terms with younger students,
- To establish a system for competence assessment for people without any formal certificates or degrees,
- To acknowledge the workplace as an important learning arena and a place for innovation.

Results of the Competence Reform

One of the main results of the Competence Reform has been that the Parliament has legalized that all adults have a statutory right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The legal right to upper secondary education was put in force autumn 2,000; while the legal right to primary and lower secondary education has been in force since August 2002. In addition considerable efforts have been made in recent years to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups through adult education. This particularly applies to adults with especially weak schooling, various groups of physically disabled persons, adults with reading and writing difficulties and adult immigrants.

Other results are[20]:

- All adults have a legal right to leave of absence from work for education purposes after having worked more than three years,
- At the end of 2003 more than 40,000 people have had their skills assessed with reference to upper secondary education,
- A competence building program to promote innovation and development in the field of continuing education and training has been established. About 150 organizations and more than 6,000 people have taken part in the development of documentation methods in the workplace,
- Since 1 January 2001, individuals have been statutory entitled to seek admission to individual courses at universities or colleges on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. To do this, applicants must be at least 25 years old and possess no general study skills. Students have also been given the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented non-formal and informal learning. Applicants accepted to courses on the basis of assessed non-formal learning and who have completed the course, will be allocated general study skills. This gives them the opportunity to seek admission to other courses with no special admission requirements. To do this, they must have completed one course lasting at least one year, or two courses each lasting six months,
- A system has been put in place to "translate" immigrant vocational competencies into formal Norwegian standards.

The Validation project

According to the Competence Reform's Plan of Action, one of its principal objectives was "to establish a national system for documenting and evaluating the non-formal and informal learning of adults, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system." This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid employment, organizational involvement, and organized training.

In order to accomplish this, the Validation Project (Realkompetanseprosjektet) was given the mandate to form the foundations for a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning during 1999-2002.

The Norwegian concept of "realkompetanse" refers to all formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired by adults. In practice, this means the sum of all the overall skills and knowledge individuals have acquired through the education system, paid and unpaid work, organisational activities and family life/life in society.

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20 Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2004): The Competence Reform, a review of measures and results connected with the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform.

The validation project: the accomplishment

Emphasis in the commission was placed on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in respect of upper secondary education. The target group includes all adults who wish their non-formal learning to be documented and validated in respect of the education system, the workplace and organisational activities.

The project had a bottom-up approach. 50 local development projects have taken part in the development of procedures, methods and tools. These projects were initiated when calls for applications for project funds were issued or by direct contact with the relevant organisations/institutions.

Priority areas for development were as follows:
- Documentation of non-formal learning in the workplace,
- Documentation of non-formal learning in the voluntary sector,
- Methods for the assessment of non-formal learning, including vocational testing,
- Validation of non-formal learning in respect of upper secondary education,
- Adjustments and possible amendments of existing laws, regulations and agreements on the basis of experiences drawn from the project,
- Admission of students to universities and colleges on the basis of non-formal and informal learning.

Legitimacy was assured by involving stakeholders at various levels throughout the entire process. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research, social partners, the education system, voluntary organisations, associations for adult education and distance learning institutions took part in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the project. This applied to, among other things, the preparation of a commission, representation and work on the project board, the project Secretariat and local projects. These parties have also taken part in network and information meetings, as well as in the project's national contact group.

The Validation Project – some results [21]

Over the project period, 24,000 people took part in the testing of methods and tools for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning in the workplace, the third sector and the education system.

In the workplace, the trial was implemented in over 150 companies from a variety of industries in both the private and the public sectors. 6,000 people took part in the trial. In the third sector, 13 organisations at local and regional level took part in the development of methods for documentation of non-formal and informal learning. 500 people took part in the trial. In the field of upper secondary education, all local councils took part in the

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21 Realkompetanseprosjektets sluttrapport (2002): Realkompetanseprosjektet 1999-2002 – i mål eller på sluttstreken.

assessment and validation of non-formal learning. 17,000 people had their non-formal learning charted, and 1,000 of them got their skills validated. Eight out of ten people (12,000) have had their non-formal learning validated within vocational trades. Of these, almost 8,000 were in the health and social sector. In the case of higher education, in 2001 around 2,600 students were allocated places on courses at universities and colleges on the basis of non-formal learning.

Various types of networks were set up in order to ensure mutual information, professional top-ups, the exchange of ideas and experiences and to create acceptance and confidence across arenas.

Meetings between the local project managers and members of the Secretariat were one type of network. 600 people have undergone training to be able to assess non-formal and informal learning relating to upper secondary education.

Advisory groups with representatives from the Norwegian Public Employment Service, the upper secondary and higher education system, associations for adult education, social partners and local projects were other types of networks. Such groups were established in respect of:
• vocational testing as a method for the assessment of non-formal learning for immigrants,
• adults with reading and writing difficulties,
• methods and tools for the assessment of non-formal learning in respect of upper secondary education.

At a central level, various parties have worked on their own initiative to implement meetings on the topic of non-formal learning. The social partners held a number of meetings, in which representatives of selected workplace projects took part. Likewise in the third sector. As far as upper secondary education is concerned, the executive committee of county education chiefs has had the subject of non-formal learning on the agenda on a number of occasions.

At a local level, the projects have gone in for cross-arena co-operation to varying degrees. The project has used a number of information channels to create interest in its work. These information channels included conferences, courses, meetings, written information, websites and newsletters.

Common procedures and principles

One of the results of the development projects is a circular from the Ministry of Education and Research with information on the implementation and further development of a national system for documentation and recognition of competence. Based on the conclusions from the Competence Project it is proposed that the national system should include a shared set of principles anchored in custom-made legislation as well as a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence.

The principles are based on the understanding that the recognition of competence is voluntary and has to be perceived by the individual as beneficial. It has to be easy in use, transparent and in line with European developments. The principles are anchored in legislation that comprises the Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.

The table underneath summarises the four steps in the procedure for recognising competence in relation to the working life requirements, the third sector and the educational systems requirements[22]. Please note that the steps for recognising competence in relation to working life and the third sector are recommended, whereas the steps in relation to the curriculum in educational sector are required. A critical issue is the recognition that the assessment methods have to be adapted to the individual's needs and use of the documentation.

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22 Mohn, McHenry (2003): The Competence Project in Norway.

Steps National procedure	*Documentation in relation to the requirements of the working life*	*Documentation in the third sector*	*Documentation in relation to requirements of upper secondary education*	*Documentation in relation to requirements of higher education*
Information and guidance	Information by: • Employers • Trade associations • Branch org. • Unemployment offices	Information by: • Voluntary umbrella organisations, local org. inform their members	Information and guidance by: • County council centres, and upper secondary schools	Information by: • Higher education institutions • NOKUT • UCAS
Identification and systemizing of prior learning	Creation of CV by • Individuals	Creation of CV by • Individuals	Creation of portfolio by • Individuals + • Counsellor skill centre	Creation of portfolio by • Individuals
Assessment	Self-assessment of actual work activities Verified by current employer/client	Self-assessment of experiences/ voluntary activities Self-declaration	Assessment in relation to national curriculum Certified by secondary/ vocational schools in co-operation with counsellors in county council centre	Assessment in relation to requirements of each higher education institution. Certified by higher education institution/NOKUT
Documentary proof	Verified document "kompetanse-attest"	Self-declared document	• National certificate of competence "Kompetanse-bevis" • Right of admission	• Recognition document • Right of admission

Table 1: Steps in the national procedure for recognition of informal and non-formal learning

Validation in the educational sector today

Higher education and training

Since 1st January 2001, individuals have been statutory entitled to seek admission to individual courses at universities or university colleges on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. To do this, applicants must be at least 25 years old and possess no general study skills. Students have also been given the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented non-formal and informal learning.

The qualifications of applicants have to be assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. Each institution have the power to assess what qualifications they consider to be necessary and decide on the appropriate course of action for carrying out this assessment.

If the applicant seeks admission to individual courses on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning, their application form will be sent to the current university or university college. It is the committee at each university/college who decides whether the applicant's papers on non-formal and informal learning fulfil the course entrance requirements. Applicants seeking admission on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning must be ranked in relation to applicants with general admission requirements on the basis of a rough appraisal. This means that they are to compete on equal terms with other applicants, and will not be admitted simply to fill any empty slot.

Applicants will be assessed on the skills they will need to complete the courses for which they are seeking admission. The assessment emphasises both the specialist content of the course and the teaching arrangements offered to students. Non-formal learning will be assessed either through self-declarations and portfolios, or by means of tests. Information on criteria and assessment methods can be acquired from individual universities or university colleges. Assessments related to admission will vary from institution to institution as discretion will be exercised to a greater extent than in the case of regular admissions. Also the complaint procedure will be specific to each individual. Adults who are seeking admission on the basis of non-formal learning will not have their study points calculated. The ranking of these students in relation to applicants, who have had study points calculated, will be discretionary.

Surveys on validation in HE

The effect of the legal right to seek admission on the basis of non-formal and informal learning has been reported on by NIFU in 2002[23]. The main impression is that most of the HE institutions have a positive attitude to the reform. The small regional university colleges find students who have started their study on the basis of non-formal and

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23 Helland, Opheim (2004), NIFU Skriftserie, nr.6/2004.

informal learning, as a professional and economic resource. The centrally located university colleges experience too many applicants and find it hard to locate enough resources to deal with applicant's schemes.

At first there was scepticism to validation of non-formal and informal learning among professionals/teachers in HE. However, evaluations reconfirm that these students are highly motivated and that their study performance is equal to the performance of students recruited on the basis of formal qualification. As a result we have seen a change in the attitudes towards non-formal and informal learning.
Since 2001 we have had an average of 7,000 applicants per year seeking admission on the basis of non-formal and informal learning. In 2001 and 2002 40% were assessed as qualified, 70% of the applicants were women.

Two projects have investigated the practice of granting exemptions from a study programme or degree in higher education based on documented non-formal and informal learning; the Norwegian Refine sub-project and a NIFU project.

The Norwegian REFINE sub-project[24] had two main objectives: achieve insight in the processes concerning assessment of candidates with non-formal and informal learning who apply for exemption in higher education, and conduct case studies of a limited number of candidates using recently developed tools for documentation of prior learning.

The findings show that the institutions lack procedures for the assessment of exemption candidates. None of the institutions had a recognized procedure, and consequently dealt with the candidates in an ad hoc manner. This doesn't necessarily mean that the institutions are negative to the idea of exemption. Some of the institutions have always practised a form of validation of prior learning with regards to admission as potential students have to document specific skills within the special discipline they want to study? Other institutions made preliminary decisions and concluded that exemption might be granted, but that the documentation of skills was not sufficient and the candidates would have to produce documentation of actual competence rather than just a description of practise, however relevant it might seem.

The suitability of documentation tools was discussed in most institutions. Some of the institutions consider the tools inadequate since they do not specifically relate to the field of study the candidate wants exemption from.
Due to lack of national or even local procedures, the institutions had different views and conclusions about the nature of exemption. When asked what the institutions maintain as the maximum number of credits a candidate may get exemption from in a Bachelor degree,

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24 Haugøy, Moe (2005) REFINE, Final report from the Norwegian sub-project.

the answers varied from a possible exemption of 10% from each level – i.e. six credits yearly or 18 credits in total in a Bachelor degree – to a possible 30 credits in total in a Bachelor degree.

A national survey has also been carried out by NIFU[25]. The survey shows that in the period 2001-2004 the Universities/university colleges received only 123 applications for exemption. The conclusion in the report is that the students have very little knowledge about the possibilities of exemption, and that there is a need for more information and guidance about the legal validation arrangements in higher education.

Upper secondary education

Adults who need primary and lower secondary education have a statutory right to such education from August 2002. This education must be adapted to the individual's needs and life situation, such as when and where the education is to be provided and the rate of progression. The municipal authorities are responsible for providing this education. Adults born prior to 1978 have statutory right to be accepted for upper secondary education on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning. The New Act on Vocational Assessment (6 December 2002) gives immigrants who have recently arrived in Norway and registered jobseekers who are not entitled to upper secondary education the opportunity to do an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning, including vocational testing.

The purpose of validating non-formal and informal learning in upper secondary education is to match the learning to formal qualifications and shorten the study period, as well as it gives possibilities for a more streamlined and tailor-made study programme for each individual. Another purpose is to provide the individual with an accredited certificate (Kompetansebevis – Competence Certificate) to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job or increase mobility in the working life.

Regional authorities decide how validation of non-formal learning is to be organised. Most regional authorities organise this work by means of one or more "centres". Adults can acquire information, guidance and help with the validation process from supervisors at these centres.

The following elements are recommended in the national procedure for validation of competence:

- Information and guidance
- Identification and systemising of all competences
- Assessment
- Public documentation

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25 Brandt (2005), NIFU Skriftserie, nr 5/2005.

Methods and tools

The following methods and tools have been developed for validation of non-formal learning in respect to the requirements stipulated in the national curricula.

- *Dialogue-based method*: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and the adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of each individual and attends to specific problems and queries in the curriculum. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question.
- This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method can be combined with port-folio assessment, self assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates. The conclusion is that the method fits in with both vocational and general subjects. Yet, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.
- *Assessment of portfolio*: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a "charting" form to a "service centre" together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of individuals' own skills and does not require one-to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to actual knowledge and skills.
- *Vocational "testing"* starts off with an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objective of the adult are charted. After the first general interview a professional specialist interviews the individual in the particular subject, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed. Working on the basis of this practice, the adult may be offered either additional education to bring him or her up to a journeyman/trade certificate level or public certificate useful for job seeking. This method complements other methods in that the assessment of non-formal learning is also possible, and where required, parts or all of the practical side of the vocational subjects can be approved. Vocational "testing" provides adults – irrespective of their ethnic origins – with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. This method picks up knowledge and experiences which are not documented and works well irrespective of learning and language difficulties. Vocational testing, on the other hand, requires inter-departmental co-operation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

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

Evaluation of the methods

The validation project was evaluated by Agenda[26]: One of the surveys was carried out among the people in the education system, supervisors and assessors/specialist. Both supervisors and assessors/specialists are finds that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has positive effects on candidates; this gives the candidates more self respect.

Regarding different assessment methods, discussions have been held on how important it is for candidates to be called to attend a meeting or an interview. Meetings or interviews are perceived as being very important by 96 per cent of the supervisors and 85 per cent of the assessors/specialists. Geographical closeness to the place of assessment is also perceived as being important, even though this is evidently a relative concept.

The surveys revealed a major need for training: Around 96 per cent of the supervisors and 85 per cent of the assessors/specialists feel that they need training in the future, particularly in relation to a quality assurance arrangement which may lead to a national standard.

The survey carried out among candidates confirms that the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been a positive experience. 80 per cent of the candidates taking part in the projects in the education system state that the identification, the systemising and the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been useful or very useful. According to the candidates themselves, the most important consequences are that the projects have made them believe that they achieve the education they want, and that it has made it possible for them to take part in upper secondary education/higher education.

Among the candidates who are studying for degrees, around 80 per cent say that they are doing as well as they expected, or better. The candidates have a good perception of the actual assessment of their non-formal or informal learning. Almost 70 per cent were of the opinion that the assessors were very accommodating in regards to their requirements, and almost 90 per cent said that the assessors were very good or quite good at finding out what the candidates' skills were.

Analysis of the situation

The objective of the comprehensive Vox project *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget*[27] (The foundation of knowledge) (2003-2005) was to find out to what extent adults make use of their rights to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and an individually adapted pathway of studies established.

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26 Agenda Forskning og utvikling (2003) Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet.

27 Haugerud, Røstad (2005) Kunnskapsgrunnlaget.

The project focused on the following three areas:
1. the extent to which the adults made use of their rights to primary and lower and upper secondary education,
2. whether the adults had their non-formal and informal learning assessed and whether they receive tailored training,
3. whether they received adequate information about their legal rights and opportunities.

Issues related to motivation, finances and life situation were also incorporated in the study.

Currently, more than 21,000 adults are participating in upper secondary education organized by the Norwegian county authorities. Most (84%) attend adapted courses organized for adults. The distribution between general studies and vocational studies is 60/40. Most adults can initiate their studies within six months of their application.

