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The learning continuity: European inventory on validating non-formal and informal learning

National policies and practices in validating non-formal and informal learning

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National policies and practices in validating non-formal and informal learning

Danielle Colardyn
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Preface

In the last decade, ‘valuing learning’ has become a priority in national and European policies for education, training and learning. With individuals acquiring knowledge, skills and competences in non-formal and informal settings as well as in formal education and training, Member States and the Commission have underlined the importance of recognising and valuing learning outcomes regardless of where and when these have been acquired. A balanced approach to valuing learning will enable individual citizens to improve their position at work, in society, and in the labour market, and to become more mobile. It will also simplify and rationalise further learning, an important element in a strategy for lifelong learning.

The emphasis on valuing learning has important implications for validation policies and methods, education and training systems and their interaction with other aspects of lifelong learning.

This has been acknowledged at several levels since the Lisbon Summit in 2000. In 2001 the European Commission and Cedefop agreed to the proposal of the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications ([1]) to set up a European inventory of approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning. The objective of the inventory was to analyse similarities and diverging and converging trends in validation policies, practices and methodologies.

This report aims to characterise European validation of non-formal and informal learning, to evaluate differences and commonalities between countries, and to consider the potential for building a European approach. Because the work started before enlargement in May 2004, the new Member States and the candidate countries are not completely integrated in the survey, but will be part of the follow-up activities. The publication of this first European inventory report will be followed by the launch of an Internet-based service providing updated information on methodological and institutional developments in this field (a pilot version is available at http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory2004/).

This work was carried out by a team composed of Danielle Colardyn (international expert and consultant to Cedefop) and Jens Bjßrn¬vold (European Commission). Mette Beyer-Paulsen (Project manager, Cedefop) made valuable contributions to finalising the work. Information on new Member States and candidate countries was provided by the European Training Foundation (ETF). Financial resources were provided by Cedefop, the European Commission, and the European Training Foundation.

Johan van Rens
Director, Cedefop

([1]) The European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications was established by the European Commission and Cedefop in 1999.

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Executive summary

This report initiates a systematic exchange of experience in validating non-formal and informal learning in Europe. It provides a detailed overview of national policies and practices in 14 Member States/EEA-countries and summary information on eight new Member States and two candidate countries. The report is the result of an initiative launched by the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications ([2]) in 2001 to establish a European inventory in validation of non-formal and informal learning. The report will be followed up by the launch of a European inventory website (pilot version on http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory2004/) in spring 2006 that will provide detailed and updated information on policy, institutional and methodological developments.

The concept of validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is an emerging activity in which objectives and responsibilities need to be clarified. This need reflects the conceptual diversity that characterises the field. The report underlines that learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings emphasises the life-wide character of learning. The Communication of the European Commission on lifelong learning (2001) stressed that learning takes place in a wide variety of settings, not limited to those provided by formal education and training. The terms formal, non-formal and informal refer to the context or the setting where learning takes place, not to the learning activities as such. The report acknowledges that terms like validation, accreditation, certification, recognition and assessment are frequently intermixed. Reflecting its widespread use, the term validation is suggested as a common term. This general term covers a range of activities, spanning identification via assessment to recognition of learning outcomes.

From experimentation to permanent systems

The report documents that, in an increasing number of Member States, validating non-formal and informal learning has become a permanent feature of education, training, employment and learning policies. It shows that validation systems can no longer be seen as isolated, but that they are connected to other initiatives, notably occupational, educational and assessment standards, modularised and credit-based education and training systems. In Member States, three sometimes overlapping stages of policy formulation and implementation can be identified:

(a) experimentation and uncertainty. Certain countries are at an experimental stage, but accept the need for initiatives. To what extent these initiatives will influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis remains uncertain;

(b) national systems emerge. Other countries move towards national systems based on legal and institutional frameworks;

([2]) Established by the European Commission and Cedefop in 1999.

(c) permanent systems already exist. Finally there are countries where permanent systems were introduced earlier; this does not mean, however, that further policy development is ruled out. There are substantial debates on the subject.