The proportion of adults stating that full-time or part-time employment is their primary activity is high, and this corresponds with the fact that 68% state that their own/partners income is the primary source of sustenance while they are in training. The reason might be that many cannot afford to take an unpaid study leave.

One important aspect of the statutory right to upper secondary education is that it increases the possibilities for adults to get formal training. The survey shows that only 25% are familiar with his/her legal rights and that awareness of rights also has an unequal geographical distribution. Those who need it most, i.e. those who have not completed upper secondary education, do not know about their statutory rights. Therefore, those who have the greatest need for new competence do not know about, or are not adequately motivated to, make good use of his/her legal rights.

The students were asked about which factors have been vital for their decision to start training. Out of those who responded to this question, 76% believed that their own motivation had had the greatest importance.

	VERY LARGE	LARGE	SOME	LITTLE	VERY LITTLE	N =
Adults' legal right to upper secondary education	35.7	20.3	14.3	10.9	18.8	622
Legal right to assessment of non-formal learning	15.4	12.6	12.6	15.5	44.0	573
Legal right to adapted instruction	13.6	14.1	14.8	16.1	41.4	573
Own motivation	75.7	20.6	2.7	0.7	0.4	674
The job/the employer	16.9	14.6	13.7	13.2	41.5	590
Family/friends	14.4	21.2	29.2	16.1	19.0	609
Financial aspects	31.3	16.6	18.0	10.5	23.6	601

TABLE 2. THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR TAKING UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION. PERCENTAGES

Training the trainers

In Norway the 19 county councils are responsible for offering adults an individually adapted training at upper secondary level. In addition to the two yearly network meetings with representatives from the county councils, Vox has recently arranged two-days seminars with the people involved directly in accreditation of non-formal and informal learning. The main goal is to have a more common national approach to methods for assessing non-formal and informal learning.

Laws and regulations, methods and tools for assessment and guidance were important elements in the seminars arranged in every county council in Norway.

The findings from the seminars are now being analysed and a report will be available. Preliminary findings illustrate that we are still in the process of establishing a national system for validation in Norway, and that more or less autonomous regional arrangements have been developed.

Validation in the third sector

The documentation of non-formal learning and informal learning can reinforce the self-confidence and inspire people to attend formal educational courses. Documented skills from non-formal courses or study activities can be assessed in relation to the education system.

It is also believed that documentation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector will lead to self-awareness, which is useful and important for career development in their work.

In folk high schools, the documentation of comprehensive skills will be useful when applying for a job. In these days the folk high school organisations are developing a scheme for describing non-formal and informal learning.

In distance education the main purpose of documentation is improving career opportunities in participants' own organisations and strengthens applications to other organisations.

Methods and tools in third sector

Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal and informal learning in the sector are based on individuals' own efforts. Electronic tools have been developed. The idea is that individual organisations will provide information to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are responsible for delivering guidance to people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own CV and identify and describe their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a self-assessment of the skills identified and described.

An instrument called PKD is a "universally valid self-declaration for voluntary work". This instrument contains:
1) An introduction in which the methodology for completion is described,
2) An example of a completed form,
3) A form ready for completion, and
4) The option of creating one's own reference.
The text is saved in Word format and can be adapted to suit the individual.

A glossary has been developed. In this glossary various voluntary organisations describe their specific activities and their skill profiles. This may help both the people completing the PKD and be useful for the receiver/assessor who will be evaluating its content.

Validation in the working life

Within the working life there are multiple purposes for recognising competences. Common purposes are (Skule and Andersen 2000[28]; McHenry 2002[29]):

a. for the organisation:
• Gain an overview of the skills of the employees
• Reorganisation, job-rotation and down-sizing
• More effective training systems
• To fulfil QA/international standard requirements
• Option for search and find (telephone, projects, network)
• Measurement of intellectual capital
• Strategic competence management

b. for the individual:
• New employment in the external market
• New internal career advancement/project participation
• Fulfil employment requirement
• Increase of self awareness of capabilities, empowerment
• Facilitate entry into education and shorter training period
• Pro-active involvement in own learning

Many organisations have their own systems and procedures for documenting competences either as part of their HR management system or ISO requirements. Yet, due to the Competence Reform more emphasis has been placed on the right of the individual to document non-formal and informal learning, rather than what has been developed over time in the work context. Especially among the small and medium sized organisations.

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28 Skule, Andersen (2000) Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien.
29 McHenry (2002) Management of knowledge in practice, learning to visualise competence.

Methods and tools

As a result of the national project, the national approach recommends taking the following procedure into use[30]:

1) Definition of the status of the organisation
A short introduction of today's situation and future challenges is a good starting point. Analyse tasks/projects in the organisation, what kind of competence is needed to fulfil them.

2) Agreeing on aims and organisation
Before starting the documentation process, both employer and employees ought to set up common goals and decide who should be responsible for the different phases in the process. It is important to discuss some of these elements in order to be prepared for unexpected situations arising during the course of the work.
A common understanding of the purpose of charting competence and how it can be best utilized can be a complicated process. The company does not necessarily always have the same need for competence as the individual employee may have. The various aspects of this issue should be brought forward so that both partners have a realistic expectancy of work results of the process.

3) Choosing instruments and tools
There is a diversity of instruments and tools used for charting competences in the working life. It is important that the use of chosen tool has been thoroughly thought through so that the work process does not falter or entirely cease due to practical difficulties with the tool. Testing the suitability of the tool before the work process has started can be a smart move. There exist a number of tools with varying lay-out and user-friendliness:
• Paper-based scheme for documentation of individual competence;
• Web-based scheme for documentation of competence freely available on the internet;
• Web-based scheme for documentation of competence that has to be purchased by the organisation and can be used as a part in an integrated HR system;
• Standardised CV format – similar to EuroCV
Vox is now developing an instrument for visualising competences and skills. It will be a two part document; a CV part for life long and life wide learning and a Competence Card for learning at work. These documents will be connected to a database.

4) Informing the organisation
Good information and implementation throughout the whole organisation is crucial for achieving good results.

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30 Alfsen and Mohn (2005) How should the process be carried out?

Before the information meeting the following should be clarified:
- What are we aiming for?
- The need for competence, future tasks/assignments
- Purpose: why document competence?
- Implementation, who has the responsibility
- How should it be done, what kind of method?
- What happens after the process is over?

5) Giving guidelines
It will vary how much help each individual needs to fill in the documents. Some have done this earlier and only need to make some adjustments, while others have never done anything like this earlier and may need guidance. This can be done in various ways. Peer-to peer counselling, colleagues, shop stewards or local managers could be of help.
It may be wise to pave the way for organized guidance to get the process started. It is often those who need guidance who does not ask for it.
One good technique for getting started is to note down the various work tasks from a day at work, or to use a description of occupation as a reference.
It can be smart to make some examples of filed in documents as a guidance in the process of filling in ones own.

6) Attesting of documents
As a rule, it is necessary to talk with the manager before signing the document.
It is advised that the document contains the following:
- A statement concerning work tasks
- A statement of competence
- Professional skill competences
- Personal and social competences
- Leadership/managerial competences
- Other relevant statements
The employee is the sole owner of the document. This implies that the employee decides how the document is to be used.

7) Following up
The process of documentation will create expectations of change in one form or another – either in the form of further education, or other work tasks or increased esteem. If the plan for following up the work has been agreed and information has been well organized en route, mistakes can be avoided.

8) A continuing process
Because of the life long learning approach a process like this should be kept up to date on regular basis. The next time the process is started; preparatory work will go smoother because everyone has experienced how this process is carried out.

You know more than you think!
Vox has developed a comprehensive motivation campaign to encourage SMEs to map and document competences. A group of so-called "ambassadors", locally selected and trained to motivate employers and employees, have taken part in the campaign together with Vox representatives. Among the material used was a "start package" that included forms that can be used to document non-formal and informal learning. In the package was also a humorous film that illustrate the message of the campaign ("You know more than you think"), and which is currently being translated to Swedish.
An analysis of the results of the campaign is done in one of the campaign counties[31]. Both employers and employees were in included in the sample. The survey showed that 33% of the employers responding had noticed the campaign, while only 9% of the employees had heard about it. When asked if the company themselves do any mapping of competences more than 60% of the employers answered yes. This corresponds well with the answers from employees. 41% of the employers/HR managers informed that the follow up of the mapping procedure includes continuing education and learning initiatives.

From rhetoric to reality – the situation today

The Norwegian approach to recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is characterised by:
• It needs to be beneficial to the individual
• It is based on respect for diversity
• Competence is contextual

It is beneficial to the individual by giving people that have fallen off the education wagon "a new chance" and give credits for their learning in the workplace, the home or any other voluntary activities. To document non-formal and informal learning will increase employability for the individual.
It is based on respect for diversity by the acknowledgement that not one method will suit all people and the assessor has to be sensitive to the needs of the individual. It is not a "one-size-fits-all" strategy. Respect for diversity is also demonstrated in the acknowledgement of many different learning arenas with different requirements to the documentation and validation of competence.

Competence is contextual. A person's competence can't be treated as an objective measurable. There has been a general understanding that competence is created in relation with other people in a particular context and can not be assessed in simple quantitative ways.

[31] The Vox Barometer (2005).

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Based on the experimentation and the above mentioned key characteristics, the Norwegian framework for the documentation and validation of non-formal and informal learning has reached a certain consensus. It contains:
- Shared laws, rules and agreements to ensure the rights of the individual.
  - The shared laws include The Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.
- Shared procedure for various forms of documentary proof and validation. This includes decisions on: who is responsible; what is the documentation based on and is there a possibility for complaints; the process of documentation and validation; and where the process takes place.
- The shared procedure comprises the following steps:
  1. Information and guidance
  2. Identification and systemisation of competences
  3. (Self) Assessment
  4. Documentary proof
- Various assessment methods, tools and documentary proof, which are suitable in relation to the requirements of the educational sector, the workplace or the third sector.
  - Diverse assessment methods in relation to upper secondary level that give a national certificate
  - Diverse tools for documenting competence in the workplace that give a company verified documentary proof
  - Several CV/portfolios where educational certificates, work experience and learning from third sector activities are compiled.

Another result is that an increasing degree of acceptance and confidence has been achieved between the workplace, education and the third sector while the work of validation has been in progress. We have seen a slight change in the attitude to learning outside the education sector.

Surveys show that those who need continuing education and training the most, i.e. those who have not completed upper secondary education, do not know about their statutory rights. Therefore, those who have the greatest need for new competence do not know about or are not adequately motivated to make good use of this legal right. A major challenge for many stakeholders will be to meet the need for more targeted and motivating information in the future.
There are reasons for claiming that information and motivation activities must be intensified and more specifically targeted to particular groups. There is an unrealised potential for such activities within the framework of the workplace, through employee representatives and employers.

The aim of assessment of non-formal and informal learning is to reveal the undocumented and relevant competence of each adult as a basis for an adapted and shortened study

path. The figures show that a step has been taken in the direction of a national system, but that some work remains to be done before the system can be fully implemented. Interestingly, it appears that individuals who have actually undergone such assessment are quite satisfied with the outcome. This is precisely what should be the motivation behind the activities to be undertaken in the future.

Recognition of learning outcomes, following divers learning experiences, was at the very core of the Norwegian Competence Reform. This will still be an important aspect when exploring the idea of a national framework in Norway, covering all levels of education and training. Maybe the framework both at European and national levels will prove to be a "missing link" between the providers of education, individual needs and working life – in a lifelong learning perspective.

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Surveys illustrate that we have not yet fully implemented a national system for validation in Norway. There is a need for bringing further development of framework and arrangements for adult learning on the political and practical agenda in both the regional and the national level.

5 VPL in the voluntary sector in the Netherlands

Ruud Duvekot & Jana Eggert

Lately there has been increased attention for the validation or valuation of prior, i.e. non-formal and informal, learning in The Netherlands. During the 1990's the first national policy outlines were presented, following from the attention that was already given to the concept of lifelong learning. Nowadays, several branches and companies have started initiatives in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The voluntary sector, or the 3rd sector, with more than 3 million volunteers is rapidly becoming an important player in the field of VPL. Why and how is explained in this article**32**.

The aim of this article is to show that VPL can play a vital role in the voluntary sector, especially to make competences in the 3rd sector better recognizable and easier to monitor and validate. The competencies involved are those learnt in a non-formal way through voluntary services practiced by young people. This aim stresses the need to make better use of these skills for many purposes but especially to raise awareness amongst voluntary organisations and young people that they have better chances – on organisational level – to work with competent people and be able to attract new volunteers more easily, and – from the individual perspective – have a better chance of participating in society and, for instance, stand better chances of getting a job. Moreover this aim implies raising awareness amongst organisations and young people, to understand better in what kind of learning environment volunteers are working.

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32 This article is based on a report for the Leonardo-project Civil Service Apprenticeship (I/04/B/F/PP-154007).

The 3rd sector in the Netherlands: definitions, laws and peculiarities

1. The Netherlands

The Netherlands have more than 16 million inhabitants. With an average population density of 479 persons per km² it is in Europe, after Malta, the country with the highest population density. The average population density in the European Union is 116 persons per km2.
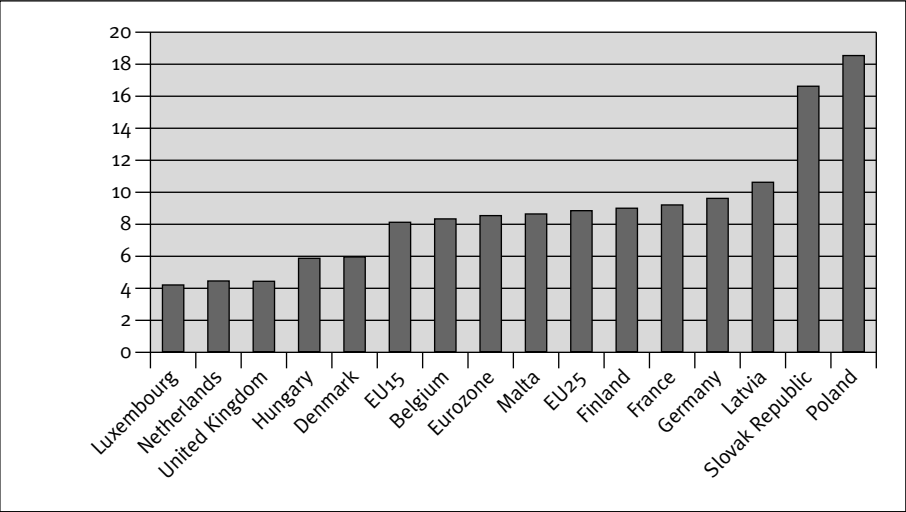
Tabel: Unemployment rates 2004

The Netherlands has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe. In 2004 the unemployment figure was 4.9% (Eurostat, 2004). But in the economically difficult times especially the lower educated persons suffered and got unemployed. Often these persons have followed a different learning path (learning by doing), which isn't awarded with formal diplomas. In the meantime the quality requirements by companies and by regulations set by the government require more and more a specific diploma to be allowed to have a specific job on the labour market.

Volunteering in the Netherlands – definition and composition

Although the Dutch economy is dominated by activities in the commercial sector, the voluntary sector also has an active and vital role to play.

Official definition

The Dutch use two forms to refer to voluntary action: *vrijwillig* (voluntary) and *vrijwilligerswerk* (volunteering). The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, (VWS) defines volunteering as work that is performed in an organised context and without obligation or pay for the benefit of other people or a community; volunteers may not depend upon their activities for their livelihood. According to the Dutch national volunteer centre (CIVIQ), volunteering should be unpaid, carried out in an organised context, for the benefit of others and society. Volunteer activities must not compete with paid work and must be auxiliary. This last condition means that the decisions of volunteers to quit should not pose undue hardship on organisations.

Scope and composition

According to the results of a longitudinal survey conducted by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office and the Central Bureau for Statistics, approximately 4.5 million persons are occupied in some sort of volunteering in the Netherlands. The primary focus of this survey was on the amount of time contributed by volunteers.

In 2002, the greatest number of volunteers was between the ages of 35 and 45. Volunteering among the elderly (above the age of 75) was the lowest, although the participation of adults between the ages of 65 and 75 was relatively high (40%). Volunteer participation is decreasing among young people, possibly as a result of changes in the demands of school (due to recent tightening of criteria for scholarships and other forms of student financial aid). Double-income households with children contribute the most volunteers, together with their older counterparts whose children recently left home. The table below shows volunteer participation according to age, expressed in total number of volunteers and the percentage of individuals within each age category that were active in volunteering.

AGE	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	PERCENTAGE VOLUNTEERING
15-19	367,531	39
20-24	320,217	33
25-34	906,581	38
35-44	1,319,282	51
45-54	1,036,435	45
55-64	773,921	45
65-74	484,621	40
75-84	189,035	25

SOURCE: STATISTICS NETHERLAND (2002)

According to the National volunteer centre, activities involving sports, religion and health and social care are among the most popular forms of volunteer activity in the Netherlands. The following table shows the major areas in which volunteers are active ranked in order of the prevelance of volunteer activity.

AREA	RANKING
Sports	1
Religion	2
Health and Social Care	3
Education	4
Community Participation and Development	5
Housing	6
Legal services	7
Art and Culture	8
Trade Unions and unionised labour	9
Animals	10

SOURCE: CIVIQ

Recreation and having been asked were the motivations most frequently reported by Dutch volunteers. The table below shows the five most important categories of volunteer motivations, ranked in decreasing order of prevalence.

MOTIVATION	RANKING
Recreation	1
Being asked	2
Sense of social responsibility	3
Desire to meet people	4
Personal needs	5

SOURCE: CIVIQ

Support for volunteering in the Netherlands
There is both at national and at local level much support for volunteering.

Government
The Dutch government considers volunteering as an integral part of civil society and a tool for integrating individuals into the society (e.g. through programmes for social inclusion, social activation and the integration of refugees). The government seeks also to strengthen local volunteering.

The distribution of power to develop policies affecting volunteering is strongly decentralised in the Netherlands, and the various ministries have their own policies on volunteering, and local and provincial governments have considerable freedom in implementing national guidelines set by the Ministry of VWS. VWS has the responsibility for co-ordinating volunteering policy.

The Dutch government supports volunteering in the following ways:
- Organising high-profile events and nation-wide campaigns;
- Supporting volunteer centre infrastructure;
- Sponsoring studies and research on volunteering;
- Gathering data to establish the economic value of volunteering;
- Encouraging local communities to develop and implement new policies on volunteering;
- Encouraging public and private sector organisations to take an active part in volunteering;
- Ensuring the accessibility of volunteer opportunities to all societal groups;
- Introducing formal credentials and standards for managers and trainers of volunteers;
- Providing financial support for volunteer training;
- Promoting volunteering, with emphasis on the engagement of young people;
- Stimulating quality in volunteering.

Local government
Local government supports volunteering by publishing official papers on volunteering, organising high-profile events and campaigns, encouraging the media to support public awareness-raising activities, encouraging public sector workers to volunteer, supporting volunteer centre infrastructure and sponsoring studies and research on volunteering.

Legislation for volunteering
At the national level, volunteering policy is formulated in the Welfare Law of 1994. The law specifies the responsibilities of each of the three levels of government (national, provincial and local). The law allows the national government to act, with the provincial support system for volunteering sharing responsibility for the executive volunteering tasks with local governments. A new law is expected to replace this legislation in the near future.

The only official policy that specifically addresses volunteers is a regulation regarding expenses. Volunteers can claim all expenses related to their activities with volunteer organisations as exemptions on their income tax returns. There is no legislation regarding insurance coverage and similar matters.

Observing the need for certainty concerning the law regarding volunteering, the Dutch government has considered developing a series of general rules to apply to voluntary activity, including the implementation of a volunteer test, reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and a system of bonuses for those engaging in voluntary activities.

Funding for volunteering

Programmes of governmental support have shifted from providing ongoing operational funding to organisations towards sponsorship of specific, time-limited projects. Some of the proceeds from this shift are allocated directly to local projects for volunteering involving young people.

The Ministry of VWS facilitates a variety of non-profit volunteer organisations. It established a temporary fund for local and provincial governments, and it created a national committee to stimulate provincial and local policy.

Because the Welfare Law does not specify how much local governments must spend on volunteering, allocations vary across local governments. For the most part, local volunteer centres and organisations usually receive subsidies.

Recognition

The government provides recognition for volunteering by financing various volunteer organisations, establishing a temporary fund for local and provincial governments and including measures formulated in governmental policy papers.

The Dutch government sponsors also the National Compliment, an annual prize for the best volunteer project. Local-level recognitions involve a variety of programmes that are implemented by local volunteer centres and local governments. Examples of these programmes include local prizes recognising individual volunteers, volunteer organisations, volunteer projects, active citizen participation in policy making processes.

National Volunteer Centre

The Dutch national volunteer centre (CIVIQ) was established in 2003 as a result of a merger between the Foundation for Volunteer Management (SVM) and the branch organisation for volunteer organisations (NOV). These organisations were designated in 1994 as the most important sources of support for volunteering. Because the two organisations worked together so closely, the distinctions between them became vague, resulting in the decision to merge. The national volunteer centre addresses issues with VWS, provides information on the regulation of expenses, is involved in measuring the results of governmental initiatives. CIVIQ maintains an information centre, provides

consultation, coaching and training, conducts research and publishes books, magazines and a newsletter.

Since the United Nations 2001 International Year of volunteers, the Dutch national volunteer centre has conducted an initiative (FreeFlex), which consists of an online database and support organisations for short-term volunteering, volunteers can search and apply for short-term volunteer positions, posting their résumés and preferences on the site. Volunteer organisations can post their vacancies (for short-term positions) and search the résumé database. FreeFlex also mediates for larger groups of volunteers.

Issues and future development of volunteering in the Netherlands

Volunteering in the Netherlands has received remarkable political support in recent years, both in terms of infrastructure and the stimulation of new volunteers' activities. Non-profit and for-profit organisations are increasingly co-operating to stimulate volunteering. Further, volunteer organisations are facing increasing pressure to professionalize their operations (e.g. through output-driven financing and computerisation).

Despite the positive developments, volunteers in the Netherlands have no recognised legal status. The regulatory atmosphere has made it increasingly difficult for volunteer organisations to identify and recruit suitable volunteers to fill administrative (board) positions. Under existing laws, Dutch authorities cannot grant general exemptions from social security contributions and taxes to full-time volunteers and the organisations that support them.

Moreover, the official definition of a volunteer (provided by VWS) does not include volunteers who receive support (e.g. pocket money, room and board) under the category of full-time volunteers. The most uncertain situation under the existing Dutch legal framework is that of volunteers who come to the Netherlands from abroad. Complying with the 'sufficient income' requirements for official permission to stay in the country is virtually impossible for overseas volunteers who are supported by organisations or other third parties.

To further ensure the position of volunteering on the political agenda, it is important to stimulate the involvement of more ministries and local governments. In addition, a national political agenda for the stimulation of voluntary work on a more structural basis must be formulated, and a new relation between public and private actors in the field of volunteering must be formalised.

National policies on validation of non formal and informal learning: the Dutch example

Some definitions used in the Netherlands

The Dutch term for valuation of non-formal and informal learning is EVC, "Erkenning van Verworven Competenties"; literally translated this means accreditation of acquired competences. The Dutch term EVC can best be compared with the term APL = Accreditation of Prior Learning or VPL = Valuation/Validation of Prior Learning. These competencies include both outcomes from non-formal and informal as well as more formal learning processes. It includes a commitment to formal recognition of outcomes using the national qualification standard. EVC is empowering the individual as well as organizations, for instance by linking individual ambitions with organisational targets.

Formal learning is learning through national accredited schools and regular education. Non-formal learning is learning through company courses and other non-regular education. Informal learning is learning through activities that are not designed to be a learning environment such as the workplace, at home and through social work[33].

The vision on EVC is threefold:
1. The recognition of competences
2. The validation of competences
3. The development of competences

We call recognition and validation only a small vision and a reactive approach on EVC. A broader, desirable and proactive approach combines recognition and validation with the development of competences. The broader approach on EVC includes stimulating learning and knowledge development[34].

VPL bridges formal, non-formal and informal learning. It values the competences (the output) and not the path of learning. EVC also bridges the gap between learning environments such as school, work, voluntary work and private life and assumes that in each environment learning is done and competencies are build.

Short history

During the early 1990s, the Dutch government felt that regular education should be made more accessible for adults. This led to the establishment of the Commission on the 'Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills' (EVK) in 1993.

The Commission published its report 'Recognizing Informal Skills' in March 1994. This marked the launch of EVK: the recognition of informally acquired skills, and emphasized

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33 Duvekot, R.C., E. Kaemingk & R. Klarus, Geleerd wordt er toch! In: *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11*, 2003, 10-15.

Klarus, R. (1998). *Competenties erkennen*. (dissertatie) 's-Hertogenbosch: CINOP.

34 Duvekot, R.C., E. Kaemingk & T. Pijls (2003). *The world of EVC*. Houten: Kenniscentrum EVC.

the need to increase accessibility to education traditionally based on formal qualifications or the award of certificates.

The Cabinet responded positively to the report. It accepted that EVK could make a useful contribution to the functioning of the labour and training markets, especially for individuals. The implementation of the scheme had to tie in with existing structures and the stakeholders had to pay the costs of implementing. The Cabinet agreed to provide a set of instruments to assist EVK, including the necessary development funding.
The various stakeholders now actively got down to work. Schools, national professional education institutions, employment agencies, educational advisory bureaus, companies and other players began to work on the elaboration of EVK, either alone or in partnership.

This work was resumed following the unveiling of the national action programme of the first liberal-socialist coalition government in 1998. The programme states, among other things, that: "More should be done to ensure that the workplace is used as a centre of learning. The experience gained should be made visible as informally acquired skills and qualifications. The Cabinet wants to assist this by setting up a system in which informally acquired knowledge and experience, that is, knowledge and experience gained outside the formal education system, can be tested and recognised."

Finally, the STAR (committee of social partners) recommendations "Lifelong learning at work" (June 1998) made an important contribution to the further elaboration of the concept of lifelong learning[35].

Vision on VPL

The discussion in the Netherlands focuses on the underlying principle of accepting that 'your glass is already half filled'. Personal competences can be developed in formal learning processes (classrooms, training situations). Competence-development, however, also takes place in non-formal and informal learning processes: on the job, at home, in voluntary work and through hobbies. If these personal competences can be described and compared with formal qualifications, then it should be possible to recognise them as valid. This valuation of competences can have a positive impact on the individual: at organisation or sector level and at national or qualification level. It can either support *summative* goals, aiming at certification, or *formative* goals, focusing on career-development. We define this way of dealing with 'your' competences as Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) when formative goals are set and Validation of Prior Learning in the case of summative goals.

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[35] Duvekot, R.C. & R. Klarus (2002). Een visie op EVC. *Handboek Effectief Opleiden 29/185*. Doetinchem: EHR.

Lifelong learning is about making use of personal competences. Everyone should be aware that you are always learning everywhere, and above all, not always in a conscious or self-chosen learning situation. The degree in which individuals and the knowledge society consciously build on this is still strongly underexposed and under-utilised. In the knowledge society, the focus is or should be on the individual learning process.

A complicating factor in dealing with this focus is that the formal procedures of training and testing describe only a very limited part of the individual learning potential or competences. Competences acquired in informal and non-formal situations may also be essential for optimal implementation of tasks on the labour market or social functions.

EVC: actors and practice

The use of VPL strongly differs between sectors depending on the specific needs for learning. The healthcare sector mostly wants to solve the problem of getting new, competent employees, in metal and process industry this goes for the moving on and upskilling of staff, and in the building industry the problem of moving on to related sectors. In general most VPL procedures aim at providing people with a nationally recognised diploma (the aim is to certify; the summative approach). In a growing number the procedures are followed up with concrete steps aimed at learning and the development of individuals (VPL as an formative approach).

VPL is usually limited to a specific branch or sector, however, sometimes activities stretch beyond branches. A nice example can be found in the Dutch health care where a homecare organisation thought of ways to fit a group of farmer's wives into their own work processes on the basis of competence-valuation. During the VPL procedure, this target group could prove to have the required competences for certain positions within the home care organisation on the basis of competences acquired outside of the regular learning paths.

Regarding the level of education, VPL is aimed particularly at competence development on upper secondary vocational level. The reason is not only that most of the positions on the labour market are on this level, but also because of the availability of a workable standard – a qualification structure – to measure competences. Such a general standard for measuring an individual's competences is not always available on higher vocational education level due to the fact that on this level every faculty can make and use its own standard. The use of the VPL system on this level is mostly limited to an VPL intake to provide exemptions to students.

Sector trainingfunds often take the initiative for VPL. For instance in collective labour agreements the social partners agree in specific sectors that trainingfunds can be used for the valuation of personal competences of employees. Sometimes they even agree on using the fund for giving learningvouchers to the employees. The trainingfund provides the portfolio models, internal assessors and guidance.

VPL in non-paid or voluntary work is widely spread, for example in sports clubs, Scouting and the Red Cross. Apart from the need for these organisations to show that they work with qualitatively accredited staff, VPL is also used to profile the organisation as a solid learning environment. This supports both the recruitment of new volunteers and the possibilities to move up for "current" volunteers.

The use of VPL in employment offices and the reintegration sector is limited until now, but there are strong signs that this will be caught up. Initiatives show that although the investment in time is limited, customer-friendly procedures are possible. The benefits differ from country to country. A precondition seems to be general legislation that offers the individual the right services tot take control of their individual learning in the past and design their future career-path, based on their specific, individual competences. The individual involved fills the portfolio him/herself on the basis of which accurate mediation is possible. The success rate is rising for these organisations and therefore the social-economic effects of VPL.

Public authorities and VPL
The Dutch government chose a bottom-up approach regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This didn't result directly in many initiatives. Several policy outlines have been made, but since the beginning of 2001, responsibility for stimulating initiatives has been placed in the hands of the Kenniscentrum EVC (EVC Knowledge Center). The role of the government, ministries and the Knowledge Center will be further described in the following chapter, which deals with stakeholders' responsibilities.

Since there is a clear qualification structure on the level of upper secondary vocational education at ROCs, most of the EVC-initiatives have been introduced on this level. EVC is perceived as a tool for stimulating economic effects. The perspective is that it enhances the transparency on the labour market and increases the efficiency of the certification of skills and competences. Long-term formal education is replaced by a quick scan of people's abilities to fulfill tasks and to formalize it. As a result, employers do not have to wait for an indication of the competences of their workers[36]. Because economic profits are expected from EVC, the responsibility for it is placed in the hands of the Ministries of Economic Affairs, Social Affairs and Education. They didn't formulate strict rules and regulations, but a couple of preconditions instead, which sector organisations and employers could use as a guideline for setting up EVC procedures:

• Existence of facilities for assessment-procedures;
• Accessibility towards the procedures;
• System for quality-assurance of the procedures;
• Practical qualification standards;

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36 Werkgroep EVC, *De fles is halfvol! Een brede visie op de benutting van EVC*, Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2000.

- Stimulating financial and judicial framework;
- Facilitative (inter) national framework;
- Effectiveness and efficiency calculation.

An exception to the decentralized policies of EVC in The Netherlands is the Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs (BIO) (the Law of Professions in Education). The law was approved by the Parliament in January 2004 and obliges workers in the educational sector to work on their employability after they've graduated and started working. On a national level, standards are going to be formulated to certify that teachers dispose of necessary qualifications[37].

The main reason to set up this law is the shortage of labour in the educational sector. While there is a lack of certificated people, the government tries to make it attractive for people with certain qualifications or valuable experience, to start working in the sector. Competences learned apart from the formal pathways are recognized through an assessment procedure. If a person's competences meet the qualification structure, he or she is able to work on a job in the educational sector directly. For people that miss certain competences, a training program may be offered first.

Industry

Since the end of the 1990's, quite some industry sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry and the care sector), have set up initiatives regarding EVC on their (sector) level. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up EVC-procedures. The Dutch government stimulates these initiatives through the EVC Knowledge Center.

To participate in an EVC-project, an employee normally has to have 3 to 5 years of experience in the sector he or she is working in. The general goal is to validate the competences that employees have learned by working. In some collective labour agreements (e.g. metal industry), employees have been given the right to participate in EVC. In these cases, the employer is formally obliged to help the employee to participate. In practice though, the employee is very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved.