This simplified picture illustrates the dynamic character of policies on validating non-formal and informal learning. Political frameworks and institutional structures still have to be permanently established and the overall situation can be described as one of trial and error.

Formal education and training providers have so far dominated the field, using validation as a means to increase flexibility and to open up for alternative learning outcomes. The monopoly of formal education and training in promoting validation is challenged; for example, autonomous validation approaches, based on standards defined at international level (ISO, EN) and in sectors are gaining importance. This competition between different validation systems highlights the question of valuing learning. Who should decide how a learning outcome is valued and who should set the standards used for assessment? Furthermore, these alternative systems highlight the issues of the links between outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and the formal learning system.

Convergence in policy and practice

National policies on validating non-formal and informal learning concentrate on a limited number of features. Developments point to common solutions which might provide a basis for common European approaches.

Standards

The standards (references, norms) are crucial to developing national systems for validation. While traditional standards frequently have mixed input and output criteria, in an increasing number of countries, the standards focus on learning outcomes.

Modules

In many Member States, the development of modules is closely related to the introduction of systems for validating non-formal and informal learning. An increasing number of countries reorganise formal education and training through establishing units and modules to delimit learning ‘domains’ suitable for validation.

Developing pathways and connections

Increasingly, national policies serve to link formal, non-formal and informal learning. In education, training and learning, this marks a significant change in the way policies are conceived and implemented. Standards and modules are elements in this strategy, the aim of which is to combine learning from different settings in a flexible way. A qualification can either be achieved by following a specific learning pathway or through a diversity of them. This tendency is strengthened by the appearance of genuinely autonomous standards set by stakeholders in sectors and enterprises.

Methodological convergence

A tendency to concentrate efforts on a limited set of methodological approaches and instruments can be observed in Member States. The portfolio is given particular attention as it captures a broader spectrum of learning outcomes. In that respect, the distinction between formative and summative assessments provides helpful information and feedback. There are five main methods of collecting evidence of learning outcomes: traditional tests and examinations; declarative methods; methods based on observation; simulations; and evidence (physical or intellectual) of work. The overall quality of validation hinges on reliability and validity. This issue underlines the need for exchange of practice in Europe.

Social partners and stakeholder commitment

Systematic and strong commitment from social partners and other stakeholders is noted in the new approaches to validation. Validating non-formal and informal learning can be seen as a way of breaking down the isolation of formal education and training systems and of strengthening the links to working life and society. Involving social partners and of a variety of stakeholders is necessary to provide confidence in the emerging approaches and systems.

Need for coherence

The report documents that validation systems are becoming increasingly important across Europe. They still operate as 'isolated islands' failing to communicate. The political wish and need to improve communication and coherence provided the background for the recommendation of the European education and training ministers, the European social partners and the Commission in Copenhagen 2002 to propose common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning ([3]).

Common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning

A set of Common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning was agreed by the 25 EU education and training ministers in May 2004. These principles are to be used on a voluntary basis. Individual entitlements, institutional obligations, confidence and credibility are at the core of this proposal. The purpose is to increase convergence between different national and sector systems for validation and to contribute to lifelong learning policies.

Individual entitlements

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

([3]) The Copenhagen Declaration on increased cooperation in European vocational education and training from November 2002 is an integrated part of the Education and Training 2010 strategy. The same applies to the Maastricht communiqué on cooperation in European VET (14 December 2004) where the follow up to Copenhagen Declaration 2005-06 is outlined.

Obligations of stakeholders

Stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

Confidence and trust

The processes, procedures and criteria for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

Credibility and legitimacy

Systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders. Assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

Towards a European policy on validation

The agreement on common European principles for validation confirms that European countries share many of the same challenges. While methodological and institutional solutions have to be developed nationally, regionally and locally, the European role is to foster the links and bridges between approaches and systems and to support high quality. The proposal for a European qualifications framework (EQF), referring to learning outcomes and competences rather than formal education and training structures, is an important step in this direction.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has to be seriously considered in establishing coherent national systems of LLL, to which the Member States committed themselves by 2006, with the support of all stakeholders and especially the social partners (who made valuing learning an important priority in their framework agreement of 2002) ([4]).