In most cases, an intake meeting/interview with the employee is held first. On the basis of this intake, examiners decide whether the individual is able to participate in an exam or assessment procedure directly. In case not, the individual is offered education or training for improving his or her competences. Afterwards he or she is asked to participate in an exam-procedure for certification of qualifications. In some cases the individual makes a portfolio in which experience is presented by a sum of certificates, notes and projects that have been worked on.

[37] Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague.

Often, informally acquired competences are matched with procedures, which are part of *the Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs* (= Law on Education and Vocational Training). An examining board produces its own qualification standards[38] in co-operation with representatives of the sector organizations. In almost all EVC-procedures the examining board contains representatives of a ROC[39]. It's a summative validation process, in that it focuses on the recognition of competences that were learned after a certain period.

Individual companies

Although several companies have set up EVC-procedures for employees in the last couple of years, a systematic and comprehensive overview on a national level is not available. Well-known companies that have introduced EVC in their human resource management are: Corus, Heinz, Auping, Rockwool, Shell and BSN Glasspack[40]. There is a belief in these companies that employees learn a lot while working and that certification helps both company and employee to indicate what competences are present (acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal way). Furthermore, these companies are aware that their working floor is a strong learning environment to keep on learning while working. In this sense EVC turns into a formative approach!

Like in the industry sectors, most EVC-procedures in companies start with an intake-interview, which is arranged by a representative of the human resources/education department. In some cases the individual is asked to make a portfolio. An overview of all experience and expertise of the person is made. On the basis of the portfolio, an examining board will visit the workplace where the employee is asked to fulfill some tasks. If the employee has shown that he or she has the required competences, a certificate is handed over. Sometimes, the manager of an employee may be involved in the process of recognizing competences. He may be asked for specific background information regarding the competences of the employee.

Another procedure is to make an indication of the competences of the individual directly during the interview. Again, a manager may offer help. If the interviewer assumes that the competences of the individual meet the necessary qualifications, an examination will take place (some weeks after the interview). In case the competences of the employee are not sufficient for a direct examination procedure, a training course is offered to increase competences.

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38 Kenniscentrum EVC, *Alle hens aan EVC, de verankering van EVC in elke context, jaarplan 2004*, p. 11.

39 Source: Knowledge Center EVC www.kenniscentrumevc.nl / Ministry of Economic Affairs, www.minez.nl

40 Een jaar '*Passie & Rendement*', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004.

In almost all EVC-procedures, the examination is executed by representatives of a regional vocational training center (ROC). Most companies try to follow the formal regulations, described in the Law on education and vocational training (Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs; WEB). It is valued as important, while employees receive a certificate or diploma with national value. Staring up EVC within companies is mostly a matter of summative assessment. Formative valuation however is rapidly emerging.

Best practice example – Introducing EVC at Heinz[41]

Certificates with both a sector and national value have been introduced among the employees of Heinz. The new qualification structure is connected with the national regulations in the Wet Educatie Beroepsonderwijs. Heinz hopes to motivate employees to reflect in a better way and to adept to necessary changes quicker. The employer also strives for more employability among its employees. The translation from informal to formal qualifications has been executed through co-operation with a ROC. Employees have been asked to participate by making a portfolio, which consists of a list of 80 tasks. An employee indicates which tasks he has fulfilled in the last couple of years. Afterwards a 'criteria-focused interview' will be held for a better understanding of a person's competences. An assessment follows, in which the employee executes several tasks. Both an internal and external examiner (ROC) value the employee's competences. From 2001 to 2003, 32 employees attained the EVC-procedure at H.J. Heinz B.V. Half of them were given a certificate directly. The others had to follow a short training program. Heinz B.V. won the national EVC-award in 2003.

Third sector

The Kenniscentrum EVC said in its work plan for 2004: 'There are more than 3,000,000 volunteers in the Netherlands. These people acquire all kinds of non-formal competences during their activities. These may be relevant according to the development of their individual working lives. The development of individual working lives can be designed inside and outside voluntary organisations'[42].

As far as there are initiatives to formalize non-formal learning, it takes place within voluntary organisations themselves. The ministries and social partners are not involved in this.

In 2002, the study 'Vrijwilligers en EVC' (Volunteers and EVC) was published in which the present and future role of EVC towards voluntary work presented. Some examples were published as well. In the health care sector it is possible to shorten the period a student is studying for his or her degree. Through an EVC-procedure he or she can show that some competences are already learned during voluntary activities. Another example is the Scouting Association[43]. Scouting has developed instruments for its members to report competences that were learned during scouting activities. Some educational bodies in the

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41 Een jaar '*Passie & Rendement*', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004.

42 Kenniscentrum EVC, *Alle hens aan EVC, de verankering van EVC in elke context, jaarplan 2004*.

43 The Dutch Red Cross makes use of EVC for volunteers as well.

Netherlands recognize competences that were learned during voluntary work. In some cases credits or exempts are given[44].

In most cases portfolios are used for measuring the competences that individuals have acquired during voluntary activities. According to a study, which was published in June 2003[45], some Dutch voluntary organisations have introduced EVC procedures on their own. The quality of these procedures is still low. It's more a matter of talking about competences than recognition of competences. Sometimes certificates are given or portfolio procedures are followed; these are the first steps towards more professional EVC-procedures. Most voluntary organisations are positive about the effects of EVC. They expect that more people will start working as a volunteer, because competences can strengthen people's position on the labour market. Voluntary organisations themselves also expect to have profits from the recognition of qualifications.

It seems clear that in the following years, more attention will be given to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in voluntary work. An important goal will be to increase the quality of EVC in voluntary organisations. It is in the interest of both lifelong learning and voluntary work itself to stimulate these developments[46].

General output of EVC

In the so-called EVC-monitor 2001-2002[47], the output[48] of EVC has been measured on a national and sector level. While EVC is a relatively new concept, output is hard to measure precisely and particularly qualitative. In the monitor an indication was made that, in The Netherlands, around 6,000 persons out of 500 organisations participated in an EVC-project[49]. The Kenniscentrum EVC estimates that, because of the rising popularity with employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures around employment exchange and the reintegration market, the numbers have increased with 50% since 2002. More qualitative material shows that HR-departments have started to use EVC-techniques to

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44 Nafzger, J. *Vrijwilligers en EVC, verkenning van het EVC-potentieel in vrijwilligerswerk*, Kenniscentrum EVC, 2002.

45 Dam, E. & Frietman, J. '*Wenselijkheid en haalbaarheid van het erkennen van competenties van vrijwilligers*', Kenniscentrum Beroepsonderwijs Arbeidsmarkt, June 2003.

46 See also: *Vrijwilligers en EVC – een globale verkenning van de stand van zaken in een aantal Europese landen*, Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn (NIZW), 2002.

47 Hövels, B. & Romijn, C. *EVC-monitor 2001-2002*, kenniscentrum EVC, 2003.

48 See also: Verhaar, C. H. A., *Wat kan EVC opleveren?: Onderzoek naar het rendement van EVC in de Nederlandse praktijk anno 2002*, Lemma, 2002.

49 Duvekot, R., Kaemingk, E., Klarus, R. Leren doe je toch, het gebruik van EVC op de arbeidsmarkt, *Opleiding en Ontwikkeling*, 2003.

work on the employability of employees (sometimes through competence manage-ment[50]). Although most employers have not seen a strong increase in the productivity of their organization, they feel there is commitment of the personnel as well as consciousness regarding competences that are necessary for the execution of tasks. Employees have been given a certificate and say to have gained self-confidence.

Responsibilities

There hardly exist laws and regulations regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands. While initiatives regarding EVC are primarily placed in the hands of interest bodies, social partners and sector organisations, the Dutch government has chosen a bottom-up method for the stimulation and implementation of EVC[51].

The appearance of the report 'Kwaliteiten Erkennen' (Recognizing Informal Skills), which was written by the Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills in 1994, was the general start for placing the validation of non-formal and informal learning (EVC) on the Dutch policy agenda. EVC is aimed to establish a basis for life long learning and employability. 'The concept refers to the process of validation of acquired competences, by identification and validation, resulting – if appropriate – in recognition of competencies'[52].

During the end of the 1990's, the Dutch government focused their attention on the recognition of EVC. The general view was that the concept should be decentralized (to sector industry levels) and output-oriented[53]. EVC was seen as a tool for strengthening the ties between labour and education and as a solution for problems around shortages on some parts of the labour market.

An EVC workgroup was set up to investigate the future possibilities of the concept. Their outline was published in 2,000, under the title 'The glass is half full!'[54]. The title is based on the assumption that EVC must build further on existing knowledge and skills, instead of focusing on present lacks regarding skills and knowledge.

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[50] A good example can be found in the HR-policies at Shell. The HR-department tries to make employees conscious of the (individual) possibilities to work on their employability.

[51] SER, '*Het nieuwe leren: advies over een leven lang leren in de kenniseconomie*', 2002

[52] Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J., *The learning continuity*, 2004. According to this report, there are more European countries in which there are no references made according to informal and non-formal learning.

[53] SER, '*Het nieuwe leren: advies over een leven lang leren in de kenniseconomie*', 2002.

[54] Werkgroep EVC/Ministerie van Economische Zaken, '*De fles is half vol!*', Den Haag, 2000.

Kenniscentrum EVC (Knowledge Center EVC)

In setting up the Kenniscentrum EVC (Knowledge centre on identification, recognition and accreditation of competences) in 2001, the Dutch government's intention was to promote the application of the EVC system in the Netherlands. The ministries of Economic Affairs; Education, Culture & Science and Social Affairs & Employment financed this Kenniscentrum EVC for a period of four years (2001-2004). The initiative also enjoyed the support of the social partners and educational umbrella organisations. The Kenniscentrum EVC operates largely on the basis of co-operation between various network partners. Its mission was continued in 2005 by the same ministries, now including also the involvement of the ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Nature.

The Kenniscentrum EVC studies, accumulates and distributes information on every imaginable aspect of EVC, such as national and international information pertaining to EVC projects, procedures, instruments, financing, yield and legislation. Incidental bottlenecks in the sphere of legislation and regulations are surveyed and discussed with the responsible authorities.

Research is carried out into the standard setting (= the yardstick for the definition and recognition of competencies), the civil status (= certification) for various parties and the level of accessibility of EVC provisions. Other activities include research into the various parties' interests in EVC, the profitability of EVC, the significance of EVC in the field of mediation and reintegration, into various assessment methods and validity, and the preconditions for the application of EVC in the small and medium-sized business sector. The centre commissions third parties to execute these projects and carry out further research. The Kenniscentrum EVC is also involved in many international activities. By collaborating and exchanging knowledge it strengthens the learning process in the Netherlands about recognition and deployment of competencies.

Trade Unions

A central role is played by the Trade Unions. Through collective labour agreements, these parties have introduced EVC in several sectors. The goal is to have employees work on employability, so their position becomes stronger on the labour market.

Employer organisations

Most employer organisations are in favour of EVC. Certification leads to an indication and better understanding of the qualifications of employees. Through collective labour agreements, employer organisations make agreements about EVC as well.

Training Funds (O&O fondsen)

The agreements about EVC are often financed by Training Funds. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sector funds, which have originally been set up to support educational initiatives for employees[55].

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[55] Hövels, B. and Romijn, C., *Implementatie van EVC: rendement, toegankelijkheid en knelpunten, deelrapportage bij de EVC monitor 2001-2002*. Kenniscentrum EVC.

Some case studies in the 3rd sector

A few case studies are presented to point out the different roads VPL is taking in the Dutch 3rd sector.

1. "Modernising sports-training" for the sake of the volunteer, the sport organization and the society (NOC*NSF)

This case study regards voluntary work in the sport sector. Eight national sport organizations act as pilots. Target group is 70,000 active, mostly voluntary workers in these organizations. They cover age groups from 16 to 65. Most of them are members of a sport organization and are voluntary involved in training/coaching. Another group works voluntary in administrative or technical functions.

The organization that has implemented this project is the Netherlands Olympic Committee * Netherlands Sport Confederation (NOC*NSF). The NOC*NSF is an umbrella organization for all sports in the Netherlands. Some 90 national sports federations, representing more than 4,7 million sports men and women, belonging to 30,000 sports clubs and associations, are affiliated to NOC*NSF. With its manifesto, *The Netherlands – a Sports Nation*, NOC*NSF would like to strengthen the recognition of the importance of sport. Their manifesto presents five strong fundamentals of sport:

1. sports and education
2. sports clubs
3. sport in business
4. elite sport
5. the playing field (accommodations and events)

Goals of the project

The project aims at the up-skilling of coaches/trainers (volunteers) in the different sport organizations from qualification levels 3 & 4 to levels 4 & 5. Through this up-skilling, volunteers will be able to work on summative goals while working and the organizations will be able to show that their working environment is also a rich learning environment.

The result will be a new knowledge infrastructure available for volunteers with which they will be able to train themselves within the context of their organization. This means learning while working for the sake of the organisation and for the sake of the personal development plan in which certification and up-skilling are the goals, meaning both summative and formative goals for the sake of volunteer and his/her organization.

If the Dutch world of sport, the government and the business community make better use of sports, Dutch society as a whole will benefit much more than it does at present.

Recruitment of volunteers

The roles and tasks done by volunteers in civil service are: training the teams, doing the logistics, coaching the teams in games.

Volunteers are recruited from the 8 pilot-sport organizations. Work experience in coaching/training in the specific sports is the selection criterion for volunteers. Apart from

that they have to have a starting level of WEB 3 or 4, to be shown with an intake-procedure on basis of a competence-scan. The abilities required from people who want to take part in the project are:
• ambition to become a certified trainer/coach,
• willingness to self-assessment.

Description of the training program
On the basis of the existing qualification structure the specific competence profiles for every sport union will be described for the levels 4 and 5. Than a design for the training program, testing program, including a VPL-procedure, are made up. There is also teacher training incl. training material developed. Then the training program is started up. The last phase is the evaluation and monitoring.

Teachers involved in the training activities are from the training institutes of the sport organizations and teachers form professional universities.
Testing is done by:
• portfolio-assessment,
• assessment on-the-job (internal assessors),
• traditional exams.

2. Certification of trade union activists (ABVAKABO)
This case study regards voluntary work in the trade union. Target group is the trade union activist (volunteers with an employee-status) in the age from 18 till 65.

The organization that is implementing this project is ABVAKABO. ABVAKABO is a trade union for public and civil services with about 360,000 members (women 44%). The union has 15 main groups: central government, provincial and local authorities, education and research, health care, services, KPN/TPG/post offices, WSW/WIW, public market sector, utility companies, nursing homes and the target groups youth, women, pensioners and early retirees, benefit claimants and migrants.
Particulars: ABVAKABO FNV is the largest union in the public sector, but it is by no means still just a 'civil servants' union'. As a result of increasing privatisation, the union also has members in companies operating in the free market sector. Take KPN, for example, formerly the PTT. The union negotiates some 160 collective labour agreements.

Goals of the project
By matching of function-profiles of union activists with national qualification structure creating a basis for:
• stimulating trade union members to become (voluntary) trade union activists
• stimulating learning on the labour market through union learning representatives
• creating a new dimension in the services of trade unions to their members.

Recruitment of volunteers

Apart from organizational and governing jobs, the volunteers work as:
- policymakers
- communication-officers
- trainers
- counselors and guiders.

There are no specific selection criteria in order to be able to participate in this project. The only important thing is being already an active trade union volunteer.

Description of the training program

Aim is the matching of roles and function profiles with the profiles from the national qualification structure. In order to do this, the following steps are taken:
- Recognition of competences (portfolio)
- Validation of competences
- Advice of personal development
- Recruitment as an union learning representative

Teachers involved in the training activities are from upper secondary – and higher vocational education institutions.

Testing is done by:
- profile-matching (comparative analysis of the function profiles and the qualification profiles)
- portfolio-assessment
- assessment on-the-job (internal assessors).

3. Crafts training at the Batavia yard

This case study regards voluntary work in the shipbuilding. Target group is young drop-outs. The organization that has implemented the project is the Foundation "Bataviawerf". The Batavia yard was founded in 1985 when master shipbuilder Willem Vos was allocated an area on the Oostvaardersdijk on the Markermeer. At first the locality of the yard does not at all resemble any other Dutch cultural-historical attraction such as old ports or picturesque townscapes. The reason is that these are, of course, non-existent amidst the direct straightforwardness of the newly reclaimed province of Flevoland. And yet we are literally on historic grounds. For the bottom of the former Zuyder Zee holds the remains of many hundreds of vessels which have perished over the centuries in the rough inland sea which the Zuyder Zee used to be. If you drive through the polder you can see those wrecks sometimes, as small mounds rising out of the mostly flat landscape. The location of the yard used to be known as the Oostvaardersdiep long before the reclamation, because the large East-bound ships passed by this place in the Zuyder Zee bound for faraway destinations. In this maritime-historic environment the Batavia yard has brought the tradition of craftsmanship in shipbuilding back to life. Since its foundation the yard has developed into an important public attraction. So far nearly three million people have

visited the yard in Lelystad in order to gaze in admiration at the craftsmanship with which the Batavia was built.

Goals of the project

The project aims to give young people a training on the job in voluntary work (learning while working).

Recruitment of volunteers
The volunteers work to get qualifications in:
- Ship-carpentry
- Rigging and sail-making
- Wood- and ornament-carving
- New wooden buildings

Volunteers are recruited on the basis of attitude, ambition and talents.

Description of the training program

The training program is organized on the principle learning while working, on the basis of personal learning targets.
Teachers are also volunteers on the yard: craftsmen without formal pedagogical-didactical experience.
Testing is done by exams and assessment on the job.

4. Finding and recognizing of general volunteer experiences (Civiq/NIZW/IVIO)

This case study regards voluntary work in the re-integration sector. The target group consists of people in the age between 35 and 75 year.

There are three voluntary organisations that have implemented the project:
1. Stichting Maatschappelijke Dienstverlening Zaanstreek Waterland
2. Stichting Ravelijn
3. Regionaal Dienstencentrum Westfriesland

All three organisations are private volunteer centres. They work in their own region on the distribution of voluntary work.

Goals of the project

The aims of the project are:
- make it possible for voluntary organisations to define the competences that volunteers develop in their work
- make it possible for volunteers to recognize the competences developed in their work and get validation (in the form of a certificate or diploma)

Recruitment of volunteers

This project refers specially at the 'general voluntary competences'. The definition of 'general competences' is that these are competences which are important for a good

functioning in a voluntary organisation. These competences are not connected with a voluntary sector, but can be used in all settings of voluntary work.

There are no special requirements in order to be able to take part in the project.

Description of the training program

The general voluntary competences are described in the 'List of Voluntary Competences'. In the list you find all the competences a volunteer can develop in his/her work. The procedure aims to recognize the general voluntary experiences ant to validate them. Each volunteer receives a portfolio describing the tasks and competencies required for their position, and appropriate competencies to aspire towards in the future. The portfolio gives the volunteer the opportunity to provide evidence for all the skills that they have learnt.

The project works according to the following structure:

• instruction organization
• instruction volunteers
• filling in of portfolio
• (self)assessment
• validation
• certification.

Teachers involved in the training activities are the trainers/coaches of the particular voluntary organization.

Learning is assessed through a combination of self assessment and validation of the coach.

5. The recognition of volunteer experience (Scouting Gelderland)

This case study regards voluntary work in the scouting. The target group consists of young people in the age between 16 and 21 year, who are active at Scouting Gelderland at the one side and young people, who are registrated at schools for vocational education and training at the other side.

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

partner in zorg en welzijn). The two organisations now regularly have contact with Scouting Gelderland through feedback meetings, workshops and other meetings.

Goals of the project

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

- Many Scouting Volunteers experience difficulties in achieving acknowledgement for the experience they acquire during their volunteer work. Scouting Gelderland therefore wanted to recognise competences acquired by their volunteers in order to acknowledge their efforts.
- It was felt that validation initiatives might make the volunteer work within the organisation more attractive for young people.

- Scouting Gelderland also wanted to increase recognition not only of the work and efforts of individual volunteers, but also of the entire Scouting organisation. Because of their validation initiative, the Scouting organisation is now taken much more seriously by education institutions for example.
- There was a desire within the organization to properly establish and document the skills expected from group leaders, taking into account the needs of their team members.

Recruitment of volunteers

The skills which men develop by Scouting have connections with three contexts:

1. the context of the target group
2. the context of the organization
3. the context of the external relations

The organisation has developed three different competence profiles for volunteers – one for 'leaders', one for 'team leaders' and one for 'group guides'. Profiles were built up through looking at the competencies held by current leaders, and discussions with volunteers about what support they would ideally like from a leader. There are no special requirements in order to be able to take part in the project. Everyone who wants may take part in the project. Each volunteer receives a portfolio describing the tasks and competencies required for their position, and appropriate competencies to aspire towards in the future. The portfolio gives the volunteer the opportunity to provide evidence for all the skills that they have learnt, and encourages volunteers to describe their skills using terms which will be understandable by future employers and educational institutions.

Description of the training program

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

1. what am I good in?
2. how should I formulate my expertise?
3. Where can I actually use it?

Training methods included worked with the 'Star' methodology (looking at Situations, Tasks, types of Action and Results), and 'quality cards' which help people to establish what kind of qualities they have, and what qualities are needed in various professions. Each volunteer receives a portfolio describing the tasks and competencies required for their position, and appropriate competencies to aspire towards in the future. The portfolio gives the volunteer the opportunity to provide evidence for all the skills that they have learnt, and encourages volunteers to describe their skills using terms which will be understandable by future employers and educational institutions.

Learning is assessed within Scouting Gelderland through a combination of self assessment and discussion with Group Counsellors

6. The recognition of volunteer experience at STHL

This case study regards voluntary work in the welfare sector. Target group are volunteers who work at STHL.

The organization that has implemented the project is Stichting Telefonische Hulpdienst Limburg (STHL). STHL is a private, subsidized organisation which provides help through telecommunication means. There are three divisions of STHL:

1. SOS helpline
2. Children phone Limburg
3. SOS help Limburg, help via e-mail and chat

STHL was confronted with a declining interest in volunteer work. So the organization was forced to think of new ways to make volunteer work attractive. One of the solutions was to make the schedule more flexible. The other one was to make the work more interesting for sections of the populations such as young people, foreigners etc. So the organizations putted the emphasizes on internal training and the recognition of the experience.

Goals of the project

The project aims the recognition of the experience of all the volunteers working at STHL in order to support the individual in structuring his own career path. So the ambition is to provide the individual with useful job competences. In order to guarantee the civil effect of the internal training there is a matching with the national qualification structure level 3. The aim of the pilot is to transfer the experience to other similar organizations in order to get a wide-range recognition of the volunteer experience in the sector.

Recruitment of volunteers

The roles and tasks done by volunteers are to provide help via telecommunication means at people who are in need. There is a wide-scale recruitment campaign twice a year. Everyone who has interest at working at STHL receives information about the organization and the profile of the volunteer (what is required to work there, which expectations has the organization etc). If the person in question is still interested he/she has to fill in an form and send it back. Than a trainer decides if a particular person will be permitted to

make part of the selection. The selection consists of a intensive training-on-the-job-period. The training and the selection procedure are closed with the signing of a volunteer-contract. There are no requirements in order to be able to take part in the project: everyone who is interested in working at STHL, can join the team (after a selection procedure, see above).

Description of the training program

Each of the candidate-volunteers has to follow a training-on-the-job. The training consists of a theory-part (36 hours) and a practical training (3 times a shift listen in to an experience volunteer; 5 times a shift picking up the phone under guidance of an experienced volunteer).

The training program consists of:
- introduction
- basic attitude
- verbal communication
- conversationfases
- interim evaluation
- reporting and follow-up
- specific interventions (crisis)
- different kinds of people who call
- evaluation

Teachers involved in the training activities are trainers from the own organization on the one side and teachers from the schools for vocational education and training on the other side.
Testing is done by assessment – on-the-job and evaluation of the introduction period.

Conclusions

Volunteering in the Netherlands

In general we can state that volunteering is beneficial for society at all levels, in the private lives of individual volunteers as well al in the broader spheres of the state and commercial sectors. Factors that influence the nature of volunteering in a country include its economic, social and political landscapes, as well al its stage of development. Within the European Union, governments and stakeholders at all levels are developing policies on volunteering and participation. The goals of these policies are to influence and stimulate volunteering and civic participation and to explore various opportunities for support. Given the diversity that exists in the field of volunteering, however: it is impossible to specify a single, universal model for policies on volunteering.

The same goes for legislation concerning voluntary work. There are no specific laws or regulation for volunteers. Voluntary work is seen as any other kind of social-economic

activity on the labour market. Volunteers therefore work under the same jurisdiction as paid workers!

The usage of VPL in voluntary work in general aims at – on the individual side – employability or re-socialisation and – on the organisation level – the intake of new volunteers and the usability of volunteers. Both individuals and organisations use VPL for summative (certification) or formative (career guidance) purposes.

Initiators of voluntary work and projects can be persons or groups from a:
• company
• local broker in socially responsible business practice
• volunteer centre
• Chamber of Commerce
• foundation (social welfare or other)
• trade association
• social welfare or voluntary organisations
• provincial support organisation
• charitable trust
• service club
• municipality or province
• enthusiastic individual/party.

VPL in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, EVC (Erkenning Verworven Competenties – Recognition of Acquired Skills) is the term used for the valuation & validation of non-formal or informal learning.

National, governmental initiatives regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning have primarily taken place during the end of the 1990's. From then on, the Dutch government has taken a bottom-up approach regarding EVC. This led to the start of the Kenniscentrum EVC (National Knowledge Center) in 2001 which aims at supporting and co-ordinating the implementation of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands.

On both the level of industrial sectors and the individual companies, initiatives regarding EVC have been taken in the last couple of years. Trade unions, employer organisations and the Training Funds have a stimulating role regarding the implementation of EVC. Employees themselves have a relative weak position in claiming access to EVC-procedures; they're dependent on the decision-making of the employer. In most cases the employer pays for the EVC-procedures. A donation from the Training Funds sometimes takes place. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these funds.

Procedures in industry sectors and companies start in most cases with an intake interview. Following from that, a portfolio procedure or assessment follows. A combination of these

activities is a possibility as well. Summative assessment occurs more often than formative assessment.

To strive for a broad recognition of competences (sector and national), many regulations are followed; in particular the Wet op Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs (Law on Education and Vocational Training). Representatives of ROC's (Regional Development Centres) are mostly asked to participate in the examiners board.

Since we deal with a relatively new concept, the output of EVC is not that clear yet. Nevertheless, both employees and employers are enthusiastic about the possibilities and first outcomes.

In the third sector, the first initiatives have been recently set up. In the last two years, several research and policy documents have been published that underline the possibilities of EVC for both the volunteers as well as the third sector itself. Volunteers may use the formalization of their competences in career-development. The voluntary sector may become more attractive in itself as well.

SWOT-analysis of the case studies

Strong points
The advantages of the projects – as described in the case studies – concerning competences and abilities developed by volunteers are:
- learning becomes a personal reality and possibility,
- the nature of the voluntary work is recognized by certification-institutes,
- organizations are able to describe their need for competences: the organization gets to know which competences the volunteers working there have and which they have to develop,
- organizations are able to promote voluntary work and attract more volunteers,
- organizations are able to modernize their services to members,
- helping the process of self-developing forward and increasing of the personal confidence of some volunteers,
- volunteers who have had their prior learning validated can be exempted from following certain formal training courses (formal training is required in particular in relation to working safely with children, dealing with disabilities, communication skills),
- organisations get a better image for attracting new volunteers.

The surplus of the projects in relation to the aim of a better employability of volunteers can be seen in:
- volunteers get also employability-changes through their voluntary work; the recognition of voluntary experiences can lead to an improvement of the position of the labour market,
- organizations can focus more accurate on selection of volunteers.

Weak points

Improvements of the voluntary work in general and VPL in particular are possible through:
- raising awareness,
- getting commitment form employers and the legislators,
- recognition of learning by other (professional) groups,
- more support for individuals at national level to design a portfolio model to meet their own needs,
- co-operation with schools for vocational education and training costs a lot energy and time.

Resistance the sector faces are:
- teachers from schools and institutes; they don't like it that other persons get control over the learning/certification process. Especially the certification is their domain,
- connecting it to the public learning system,
- experience gained through voluntary work is often not taken seriously,
- the Dutch government is not pushing the validation issue high enough on their agenda,
- the procedure takes a lot of time, so organizations has to calculate this before getting started,
- structural financing the procedure,
- cultural: *is voluntary work real work?*

Opportunities

The opportunities that may be 'captured' to get better achievement of the projects are:
- getting recognition for voluntary work as a certifiable learning ground,
- raising awareness amongst social partners and authorities,
- the general profile of the competences gained through voluntary work in the Netherlands has been raised, with wider recognition of the efforts made, and skills and knowledge of volunteers,
- making organizations based on the voluntary principle more attractive for people.

The social and economic trends that may be tied up with volunteer civil service are:
- making it part of secondary school-curriculum,
- making it a means to get work experience and/or more satisfaction from labour,
- greater identification at the national level of which competencies are required in which sectors and on which levels.

Threats

The obstacles to overcome are:
- the development of the labour market: with shortages on the labour market the available surplus for recruitment gets too small,
- strategic: employees and employers are difficult to get committed to learning,

- generating a new division in labour: those who can learn and those who (think they) cannot,
- more focus should be put on co-operation with employers.

The troubles coming from institutional, law, social, cultural context are:
- recognition of voluntary work as being a true learning experience that can even be certificated,
- ridiculising learning in the sense that learning can be done anywhere but still has to be quality assured,
- there is no national framework that makes the recognition of voluntary work possible,
- there is more involvement needed of the Dutch government to improve dissemination,
- the lack of extra funding to support subsidies for the costs of infrastructural change which is required by companies and organizations introducing the validation of informal learning,
- the lack of co-operation between the government and social partners in this policy area the one hand and between different educational levels within the system on the other,
- creation of a separate certification-body for voluntary work.

6 VPL in Switzerland: CH-Q as a formative approach and a system for managing competencies

Basic features and implementation criteria for recording, assessing, recognizing of competences and qualifications

Anita E. Calonder Gerster

Since 1999, the Association CH-Q Swiss Qualification Programme for Job Careers (Schweizerisches Qualifikationsprogramm zur Berufslaufbahn) is established as a non-profit organization dedicated on a national scale to strengthening links between Lifelong Learning and Individual Management of competencies. It has set up a System of key elements geared towards analysing and recording (self-assessment), evaluating and validating formal and informal professional and general competencies in a variety of areas.
The Association CH-Q acts as roof Organization responsible for political, strategic and structural functions of the system. These relate to the quality and control of the key elements involved. The Association CH-Q is now active in five European countries.

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies evolved out of a national initiative in education in the early 1990s. It developed into a 4 year project, supported by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET). The main targets of this initiative were the flexibilisation of the educational system and the equivalence of formal and informal learning. In that context, a model was developed for identifying, assessing and recognizing skills and competencies. It included respective guidance tools matching the needs of specific target groups. The Association CH-Q was subsequently set up in 1999 in order to manage, expand and promote the system.

CH-Q is the name of an integral concept for the valuation of acquired competences in Switzerland. It consists of a wide package of different services in the entire chain of VPL: portfolio, assessment, career formation, quality assurance and accompanying training programs. The target of CH-Q is twofold: the individual development or career formation in training and occupation and the development of the flexibility and mobility of that individual on the job market. In this sense CH-Q is a truly formative approach in which the valuation as well as the validation of prior learning is integrated.

In this contribution the ways of working is explained of CH-Q as a formative approach and a system for managing competencies.

Basic Features

General Concept

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies is an overarching concept committed to the individualized development of young people and adults thus enhancing their job flexibility and mobility.

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies includes:

- Procedures based on methods and sets of contents, accompanied by specific tools and supporting actions
- Quality criteria, principles and guidelines for implementation in education, training, career guidance and the working world that is tailored to the needs of the individual.

In the pursuit of its objectives, the Association CH-Q is supported by decision-makers of the Swiss educational system, labour and management as well as by representative bodies of researchers, administrators and business managers.

Objectives and Purpose

Objectives

The primary goal is to empower individuals or groups of users, clients

- To make use of their own potential in a deliberate and realistic way and accept full personal responsibility for it
- To take charge of managing their own skills, competencies and qualifications in a sustainable way
- To focus on resources and solutions while planning their careers
- To applie the selfmanagement of competencies in a profitable way for their personal development.