([4]) *Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competencies and qualifications* (UNICE, 2002). Available from Internet: http://www.etuc.org/a/146.

1. Why a European inventory?

This report on national policies and practices on validation of non-formal and informal learning is intended to open up a more systematic exchange of experiences in Europe. It is our hope that this effort will support the development of high quality methodologies and systems for validation at national, regional, sector and enterprise levels. This report is the first step towards establishing a European inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning which it is hoped will contribute to more coherent, high quality and cost effective methods and systems for validation.

1.1. A changing political context

During the last few years, valuing learning has become a priority in European policies on education, training and learning. While formal education and training form the backbone of what are frequently termed knowledge-based societies, an increasing number of actors stress the need to make use of the full range of available knowledge and competences. The outcomes of the learning that occurs in non-formal and informal settings at work, in voluntary organisations or at home must be properly acknowledged and valued. This is the only way, it is argued, that a strategy of lifelong learning can be developed and realised, allowing individuals to combine and build on both formal and non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

This challenge is explicitly addressed in the Communication from the European Commission on *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality* published in November 2001. Based on extensive consultation in Member States, candidate and EEA countries, among social partners and non-governmental organisations, the Communication underlined the crucial role of non-formal and informal learning in a strategy for lifelong learning. By linking 'lifelong' to 'life-wide' learning, the Communication signals that there is a need to change perceptions of when learning takes place (cradle to grave) as well as where it takes place. To succeed, a knowledge-based society must be able to link together the full diversity of learning processes and learning outcomes, irrespective of the institutional setting. Continuity of learning is central.

The Communication emphasises the need for systematic exchange of experience and best practice in identifying, assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning. This exchange is essential to clarify the complex methodological issues that arise when validating non-formal and informal learning. Such sharing is also necessary when addressing institutional and political issues, like the role and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders.

The Communication on lifelong learning was followed by several political initiatives during spring and autumn 2002. In February 2002, the European social partner organisations (ETUC, UNICE, CEEP) agreed the joint declaration *Framework of actions for the lifelong learning*

development of competencies and qualifications (2002). This initiative underlines the increasing importance of validation of competences. In particular, it insists on introducing methodologies and systems for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning. Finding appropriate and high quality solutions to this challenge is seen as a high priority. The framework for action is the first coordinated and explicit statement of the European social partners in this field and was confirmed in a follow up report published in March 2003.

In May 2002, the European Union Ministers of Education and Training passed a resolution on lifelong learning reaffirming the importance of valuing learning and the main recommendations of the Communication European Council (2002b). In June 2002, the European Union Employment Ministers drew a parallel conclusion in their resolution on skills and mobility (European Commission, 2002). In November 2002, Education and Training Ministers passed a resolution calling for increased cooperation in vocational education and training. Member States are invited to develop:

> 'a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels'.

Such common principles and the recommendations of the 2002 European conference on validating non-formal and informal learning ([5]) have several consequences. There is an urgent need to provide an updated inventory of methodological and institutional developments and it is also necessary to bring together relevant stakeholders to elaborate a European strategy.

The Copenhagen Declaration (November 2002) and the Council Resolution (December 2002a) acknowledge that priority should be given to developing a set of common principles on validating non-formal and informal learning. Since then several further decisions have been adopted to affirm the importance of such principles and guide their development and application.

In May 2004 ([6]), as a follow up to the Copenhagen Declaration ([7]), the Council adopted a set of conclusions outlining *Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning* ([8]). The Council invited the Commission, Member States, social partners and non-governmental organisations to disseminate and promote these principles.

([5]) The conference was organised jointly by the European Commission, Cedefop and the Ministry of Education in Norway (Oslo, May 2002).

([6]) Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council (Brussels 18 May 2004) on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

([7]) Copenhagen Declaration, 2002. See website: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/index_en.html.

([8]) Common European Principles, 2004. See website: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/docs/official/keydoc_en.html.