Purpose

The purpose is the beneficial optimization of existing strengths and their translation into qualifications (validation) thus ensuring links between personal as well as career development and accreditation.

Frame of Reference

The main points of reference for the CH-Q System of Managing Competencies are based on a frame of reference that determines its development and application. It is derived from the major objectives and defines the conditions for applying the elements of the system. It includes:

- Principles of holistic approach:
    - linking various different areas of life/acivity
    - linking cultural, general and vocational education
    - equivalency of formal and non-/informal learning
    - including all types of competencies (technical, methodical, social, self-competencies)
    - challenging equal chances

- Principles of lifelong learning:
    - the understanding of oneself and one's own possibilities
      ⤑ consistency/self-identity
    - the competency of acting autonomously
      ⤑ steering one's own decision making
    - the career flexibility and mobility
      ⤑ marketability.

Programs and Services Offered

Products

Several 'products' are available:
- Conceptual framework for CH-Q training and career guidance programs and services, such as:
    - Tested contents, methods, procedures for user-tailored adaptation and application in the field of activity of the respective programme organizer/provider
    - System for training experts in training, education and career guidance by licensed providers
    - Modular framework, standard modules for integrating CH-Q programs into a network of applications that can be linked
    - System of quality development and assurance that covers all providers/organizers
- Supporting tools:
    - Competency portfolios (folders) for consistent career planning
    - Certification files to prepare for formal recognition (e. g., job applications)
    - Identification documents for formal certificates (qualification passport)
    - Instructions, manuals for specific groups of users

Looking at the key features of the products, they all fit into the conceptual framework and are characterized by:
- Coherence: all parts are aligned with each other and are mutually complementary (unité de doctrine) based on a common, unified language (identity),
- Orientation towards users and practical applicability: products are geared towards the needs of target groups, they take into account research findings in academic disciplines, reflect developments in education, business management, cultural affairs,

- Modular design: flexible and easy networking with other existing programmes, tools, concepts in the respective field of application.

Stakeholders

Actors and stakeholders on four different levels co-operate as partners in order to implement the CH-Q System of Managing Competencies:
- Educational policy level: co-operation partners in trade and industrial organizations, public authorities,
- Institutional level: CH-Q programme organizers in private and public sector, education, training/career guidance,
- Programme level: qualified experts for developing and marketing programmes and for monitoring their quality,
- Individual level: users on all levels and in various different fields of activity.

Quality Assurance

Quality and relevance of the programmes

Programmes and services are offered according to binding criteria. The principles and guidelines defined by the Association CH-Q are the decisive quality criteria. They are based on internally adopted standards. They determine
- The level and quality of programmes,
- The organization and implementation of programmes.

CH-Q Commission for Quality Assurance

The Commission for Quality Assurance, appointed by the members' meeting of the CH-Q, is responsible for ensuring and monitoring quality. The commission checks the fulfillment of quality criteria by individual and institutional programme organizers by reviewing programmes and tools.

Demand, objectives and quality are the factors determining the ongoing development of programs

Programmes are periodically checked for their effectiveness and for the tools they use. For this purpose, experts from the business community, education, applied research and educational agencies co-operate with the Association CH-Q.

Organisation & structure

The Association CH-Q has divided the political, normative functions and the operational activities into two separate structures with two separate organisations. The reasons for this follow the principles of division of power:
- The CH-Q Association itself is not a provider, but as a non-profit organisation, it is in charge of the preconditions, development, quality guarantee and co-ordination of CH-

Q. In realising its aims, the Association is supported by various institutes in the field of schooling and by social partners,

- The Committee for quality assurance is responsible for maintaining and monitoring quality, for issuing CH-Q certificates and accrediting CH-Q products and services,
- The Research and Development committee is responsible for developing tools for working with CH-Q and the expertise of those working with it.

In short, the Association CH-Q consists of a legislative branch (assembly of CH-Q members), a judicial branch (committee for quality assurance and development) and an executive branch (executive board). All Committee members have completed a training in selfmanagement of competencies and have a knowledge of assessment and qualification procedures. All executive parties are obliged to work with the products, procedures and quality requirement developed by the committees. Both individual providers (advisers, trainers) and institutional organisers (institutions and organisations) can act as implementers. Implementers enter partnerships with the Association CH-Q, in which agreements are concluded as to conditions of working with the CH-Q Model (requirements, rights, obligations, including endorsement of the ethical standards), the transparency of products and services (clear and comprehensive information and documentation) and target group orientation (adjusted learning objectives, achievement levels and fundamentals.

Application

Target Groups
The training and career guidance programmes and services offered as part of the CH-Q System of Managing Competencies are basically designed for a broad range of users irrespective of their personal background, educational level, occupation, social status.

The programmes address young people and adults who are:
- Attending school, as part of compulsory or post-compulsory schooling;
- In initial training/basic education, continuing education or training, remedial education;
- At the dividing line between: school/education-job, non-employment-employment or re-entry into the labour market;
- In employment.

They want to do target-oriented training and make use of a supporting programme with an integrated set of tools that is tailored specifically to their needs.

CH-Q Training and Guidance Program
The most important element of the ensuring the quality of the whole system is the qualification of the trainers and guides. The training of professional guides and

counsellors is modular by design and integrated in the official building brick 'CH-Q Certification program'.

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies is integrated into a set of training modules which are accredited by the former Swiss Modular Centre in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Federal Agency for Vocational Training and Technology BBT. They contain:
• Standard modules for users,
• Standard modules for the training of CH-Q training and guidance expert.

The CH-Q standard modules meet the quality criteria established by the Association CH-Q. They are designed to be open and accessible from the user to the trainer level (reviews of equivalency); they combine course/seminar/workshop sessions with independent study sessions; they are geared towards tangible implementation steps; and they conclude with a qualification step that is regarded as a certificate and bears the quality seal of the Association CH-Q.
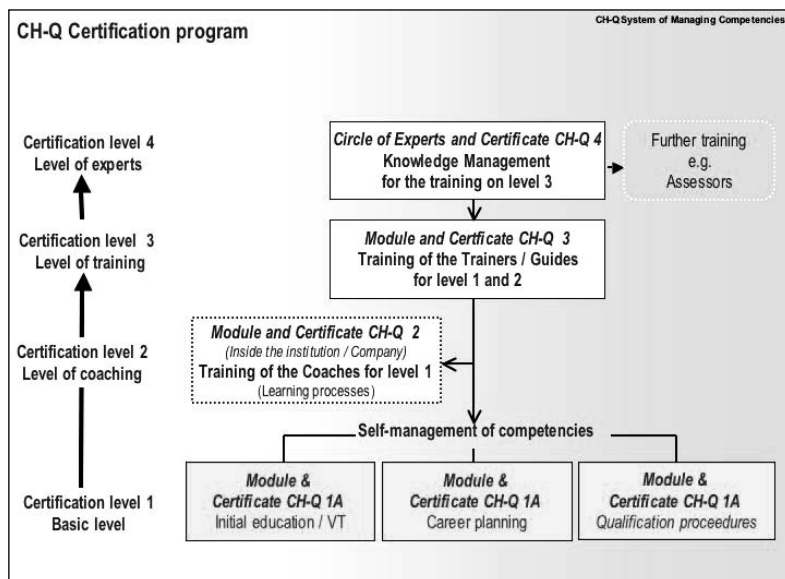
GRAPHIC 1: THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME

The organisation of the modules

The modules are organized as learning sessions, individual or group counselling sessions. In terms of format and organization, they fulfil the following criteria:

- Transparency: clear and comprehensive information, documentation;
- Partnership with attendees: agreements on conditions of attendance (prerequisites, rights, duties);
- Target group orientation: adapted learning targets, steps, basic information. In publicizing the programmes (invitation for bids, advertising) these principles are communicated in an adequate and comprehensible way.

What does the application require, what procedure is used?
Implementing competency management requires that the following steps be taken.

I. The content ensures the following activities:

- Recording and proving skills, competencies from all walks of life. The goal is to raise awareness of existing resources and to make achievements visible;
- Assessing skills, competencies through self and outside evaluation. The goal is to question, judge and evaluate skills and competencies;
- Furnishing proof of competencies with regard to recognition/validation. The goal is to link up competencies with requirements (job applications, qualification procedures).

This learning process unfolds in different stages (sub-processes) and is made up of various fields of action (process steps). This includes working on the biography (personal background/inventory), describing an individual's potential (analysis), drawing up the current profile (synthesis). The process steps lead to a personal record of competencies.

II. The procedure used contains three interlocking working methods:

- Documenting, i. e. the systematic recording, compiling, arranging of data and facts;
- Reflecting, i. e. the periodic reviewing of developmental steps, evaluation of learning, job and life contexts and drawing of conclusions;
- Implementing, i. e. solution-oriented and context-specific planning and strategy decision-making.

The procedure results in a personal portfolio and/or file for furnishing proof of specific competencies (files for job applications, equivalency assessments).

Training/teaching

The responsibility for communicating programmes and designing processes lies with experts who have completed a training course for CH-Q training and/or guidance experts and are prepared to use the CH-Q System of Managing Competencies while supporting and counselling individuals.

Methodological-didactic guidelines

The following methodological-didactic guidelines are observed when implementing programmes:

- Process-oriented, individualized learning based on guidance and counselling support;
- Action-oriented approach;
- Use of a diversity of methods by including various different processes for self and outside evaluation.

Who organizes the programs?

The CH-Q training and guidance programs and services are offered by institutional organizers (institutions, organizations) or individual providers (career guidance experts, managers of training courses). They use a system of quality assurance and of evaluation and are recognized by the Association CH-Q.

The following requirements determine the organization and implementation of the specific training and guidance programmes and services:

- Compliance with the basic principles and guidelines defined by the Association CH-Q;
- Transparency in communicating the underlying conditions, objectives, content and design of programmes vis-à-vis the Association CH-Q and in the tendering process;
- Use of qualified CH-Q training and guidance experts for marketing programmes.

Certification and awarding of the CH-Q label

Basic Principle for certification

Certification is done on the level of the individual. Certified training and guidance experts are the guarantors of quality when it comes to implementing competency-oriented programmes and services. Whenever institutions organize CH-Q programmes, the certified experts are responsible for agreeing the necessary conditions with them.

Goal of Certification

Certification is designed to furnish proof of individuals' competency in handling their own competencies (self-management of competencies), or in mastering CH-Q programme content, respectively. The certificate proves that the bearer of the certificate meets the requirements of the quality criteria defined by the Association CH-Q. As a sign of this, the certificate bears the label of the Association CH-Q.

Individual certification comprises the following elements: the concluded learning process on the basis of quality criteria, the testing and assessment (evaluation) of the acquired competency, the recognition of the successfully concluded learning process through the awarding of the certificate.

Basic Principle for awarding

The label is awarded to CH-Q-recognized programmes that were developed by certified trainers/guidance counsellors for specific target groups in their own field of activity. By awarding the label, the specific CH-Q programme is accredited.

Purpose of awarding the CH-Q label

The purpose of awarding the CH-Q label is to confirm that the programme concerned fulfils the quality criteria defined by the Association CH-Q. The label performs the function of a quality seal. It furnishes proof of the tested quality and leads to the designation "Accredited CH-Q Training Programme, or Accredited CH-Q Career Guidance Programme".

## The Association CH-Q and the national frame of qualification

As stated in chapter VII.A.3 "Switzerland" the focus of the activities of the Association CH-Q lies in a combination of Validation and Valuation of formal and informal learning. In a learner oriented implementation of Validation summative outcomes are less considered as a final goal. Formative procedures with their perspectives of individual and personal development become an important issue. So far Validation procedures function as a top down approach. The fact that it gives or could give at the same time a "value" to the learning process brings the bottom-up approach into focus. The question is how to bring the two approaches into a due balance. The Association CH-Q claims that if this aspect it considered as worthy it should be an issue in the setting up of a national frame of VPL and qualification system.

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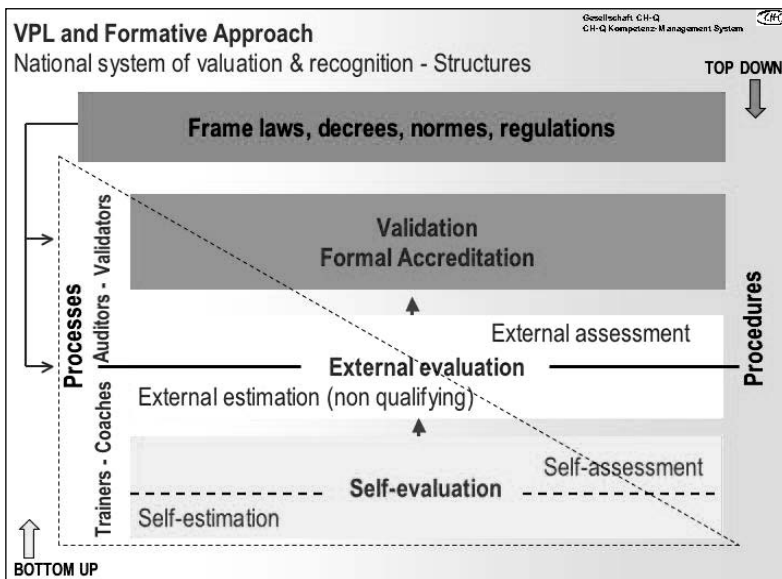
Graphic 2: VPL-structures
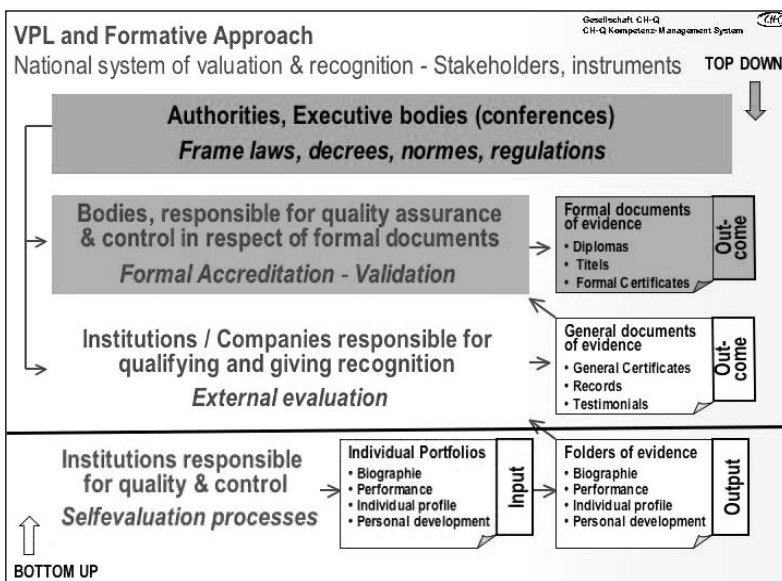
Graphic 3: Stakeholders and products

The Association CH-Q makes this very conviction an issue in the context of the VPL platform installed in late 2004 by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET). The OPET platform includes the important stakeholders on all levels involved (Graphic 2: Stakeholders and products): the authorities and executive bodies, the social partners (employers, trade unions), the Organisations in education and vocational training, the specialists and experts.

The Association CH-Q, acting as a stakeholder responsible for the quality and control of individual competence management procedures, is a member of this platform.

To conclude with, the following graphic illustrates these reflections:

7 The development of VPL in a wider European perspective

A view from the European sidelines, in particular the new and future EU member states

Arjen Deij

The validation of prior learning has gained enormously in importance in recent years in the context of the European discussion on making qualifications and competencies more visible. But in practice it is still only a minor link in the development of strategies for lifelong learning. The main aim of these strategies is to give as many people as possible the chance to take an active part in society and to adapt to rapidly changing developments. What is mainly at stake is work, employment, updating of skills and being employable. That is also the focus of my approach to VPL in a wider European perspective in this article.

I deal with the development of VPL in a wider perspective. I focus my attention primarily on its usefulness in the labour market and the educational systems of the countries on the borders of Europe. These are the countries that the present immigrants to Europe's labour market come from, and most probably the future immigrants too. Some of them are the new and future EU member states. At the same time, I also attempt first of all to describe the broad context within which VPL has been developed.

How do these developments relate to the Netherlands? As a Dutch citizen who has been living outside the country for over fourteen years now, I have followed developments in the Netherlands as an outsider. The Netherlands has gone through huge social and technological changes in the past fourteen years, and these have left their mark on educational policy. Attitudes to education have changed. Vocational education has become more appreciated, particularly on the labour market. That appreciation has been reflected in structural changes to the various levels of vocational education. The Ministry has gradually withdrawn from its role as the engine driving the development of education, and more responsibilities have passed to the field. The Dutch "polder model", while criticised in other areas, has become increasingly widespread in vocational education. And that has also had consequences for the way in which VPL in the Netherlands is

evolving. VPL has been applied in the Netherlands in various ways, with more emphasis placed on the practical application than on the development of a centralised national model. This "model" is different from developments in some EU countries where VPL is part of a nationally initiated policy and both its application and its link to the national qualifications system are regulated.

VPL is still in its infancy. Many European countries still have to make a start on it. At the end of my article, I raise the question how useful the existing European experiences and objectives are for promoting VPL to the countries around the EU as part of a European "foreign education policy". In asking this question, I am also attempting to gauge the future role of VPL in Europe. The questions here are: Is what is good for EU countries good for our neighbours too? Or is the lack of interest in VPL outside the EU perhaps an indication that the importance of VPL is being overestimated? In any case, the views expressed here are my own, and not those of the ETF.

European Training Foundation

The European Training Foundation (ETF) in Turin, where I work, is responsible for adapting European educational policy to the capabilities and requirements of countries surrounding the European Union. It covers educational policy relating to all ways of developing competencies for the labour market. The ETF provides advice and support to educational reform targeted on the labour market in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Balkans and the Middle East and North Africa. Most of those countries are facing uncertain labour market prospects, and this has a huge impact on vocational education, retraining, further training and lifelong learning. In addition, the resources for education are generally extremely scarce. Against that background, it is very important to be able to set priorities and make systems more effective, in particular by addressing those policy areas that can promote changes and produce concrete results.

The problems facing the countries around the EU vary from country to country. A number of countries are still weighed down by the burden of an obsolete centralised education system that now has to manage on a fraction of the government support that it was used to receiving. This often results in nostalgia for a better past, particularly when there are no clear new directions present.

The links to business which are so important for vocational education often have to be built up again from scratch, since many large companies have disappeared and there are no good links to small companies. Some countries are still mainly agricultural, while others are highly industrialised. Sectoral restructurings are inevitable. A number of smaller countries have only recently become fully independent, and they have been able to make a clean sweep of their educational and training policies; however the larger countries have to redesign their existing systems.

A select group of countries is aiming for future integration into the EU. What they have to do is to bring their education systems into line with the developments within the EU that enable free movement of persons within the European employment market, and strengthen the adaptability of their labour forces and their ability to compete with the existing member states as much as possible. This also includes a better policy for the integration of socially disadvantaged groups.

The demographic trends in the various countries are extremely varied. The negative trend of a rapidly ageing population predominates. For example, Russia now has only two-thirds of the number of students that it had ten years ago, whereas the youth population is growing strongly in most Muslim countries around the Mediterranean.

As in the EU, there is a general striving for a more highly skilled and better-trained labour force. The aim is to provide wider access to education and training systems. For one country, this will mainly mean emphasis on secondary education, for another greater emphasis on higher education, and for a third better further training and retraining opportunities. A number of countries will have to devote considerable effort to ensuring that young people get at least a basic education.

There is a great deal of hesitation about making vocational education the priority in an uncertain employment market, despite the fact that there is often no real alternative available for a large part of the school-age population and that the main thing is to provide them with proper training. Vocational education often remains a negative choice for young people who are not considered suitable for more general education.

Transition economies are not always in a position to guarantee public provision that provides the majority of the population with satisfactory opportunities for good, affordable schooling. This results in a further split within society. The status and salaries of teachers and educators have deteriorated sharply over the past decade in many countries.

It is not surprising that education is a very critical development factor under such circumstances.

Instead of a standardised education provision that is highly centralised, there is a need for more decentralised systems that can respond better to local and individual requirements and are sufficiently financed to perform properly. At the same time, the provision must be manageable and accountable. Education and training systems must be properly accessible and provide more open learning routes for young people and also for adults. They must be innovative.

Despite these generally applicable principles, there are no readymade solutions that will work in every country. The context largely determines what solutions are most

appropriate. Copying policy models that have been successful in other countries is no guarantee of success; quite the contrary. It is essential to learn from experiences at home and elsewhere to achieve progress. In the ETF we speak of "policy learning" (Peter Grootings, 2003). Policy learning is not about learning the policies that other countries have developed. Policy learning is about learning which policies can be developed locally by reflecting on countries' policies. The principal role of ETF is to *enable* a reform policy learning process. (Peter Grootings, "Learning matters": Sharing Experience from the Past for the Future, ETF Advisory Forum 2003).

ETF's day-to-day practice consists of advising colleagues in the European Commission in Brussels and the European delegations on the spot that coordinate European programmes for the countries surrounding the EU, and of advising the stakeholders in the countries themselves on how to make best use of European financial and technical assistance to reform education and training systems. The range of advice is very broad and may consist of studies and analyses, information provision and development of capacity, the preparation of tender documents, advice on policy proposals and legislation, and the assessment of results, monitoring and evaluation etc. Considerable attention is paid to the national policy and development framework within which such advice has to fit.

In this context, ETF is also responsible for implementing the relevant European educational, training and employment policy. While on the subject of European policy, we also have to take account of the fact that the European Union only has limited powers in the area of education and the development of lifelong learning. These responsibilities lie mainly with the EU's individual member states. So for me and my colleagues, European policy is not just the policy that comes from Brussels but also the policy made within the European member states. This does not just involve formal types of education. Training for economic growth is not limited to the public provision. And the integration of groups in society that are economically and socially disadvantaged by comparison with other groups is also an important objective. We do not focus solely on national policymakers from the Education and Employment Ministries and local experts. For instance, the government's role as regards adult learning is often limited, and companies, employers' and employees' associations, non-governmental organisations and of course the individual learners themselves play a major role.

The ETF is not responsible for the development of European policy. We follow developments in Europe closely and contribute to European cooperation in the context of the Copenhagen process. Our task is primarily to share European expertise and experience in order to support the reform of education and training systems in the countries surrounding the EU, and so to contribute to economic and social development and stability.

On education and employment integration

Education is a politically loaded subject that everyone has a view on. The same applies to the integration of young people and adults into the labour market. This is possibly because very many people have experience in both areas. Where these two subjects come into contact there can be strong differences of opinion. The perspective from which people view the role of skills development for integration into the labour market often determines their position on the subject. One current issue is whether we should educate young people as broadly and as generally as possible to prepare them for the changing needs of the knowledge economy, or whether we should give them a practice-based training that will give them a better chance to integrate (more quickly) into the employment market. In the Netherlands, these themes recur in the discussions on the effectiveness of the VMBO and MBO (primary and secondary vocational education). The general tenor is that people should specialise later, because they will then have a better foundation and they will be able to adapt better to the ICT age. But this does not apply to everyone. Not everybody can or wants to become a highly trained computer specialist. There will continue to be a need for occupational groups such as bakers, bricklayers, painters, plumbers, car mechanics, road builders, bus drivers, maintenance staff, shop assistants, receptionists, cleaners and security staff. Training courses for specific occupations are important and will probably gain further in importance by comparison to general training courses as the emphasis shifts increasingly to further training and retraining due to the demographic and economic developments. Learning in the workplace also remains an attractive form of training. The European countries with highly developed dual-systems of vocational education system have lower youth unemployment as a result. It seems that both learning in the workplace and general non-vocational education have an important future.

It is important to look ahead to how the labour market will develop to determine now what skills the labour market will be looking for in the medium term. According to Learning for Employment, Cedefop's second report on vocational education and training policy in Europe[56] half of the newly created jobs in the European Union in 2010 will demand higher education, while 40% will call for advanced skills at upper secondary vocational education level and only 15% of the new jobs will be suitable for those with lower skills levels. In addition, 80% of the jobs will involve ICT. However, existing jobs will not just disappear, so the labour market will change only gradually. [The report envisages that newly created jobs will grow at 1.5%-2% per year (see p. 157-160)]

[56] Learning for employment, Second report on vocational education and training policy in Europe 2004, 216 pp. Document type: Cedefop Reference series Cedefop publication number: 3032.

Europe is still far from ready for the knowledge economy. This can be seen from the following data for 2001 in the same report:

• Nearly 40% of the EU population between the ages of 25 and 64 had no qualifications above the minimum level of compulsory education. That is more than 75 million people – substantially more than the population of France, Italy or the UK;

• Around 45% of the young people aged between 19 and 22 in the EU were not participating in education or training;

• A third of women between 25 and 54 in 2001 had no qualifications beyond the compulsory minimum level of education. This will affect their employment prospects, considering that in 2001 83% of women between 25 and 54 with further or higher education were in employment, compared to just 49% of those with only basic education.

Europe's aims

The goal that Europe set itself in Lisbon in 2000, to become the world's most competitive knowledge economy of the world with the highest level of employment by 2010, still seems far off. It is very evident at European level that lifelong learning and educational policy will play a key role in achieving that goal, even after the recent relaunch of the Lisbon process and the increased emphasis on growth. The lifelong learning and employment agendas are increasingly being brought into line with each other. "Lisbon 2010" appears to play a less important role at national level. This is also shown by the study of the contribution made by vocational education and training courses to the Lisbon targets as discussed in Maastricht in December 2004.

The discussion that is ongoing at European level on the development of higher and secondary vocational education (Bologna and Copenhagen process) will help to let different education systems grow together gradually. Further training and retraining and the development of qualifications have a key role to play in that process. Higher education has made great progress in developing shared principles that should result in comparable qualifications. Here, higher education has clearly profited from the fact that it was already engaged in much more international cooperation. The starting points in vocationally based courses and secondary vocational education are much further apart. Also, there are more players involved in the further development and updating of this vocational education.

Continuing vocational training is less regulated at national level and therefore less closely tied to particular systems. The investment in CVT is growing steadily almost everywhere. The growth comes mainly from the business sector. It goes hand in hand with a growing need for quality assurance, particularly as regards the results of further training and retraining. Certification is becoming increasingly important. As far as employers are concerned, qualifications continue to be important for newcomers to the labour market.

But they rely more on CVs for people with work experience. Developing qualifications as a measurement of acquired competences and competences still to be acquired is still not a conscious option for many companies. However, there is a trend towards certificating processes and employees in the context of progressive quality control (ISO certification etc.) Quality assurance and the need to make investment in people more visible may result in an increase in the certification of new employees and existing personnel at company, industry or even national level.

However, certification has the disadvantage that the value of company certificates and sector-specific certificates is limited when people change jobs. Nationally recognised certificates are the most valuable kind. These are associated with defined rights to progress to a higher level, bypass certain parts of training courses (exemptions), carry on particular occupations etc. This is the societal impact. Even new international initiatives from sectors and occupational groups that are dissatisfied with existing national qualifications often attempt to tie in with national systems in order to obtain a societal impact.

But the problem is that national and international initiatives that develop their own certificates for professional practitioners often find it difficult to tie into national qualification structures that are aimed mainly at basic educational provision for young people. From the point of view of employment integration, there is more need for qualifications that promote integration into the labour market than for qualifications that permit progression to the next level of education. Many people taking courses leading to a qualification drop out early once they have found a job, before they have obtained their certificate. These developments are putting pressure on the current qualification systems in Europe. Modular certificates are gaining in importance, and the Ministries of Education are losing their monopoly as the awarders or legitimating bodies for the certificates. What these developments also show is that the value of qualifications is relative and varies from user to user. Qualifications are only aids to making competencies visible, not an end in themselves. This means that more attention has to be paid to certification that provides direction on what the learner needs to do to keep up with developments and decide on his or her own personal form of lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning for everyone?

Lifelong learning for everyone means a huge growth in learning activities, together with the associated costs. The responsibilities of individuals, companies, employees' and employers' associations and governments are closely linked to the learning activities they are involved in. While there is a clear trend to encourage people to work more actively on their competencies, opinions vary on who is responsible for achieving this and therefore who has to foot the bill. By setting up the principle that everyone in the Netherlands is entitled to an initial qualification, the Dutch government has taken a clear position on how

far it sees its responsibility going. It has taken its inspiration mainly from the fact that so many adults still do not have an initial qualification of this kind. Figures from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment show that 26% of the labour force aged between 25 and 64 had no initial qualification in 2002. The knowledge economy mainly demands qualifications at a higher level, and it is expected that the bill for this will have to be paid increasingly by third parties rather than by the government. However, the government may possibly differentiate between the individual return and the societal return on qualifications. The individual contribution may be higher for qualifications giving access to jobs where the costs of the training can be earned back quickly. This will also impact on post-initial education.

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The initial qualification is the cornerstone of the Dutch lifelong learning policy. The Dutch policy of ensuring that people obtain an initial qualification wherever possible is linked not only to the generally accepted importance of a better educated labour force but also to the problem of early school leaving. To counter this problem, a whole monitoring system has been set up to follow up young people aged from 18 to 23 who are no longer in education and have not yet obtained an initial qualification and encourage them to obtain such a qualification. Adults aged over 23 also have the right to obtain an initial qualification; this means that any social and financial hindrances must be offset wherever possible and wherever necessary, even at a later age. One in four of the working population in the Netherlands is unskilled or low skilled – a total of two million people. The Dutch policy to cut the number of lower-skilled young people aged under 24 appears to be successful, although it remains to be seen whether the improvement can be maintained. Expanding the policy to include a more active approach towards unskilled and low-skilled workers of all ages could give a major boost to lifelong learning. But the question is how to promote this and organise it effectively!

VPL is potentially an important tool for lifelong learning. People should not be forced to learn, in particular not what they already know, understand and actually put into practice. It is better to encourage them to learn on the basis of what they have learned already. Then they could even gain a certificate or qualification without having to take an expensive, time-consuming course first. However, this is not the central idea behind Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). VPL is aimed more at determining to what extent people are already competent and how to build on that. So VPL is an aid to learning (and continuing to learn) throughout one's life rather than a way to avoid learning activities.

The EU member states have a variety of vocational education and training systems. Based on the principle that it must be possible to achieve qualifications in various ways, the European Commission has strongly promoted the interests of VPL in recent years in the context of the Lisbon and Copenhagen process. The European Commission has been looking for linking elements to bring the various systems closer together without the need to impose a uniform structure. The tools developed for this purpose are a European format for individual portfolios in the form of Europass, a European Credit Transfer System for

vocational education and training courses, a common frame of reference for qualification levels, a common European context for quality assurance of vocational courses and a framework for VPL procedures.

In his book **"Making Learning Visible"**, one of the classics of VPL, Jens Bjørnåvold places the Netherlands along with the United Kingdom and Ireland in a category of countries that have based their approach to VPL on their national vocational qualification methods. That comparison no longer as applicable in 2005 as it was in 2000. While Ireland and Scotland have now overtaken the rest of the United Kingdom with single qualification frameworks, the Netherlands has since put the emphasis much more on the practical use of the existing qualifications. Also, Dutch VPL policy is characterised primarily by the way in which organisations in and around the labour market provide information on VPL applications, experiment with them and promote them.

These different implementations of what are apparently the same systems shows that what matters in VPL is the individual portfolio, not the benchmark with which it is measured. After all, people learn in different ways and in different situations. However, giving them credit for all they have learned demands that their competencies should be compared with a standard that is laid down somewhere. That standard can be adapted depending on the situation in which accreditation is required.

This provides a pragmatic alternative to a single qualification framework". Within such a single framework, one common yardstick is adopted for a particular competency. The development and maintenance costs of single frameworks can be a drawback, particularly for smaller countries. Frameworks may promote progression and accreditation, but not in all cases. The more that is learned outside official contexts, the less the chance of accreditation, even in a single framework. It is an illusion that solutions can always be found at national level for qualifications that have been developed outside the context of such a framework (for instance at industry level, within multinational companies, as an international initiative, as part of ISO certification, or as industrial standards).