In the Maastricht communiqué (December 2004) ([9]), the ministers responsible for vocational education and training, the social partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen cooperation to modernise their vocational education and training systems and to offer all Europeans the qualifications and competences they need. In particular, to achieve the Lisbon goals at national level, priority should be given to the use of common instruments, references and principles to support the reform and the development of VET systems and practices regarding transparency (Europass) ([10]), guidance throughout life, quality assurance and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

According to the joint interim report of the Council and Commission, *Education and training 2010* (February 2004) ([11]), the use of common instruments, references and principles should contribute to the increase of mutual trust between countries and key stakeholders. These common 'tools' should encourage national authorities to introduce reforms, enhancing their visibility, understanding and application.

The European inventory presented here is one element of these common tools. It is a prerequisite to closer cooperation in implementing common principles on validation. It establishes the foundation for possible next steps towards national comprehensive validation systems and common principles agreed at European level. Another instrument under development currently is the knowledge system on LLL, where good examples on policy development will be documented (www.cedefop.eu.int).

1.2. European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications

One of the main tasks of the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications has been to exchange experience on validating non-formal and informal learning. Acknowledging that Cedefop had already made a first attempt (Bjornavold, 2000), it was agreed that a more detailed approach was needed to support future national and European discussions. Therefore, the forum launched a process to establish a European inventory of validation approaches.

In October 2001, the members of the forum (representatives of national governments and social partners) were invited to identify and appoint experts and institutions responsible for providing and updating information on validating non-formal and informal learning. This information, covering public (national and/or regional policies and practices) and private (sector and industry) initiatives, aimed to provide a coherent and updated overview of

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([9]) Maastricht communiqué, 2004. See website: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/news/ip/docs/maastricht_com_en.pdf.

([10]) http://europass.cedefop.eu.int.

([11]) Joint Council and Commission Interim Report, 2004: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf.

political and legal issues, and methodological developments. Questionnaires were distributed. The purpose was not to conduct a one-off survey but to establish the basis for a continuing information gathering process. Rapid developments and the quality of the material received made it necessary to gather additional information as well.

1.3. Structure of the report

This report covers Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It includes information on eight new Members States (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and two candidate countries (Bulgaria and Romania). The European Training Foundation (ETF) provided an overview of initiatives in the countries which, at that time, were candidate countries.

The report summarises the main findings and tendencies, convergences and divergences, innovative and creative policies and practices. Particular attention is given to comparative dimensions. It presents the common European principles needed to support a coherent validation approach at national and European level.

The report is organised in the following way.

Chapter 2 revisits the conclusions of *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000). These conclusions serve as a general starting point for the discussions on political and methodological issues (Section 2.1.). The definitions of core concepts are presented (Section 2.2.) as well as some aspects of the debates in the research community (Section 2.3.).

Chapter 3 describes national policies and practices on validation in the Member States and candidate countries. It addresses the following sub-questions:

- can national (and regional) validation policies and practices be identified?
- what are the possible roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in designing and implementing validation policies?

The chapter indicates the direction and depth of policies and practices. It does not pretend to provide a complete overview.

Chapter 4 examines areas of commonalities and convergence in national policies and practices. Linking non-formal and informal learning to formal education and training is a crucial feature of current developments. Most countries are involved in defining standards (Section 4.1.), organising modules (Section 4.2.) and improving pathways (Section 4.3.). Social partners and stakeholders are actively involved in validating formal, non-formal and informal learning. As their roles and responsibilities change, the process of coordination becomes more challenging for them and for public authorities (Section 4.4.). Convergence is

particularly relevant to developing common European strategy to valuing learning (Section 4.5.).

Chapter 5 concentrates on the methodologies used in Member States for innovative experiments and practices to assess and validate non-formal and informal learning. In validation, there is a challenge to consolidate the relationship between qualifications and competences (Section 5.1.). In practice, assessment serves distinct formative and summative functions. Examples in Member States are discussed (Section 5.2.). The portfolio is a tool that embraces these assessments; this tool is already widespread and plays an exploratory, a validating or a certifying role (Section 5.3.). Collecting evidence for the portfolio can be based on several assessment methods; five main types of method practiced in Member States are considered (Section 5.4.). The fundamental issue of quality (reliability and validity) of assessment and validation approaches is briefly treated (Section 5.4.). Finally, the use of a limited but diverse set of assessment methodologies is recommended to ensure transferability and coherence as well as to achieve and improve quality (notably, reliability and validity) (Section 5.5.).