In the 1980s a Bulgarian friend of mine, Stoyan, took a specialist course in optical physics in the Soviet Union, which did not exist in his own country. When he came back to Bulgaria he wanted to have his new title recognised, but since his course had not been provided in that country there was no corresponding title and he had to make do with what was for him a less prestigious title for everyday use. He could get quite worked up about the whole business. The fact that the qualification did not exist in his own country made its recognition impossible. Now even if Bulgaria had had a single qualification framework at that time the problem would still not have been resolved, since the basic principle of accreditation depends on the available qualifications (and part-qualifications), not on the system.

Therefore the pragmatic use of several qualifications as happens in the Netherlands can give the individual more possibilities to capitalise on prior learning. The advisory report of the Dutch Council for Education *"Werk maken van een leven lang leren"* ["Making Lifelong Learning Work", 2003] includes the following passage, which in my view is very important for interpreting the function of VPL:

If certified competencies are actually made visible and deployable, the outside world must first of all have confidence that the qualities testified to by a certificate are relevant qualities. In that case, it is essential to use assessment frameworks in which the parties concerned with the certification – including follow-on courses, employers and the learners themselves – can recognise the competencies and standards that are important from their perspectives.

The present qualifications for the vocational training and adult education sector are an example. They provide assessment frameworks in which competencies are made quite explicit and are widely recognised. Other frameworks are less explicit and/or are less widely valid or more restricted in scope. Nevertheless, they have their own functions that cannot simply be taken over by a national qualification without more ado. For instance, industries and professional associations, voluntary and sporting organisations have assessment frameworks that are relevant mainly to their own audiences. Temporary employment firms and rehabilitation agencies also have their own frameworks, which are largely implicit and have at best local applicability. The assessment frameworks met with at international level vary in such aspects as subject focus and breadth, degree of explicitness and detail, and area of applicability. They have been developed by various different bodies and have a wide variety of functions. While they are closely linked to the original system in most cases, a number of them also show interesting additions.

In this approach, the Education Council aligns itself with the general trend of assessing the merits of VPL mainly on its functionality. The number of people in Europe that have taken a VPL programme is still far from high. The low numbers are grist to the mill of the sceptics, who see VPL as an expensive, excessively bureaucratic solution for recognising competencies. However, the visible quality of the VPL developments shows that the tide towards introducing VPL in the EU member states is unlikely to turn. VPL is gaining in importance in all member states. And here the Dutch model, which has been developing very much on the basis of the practical benefits and focusing particularly on the functionality of VPL as an aid in learning activities, could perhaps come to serve as an alternative to the UK and Irish approaches that are closely linked to standardised single qualification frameworks.

At European level, a European Qualification Framework is also being developed. This framework is intended to operate as a context that will make it possible to compare various national and sectoral qualifications and qualification systems and so to promote mobility and progression. The framework provides a set of eight descriptions for final attainment levels (learning outcomes) at different levels, a European credit accumulation and transfer system and quality guarantees, and is closely linked to existing instruments

for creating transparency such as Europass and the common principles for VPL. As this framework will have to operate to link different qualifications to each other, it is much more open than national frameworks containing specific qualification descriptions, but as a result it is not possible to base a VPL procedure solely on the EQF. Nevertheless, the framework can provide a context to render various qualifications comparable not just at European level, but at national and sectoral levels too.

One extremely critical point for the development of VPL is good accessibility to VPL facilities. In Europe, it is mainly oriented towards use for people in work at the moment. Developing a VPL programme for groups of employees in larger companies and organisations could provide substantial savings on training budgets. Jobseekers, early school leavers and other target groups qualifying for assistance in integration (or reintegration) into work could also be given organised access to VPL. VPL is still not really accessible for smaller companies and individuals. The entitlement to an initial qualification in the Netherlands is a starting point here, but organisationally it is still difficult to reach individuals. The Norwegian right to have one's portfolio updated every two years is another example of an existing positive arrangement that could encourage the broad application of VPL. The critical question that has to be asked here is to what extent VPL can serve better the interests of individuals, and not only the general public interest.

What is happening with VPL in the "new Europe"? Is VPL only relevant in the EU?

In February 2004, the ETF organised a seminar with participants from what were then the future member states and applicant states in order to exchange experiences on the development of VPL in their countries and to discuss the common principles for the validation of informal and non-formal learning that had been developed by a European group of experts lead by the Commission. The seminar demonstrated that a number of new member states were already working to construct their own approach to VPL just like the old member states.

Estonia's approach is the most ambitious. The developments in Estonia have emerged from vocational education and higher education. The country has seen the numbers entering higher education double to 60,000 students over the past six years. VPL can shorten the length of their studies, and this has given it a considerable boost. The Applied Higher Education Act and the Universities Act have created a context within which the higher education institutions are to develop their own VPL procedures. The University of Tartu is the leader in this field, and has been experimenting with VPL for some years now. Universities put the emphasis mainly on forms of certified learning; accreditation of informal learning is still a problem because the higher education institutions still have

insufficient experience in applying learning outcomes. Students may gain exemption from up to one half of their course of studies on the basis of study credits granted to them.

Estonia has taken its inspiration from Finland as far as vocational education is concerned. Vocational education has been founded on competency-based occupational standards for some years now. This simplifies the development of VPL procedures. There are 447 vocational qualifications that have been developed by 16 tripartite professional councils. 57 professional organisations are accredited to issue these qualifications. The Estonian qualification authority Kutsekoda (set up on the initiative of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce) coordinates the development of the standards. VPL is also applied within companies, often in connection with recruitment and selection systems, staff appraisals, reorganisation and training. There is an active association of HRM professionals that promotes VPL.

The preconditions for the broad application of VPL are in place. However, practice is still lagging behind what is possible. It is striking in the Estonian system how open the Education Ministry is to VPL, and how much it encourages the educational institutions to cooperate in VPL. Elsewhere, education ministries are often the main obstacle to a wide use of VPL. In cooperation with the Estonian Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry has created scope for vocationally based organisations to play an active role in certification.

Slovenia is the other new member state with a clear VPL policy. The development in Slovenia started from a number of branches of industry. A number of companies have now brought in VPL for the certification of their personnel. Most of the companies in the pharmaceutical sector have followed the example set by Krka, Slovenia's biggest pharmaceutical company. VPL is now a part of widescale educational reforms which have also contributed to creating alternative learning routes for young people and adults. Just as in the Netherlands, a full dual-path learning structure has been developed for secondary vocational education. In addition, progression from vocational education to higher education has been improved and much more attention has been paid to training for adults. In June 2004 there were 65 occupational profiles available (still mainly at lower level) that can be used for VPL under the National Occupational Qualification Act (2000).

The fact that for a long time Slovenia had a relatively high dropout rate from education makes VPL a potentially important factor in the national policy for a higher skilled labour force. As a result, it is mainly the Ministry of Labour that is promoting VPL there. Higher education is now showing an interest too. As elsewhere, the Bologna process is stimulating developments. The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education trains accredited assessors and vocational advisors for VPL. There are already 180 accredited assessors, and some 500 people have received a certificate through VPL.

The other new member states are still at the orientation stage or have just started up in a specific sector or vocational group. Malta and Cyprus have not yet made a start. Because

of the small size of these countries, young people and adults there often opt for foreign courses and certificates, making it more difficult for them to set up their own system for VPL. Particularly in Malta, where around half of the labour force has not completed secondary education, VPL could be an important means of catching up on the qualification shortfall.

Only Romania, which is not yet a EU member, has developments comparable to those in Slovenia and Estonia. When they became independent, it was easier for Estonia and Slovenia to adopt a new approach to education. However Romania is still weighed down by the burden of the existing system. Negative selection was a basic principle of the Romanian education system for many years, and the consequences are still visible. There is a strong emphasis on formalisation, certification and gaining a degree, while on the other hand a lot of young people leave school early. Compared to the new member states, the Romanian labour force is less skilled, and in particular the number of early school leavers [57] is much higher. The population in the rural areas especially is lower skilled. In the early 1990s the length of compulsory education was actually cut back from 10 years to 8 years at the request of parents who did not see any benefit in the existing education. That reduction was not reversed until 2003. Nevertheless, the Romanian governments over the last ten years cannot be accused of shortsightedness. On the contrary, Romania has constantly striven to follow European trends in education and was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to start developing competency-based occupational standards. Since the second half of the 1990s, vocational education has been using these occupational profiles to develop broadly formulated competency-based learning outcomes that will provide young people with access to a range of occupations. The links with representatives of both sides of industry and with companies have also been improved gradually. What Slovenia, and particularly Estonia, managed in quite a short time is taking longer in Romania because of the lack of a definite way ahead and the absence of a clear consensus among all the parties on the route to take.

For example, the occupational standards were developed, with the assistance of the World Bank, by a specially formed Council for Occupational Standards and Accreditation (COSA). The Council provided technical assistance to the working parties that developed the standards. It has also started to use these standards for VPL. Initially it took advantage of a loophole in the regulations and obtained consent to grant certification that had technically been obtained through the national standardisation institute (comparable to the Dutch NEN) rather than through a political mandate. In this way, COSA started to issue COSA certificates based on a VPL procedure. However, accredited COSA assessment centres had to meet strict conditions, having accredited and experienced assessors and being expert organisations in their specialist areas. A number of major companies (Banca

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[57] Young people aged from 18 to 24 who are not involved in education and have only completed secondary education or less.

Comerciala Romana and McDonalds Romania) took the lead in this development along with a number of specialised training centres from various sectors.

As the continued financing of the maintenance and further development of occupational standards was unclear following the end of the World Bank project, COSA became part of another organisation, the National Adult Training Board (CNFPA). That organisation was set up in 1999 to advise on policy for adult training and has developed recently into a quality centre for adult education, and even more recently into the National Qualification Authority. The Adult Training Act (375/2002) recognises the possibility of obtaining qualifications through an VPL procedure, but it was only in autumn 2004 that the act was actually put into practice. In the meantime, the number of accredited centres for VPL has risen from 6 to 13. As yet, though, they are only using the occupational standards. Accordingly, the next step is to start to use learning outcomes for vocational education for VPL too. That would create a real basis for progression. Higher education is also experimenting on European projects, but the connection between these various experiments and the regulated VPL procedures under CNFPA supervision and coordination has not yet been made.

VPL and the future

The intention is that, after the 2004 expansion, the EU will expand further to include Bulgaria and Romania (accession envisaged for 2007), Croatia and Turkey (no date yet). In the long term, all the countries of South-East Europe should be members of the EU. That would then complete the expansion. Apart from Romania none of those countries, nor the other partner countries working with ETF, have developed initiatives to put VPL into practice. In these countries, lifelong learning primarily means improving the existing initial education. The traditional central control of education by government is an obstacle to innovation in many cases.

However, the Bologna process has given rise to a discussion on VPL in the Bologna countries. As well as the EU countries, the acceding and candidate countries and the EFTA countries, these include all the countries in South-Eastern Europe and a number of the countries of the former Soviet Union. More VPL in universities will certainly contribute to demonstrating its usefulness, but it will take some time before things reach that stage.

Migration could also play a role. Although the EU countries are trying to outstrip each other in blocking immigration from neighbouring countries, their ageing populations mean that there is no viable alternative. However, the kind of immigrants that Europe hopes to attract will have to change. Whereas immigration has previously been mainly a way of attracting cheap unskilled labour, the knowledge economy means that the emphasis will move increasingly to higher skilled personnel. And when qualified workers are involved, VPL can come to play a major role.

The rise of VPL is a prolonged process, and despite the interest from Brussels there is still not enough cross-border cooperation in this area. Brussels cannot be accused of neglecting the issue. Thanks to the common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the provision of the inventory of developments in the member states, and financial support in the form of Leonardo and ESF projects there is clearly a European context for cooperation, but direct cooperation on policy areas cannot be based solely on European initiatives.

VPL can become an element of European "domestic and foreign educational policy", but only if it meets needs that are acknowledged locally. And those needs are not sufficiently clear yet. Successful models and larger numbers of VPL candidates are needed to put the usefulness of VPL beyond dispute. It will have to become more obvious that VPL can save costs, time and trouble. The possibilities are there, but it still remains uncertain whether VPL will still be high on the agenda in 10 years' time and whether other countries within and outside the EU will adopt it enthusiastically. Only time will tell.

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The VPL-network

Leonardo-project 'European network for Valuation of Prior Learning'
NL/02/B/P/NT/123207

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In her present function she has the responsibility to set up the information-system about certification and its access through VAE at national ánd international level through the website and the RNCP.

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Useful websites for VPL in Europe

Organisations

Norway
www.vox.no

The Netherlands
www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

Switzerland
www.ch-q.ch

Europe
www.europeancompetencenetwork.org

Education and Training 2010 – diverse systems

The education and training contribution to the Lisbon strategy
(Copenhagen process, LLL, Bologna...)
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

Vocational education and training (Copenhagen process):
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

CEDEFOP The European centre for the development of Vocational training
http://www.cedefop.eu.int/

ETF – European Training foundation
http://www.etf.eu.int/

EURYDICE – The information network on education in Europe
http://www.eurydice.org/

Funding programmes from the EU (Leonardo, Socrates, Erasmus)

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/programmes_en.html

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/new/leonardo2_en.html

Free movement of people – Professional qualifications

http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/qualifications/overview_en.htm

The future regime for professional qualifications
http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/qualifications/future_en.htm

European information networks for the citizens

• Euroguidance (National Resource Centres for Vocational Guidance),
  http://www.euroguidance.org.uk/ and their study and training mobility portal
  http://europa.eu.int/ploteus

• Era-More (European Network of Mobility Centres), and their researchers mobility
  portal http://europa.eu.int/eracareers

• Eures (European Employment Services), and their job mobility portal
  http://europa.eu.int/eures

• Eurodesk, and their youth portal http://europa.eu.int/youth

• Europass
  http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/europass/index_en.html
  and their portal http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/

• Naric (National Academic Recognition Information Centres); www.enic-naric.net/ and
  http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/rec_qual/recognition/index_en.html

• Information Points for Professional Recognition;
  http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/qualifications/docs/contact-
  points/info-points_en.pdf

- National Reference Points for Vocational Qualifications;
  http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/europass/home/vernav/Information+and++Support/
  National+Reference+Points/navigate.action

- Solvit; http://europa.eu.int/solvit/site/index_en.htm

- Information for citizens (the new portal "Your Europe" recently integrated the existing
  website "Dialogue with citizens" in its section "Information for citizens");
  http://europa.eu.int/youreurope

- Europe Direct – Your direct line to the European Union. For your questions on the
  European Union http://europa.eu.int/europedirect/

CEDEFOP virtual Communities

- Single Framework on Transparency of Qualifications and Competencies
  http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/transparency

- Non-formal and Informal Learning http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/nfl

- Lifelong guidance http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/lifelong_guidance

- Quality Assurance in VET http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality

- Credit Transfer In VET (⋯⋙ EQF and ECVET)
  http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/credittransfer

- Sectoral Qualifications http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/sq

THE UNFINISHED STORY OF VPL

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that initial education is no longer enough for a lifelong career. It is more important to develop your competences throughout your life. How? By accepting that 'your glass is already half filled'!

Personal competences can be developed in formal learning processes (classrooms, training situations). Competence-development, however, also takes place in non-formal and informal learning processes: on the job, at home, in voluntary work and through hobbies. If these personal competences can be described and compared with formal qualifications, then it should be possible to recognise them as valid and – even more - value them as a starting point for further development. This valuation and validation of competences has a positive impact on individuals, organisations and sectors and at national or qualification level. It supports formative goals, focusing on personal and career-development, including summative goals, aiming at certification. In both cases we define this way of dealing with someone's competences as Valuation and Validation of Prior Learning (VPL).

During the past three years the Leonardo-networkproject Valuation (and Validation) of Prior Learning (VPL) has researched European practices. In the period 2002-2003 the network concentrated on making an inventory of national learning cultures. From 2004 onwards the network discussed the design for a European model to cover the whole VPL-process. This discussion isn't finished, as the implementation of VPL in Europe isn't finished.
The result of this unfinished work is presented in this book. The aim is to show the variety of the use of VPL in the main European learning cultures. These learning cultures are: Anglo-Saxon, East-European, German-dual, Mixed, Scandinavian and South-European.
By learning from each other's culture and practices we hope to create a strong incentive for the knowledge exchange between different learning cultures and – above all – the structural implementation of VPL on national, regional, sector and organisation levels.