Chapter 6 summarises the main trends in validating non-formal and informal learning in Europe (Section 6.1.). The common European principles recently agreed upon by the Council at European level set the preconditions for a transparent and coherent European strategy on the matter (Section 6.2.). The key message of these principles is to support coherent national validation approaches by ensuring confidence, impartiality and credibility (Section 6.3.). At European level, mechanisms exist to help transfer and coherence; at national level, the common European principles strengthen comprehensive national systems; social partners and stakeholders have growing responsibilities and, for the individual, the recently adopted Europass should enable them to combine learning outcomes from different settings in a more flexible way than today (Section 6.4.).

2. Issues and concepts

This chapter starts by examining political issues, institutional challenges and methodological requirements concerning validation (Section 1.1.). It revisits the overview of European developments in validating non-formal learning initiated by Cedefop (Bjornavold, 2000) ([12]) which presented five country clusters and initiatives at European Union level. Attention is then devoted to defining core concepts (learning and its components; validation and its main types) starting with the definitions by Cedefop, the Commission and the Member States (Section 1.2.). While differences in concepts exist, a certain convergence can be observed. Finally, questions raised by researchers are presented briefly. The debate concentrates mostly on the relationships between learning in formal and non-formal settings and the possibility of providing a positive definition of non-formal learning.

2.1. Issues and requirements

According to *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000), political and institutional issues are crucial, in addition to methodological requirements. Who to involve and how to increase mutual learning between Member States are questions still to be debated. Answers are important when trying to implement a lifelong learning strategy in Europe.

2.1.1. Political and institutional issues

Two requirements for successfully implementing validation were emphasised in *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000); one focused on institutional aspects, the other on mutual learning.

In a validation process on formal, non-formal and informal learning, institutional design must fulfil some basic principles of trust ([13]). For example, transparency of standards is essential if acceptance, trust and legitimacy are to be achieved. Transparency of procedure is also very important. Therefore, the division of roles (standard setting, assessment, validation, appeal, quality control) has to be clear and available to those interested. The stakeholders must be considered. Since validation of non-formal learning could have a direct effect on wages as well as on the distribution of jobs in the labour market, this matter requires a balancing of interests. Although little emphasised until now, the question of who to involve and who to listen to could be decisive. The attention of policy-makers and researchers must be drawn to this issue when implementing common European principles.

([12]) Practices were examined in 15 countries and were concluded by listing methodological and institutional challenges.

([13]) Or, '*communauté de confiance*' as proposed by Young (2001).

Mutual learning should be supported between projects, institutions and countries. It is important for policy reasons (trust and credibility) and for methodological or institutional improvement. At policy level, it is necessary to increase coordination and to support European and national activities to capitalise on the experiences gained through projects, programmes and institutional reforms. At European level, the potential for mutual learning is much greater than the actual and factual achievements. Establishing possibilities for learning mechanisms must reflect the various purposes and functions to be fulfilled.

2.1.2. Methodological requirements

While relevant in formal education and training, certain issues emerge as critical when encountering learning in non-formal and informal settings. For example, which competences should be certified at national level, and which should not? How should standards for non-formal and informal learning be defined? Who should decide on standards and what interests are to be involved in these processes? When do assessments enter into the personal domain where ethical considerations ought to restrain from further intrusion? Discussion on national and European approaches to validating non-formal learning highlights four general challenges ([14]). These cover how to:

(a) approach new roles and functions given to assessment and validation?

(b) deal with complex questions of reliability, reflecting the diversity of learning contexts and experiences encountered?

(c) deal with complex questions of validity, taking into account the tacit and highly contextual character of non-formal and informal learning outcomes?

(d) manage the issue of standards setting (*référentiels*)?

First, new roles and functions are given to assessment and validation. In the non-formal and the informal, just as in the formal domain, the purpose of the assessments determines methodological choices. Successful development implies that the functions are clearly understood and combined (and/or separated) in a constructive and realistic way. With a formative function to assessment, instruments and tools are used to guide learning by individuals and enterprises. With a summative function, non-formal learning can be tested for inclusion in formal education and training and it can remain independent. Is a combination desirable and feasible?

Assessment can fulfil a summative or a formative function. The distinction between summative and formative is essential to the basic methodological choices made. On the one hand, the primary goal of summative assessment is grading or certifying students and/or candidates (for example assessment of work experience). Skills and competences assessed are either potentially or actually in use. Assessment takes place at the end of a unit, a chapter, a

([14]) The order of presentation of the questions is for convenience and does not denote priorities.

course or a semester, a year or when it is expected that the required level of competence will have been achieved. The judgement is made after a particular piece of learning or education is thought to be completed ([15]). On the other hand, formative assessment occurs during learning. The most important function of formative assessment is to facilitate individual learning. It points to areas of needed remediation so that immediately subsequent learning can be made more pertinent and beneficial ([16]) ([17]). The purpose is not to grade or certify the learner; it is to help both the learner and the teacher focus on the particular learning necessary for movement towards mastery. Formative assessment may also prove useful from an enterprise point of view as a way of taking stock of human resources. It also facilitates learning by breaking the sequence into smaller units. Formative assessment involves collecting appropriate evidence while learning takes place. Today, accepted theory no longer separates formative and summative assessments. Following Taras' (2002), assessment requires being primarily formative in nature.

The second issue concerns reliability. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment scores: a candidate expects to attain the same score (results) regardless of when the assessment was completed, when the test was marked, by whom and in which location the test was marked (Moskal and Leydens, 2000). With non-formal and informal learning, the diversity of processes and contexts makes it difficult to achieve the same level of reliability as in standardised tests (for example, multiple choice). The question is how (and which specific kind of) reliability should be sought in this new domain. It could be through seeking optimal transparency in assessment (standards and procedures) and implementing transparent quality assurance procedures at all levels and in all functions.

The third issue deals with validity. There is an acute danger of measuring something other than what is intended. The highly contextual and (partly) tacit character of non-formal and informal learning complicates the quest for validity ([18]). A main challenge is to avoid a distorted picture of the candidate and the domain and to strive for authenticity. Methodologies have to reflect the complexity of the task; they must be able to capture what is individually and contextually specific.

Fourth, the issue of standards (*référentiels*) is central to assessing formal as well as non-formal and informal learning. While norm referencing (using the performance of a group/population) has not been seriously discussed in the context of assessing non-formal learning (due to the diversity of competences involved), the issue of criterion or domain

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([15]) In formal education, the results can also be useful for judging the effectiveness of the teacher, and comparing alternative curricula.

([16]) Taras (2002) mentions the review of literature presented by Black in 1998 which summarises evidence from 250 articles or chapters, at all educational levels, from infant school to university, and across subjects and different countries. The review notes that emphasising and strengthening formative assessment improves learning.

([17]) Adapted from the definition given in Bloom et al., 1979.

([18]) Establishing reliability is a prerequisite for establishing validity (Gay, 1987).

referencing is very important. The definition of boundaries of competence-domains (their size and content) is also of critical importance. The wider the area, the greater the challenge in designing authentic assessment approaches. This reverts, in many ways, to the question of functions to be fulfilled by assessment and validation. Is the learning process to be improved? Is it desirable to produce a certificate? Both purposes are highly legitimate and useful. The setting up of standards (or *référentiels*) and assessment methodologies may differ considerably according to the purposes selected.

2.2. Definitions of core concepts

Validating non-formal and informal learning is still a new, unsettled and emerging activity in which objectives and responsibilities have to be clarified. This is reflected in the conceptual diversity (and at times, confusion) characterising the field, in many cases making it difficult to fully comprehend the initiatives being launched. Cedefop addressed this problem through the glossary annexed to *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000), updated after the accession of the new Member States (Cedefop, 2004). The purpose is to introduce a set of key terms and definitions to help communication.

The need for conceptual clarity was also illustrated in the consultation leading up to the Communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001) ([19]). The consultation illustrated major differences between the countries in the definition and understanding of core concepts. This might eventually influence the way Member States define and design practical solutions to validation.

The issue of defining learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and validation is a complex one. The survey illustrated that each Member State has its own definition. It also shows that they frequently use different concepts to capture the same activities. Different definitions may coexist in a country. Terms like validation, accreditation, certification, recognition and assessment are intermixed and used in parallel to each other. At European level, the challenge is to adopt definitions that are wide enough to embrace national and regional specifics and cultures, but at the same time focused enough to make exchange of experiences possible.

Not underestimating this complexity, a tendency towards convergence exists. In fact, important elements of the definitions presented in the Cedefop glossary, and elaborated in the Communication on lifelong learning, seem to have been adopted and/or adapted in a majority of the countries participating in the survey.

([19]) For a detailed overview over this consultation process, see http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/lll_en.html.

2.2.1. Learning: formal, non-formal and informal

The Cedefop glossary (Tissot, 2000; 2004) defines core concepts as follows:

(a) formal learning consists of learning that occurs within an organised and structured context (formal education, in-company training), and that is designed as learning. It may lead to formal recognition (diploma, certificate);

(b) non-formal learning consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element;

(c) informal learning is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. It is often referred to as experiential learning and can, to a degree, be understood as accidental learning.

A crucial dimension is the extent to which a learning process is planned or structured explicitly to enable learning.

The Communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001) defines core concepts as follows:

(a) formal learning is typically provided by education or training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective;

(b) non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to certification. However, it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view;

(c) informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support). Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random).

Both these definitions insist on the importance of context and the intention to learn. The majority of Member States responding to the survey accepts the definitions provided by Cedefop and the Communication on lifelong learning as useful tools for communication. This does not mean that all aspects of national policies and practices are covered. Nevertheless, the concepts are helpful in drawing attention to the activities in question. Countries like Austria (*nicht-formell und informell*), Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway (*ikke-formell og uformell*) and Spain are all using the terms non-formal and informal learning in their descriptions of national activities. However, they underline the general character of the concepts and point to the need for additional ones.

Other countries (France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) do not refer to the term non-formal or informal learning. This applies in particular to Ireland and the United Kingdom where terms like prior learning and prior experiential learning are used. In France,

the term *acquis de l'expérience professionelle* is reported and points to validation of already acquired learning outcomes. In the Scandinavian countries, the term *Realkompetanse* has been established in relation to the developments in validation (Nordic Council, 2001). *Realkompetanse* covers the entire scope of learning outcomes, from formal to informal, and has been criticised for being too broad. However, the concept is important in addressing the totality of qualifications and competences held by an individual.

In general, there is no absolute borderline between formal, non-formal and informal learning ([20]). Adding to this complexity, approaches from policy-makers and academics do not always match. While the focus on non-formal and informal learning has increased political attention to learning taking place outside schools, the imprecise character of the concepts has attracted criticism from researchers (see discussions in Section 2.3.).

2.2.2. Intention and structure

The context of learning and the intention to learn are two dimensions emphasised in the definitions (Cedefop, European Union, Member States and research). Faced with the challenges of lifelong and life-wide learning, the learner is at the core of the learning process, regardless of the context or setting in which learning takes place. The intention to learn and the contextual factors vary considerably and will inevitably influence the outcomes.

The variations along these two dimensions explain differences in categorising learning (formal, non-formal and or informal). In formal education and training, learning is structured and planned according to specific education and/or training objectives (Eraut, 2000). In an enterprise, activities may be highly structured, but not planned according to any particular learning objective. The situation is not planned for learning but important learning may nevertheless occur. Finally, in activities with little structure and/or planning involved, such as many family or leisure activities, learning is not the explicit objective or purpose, but it can occur. Table 1 illustrates the nature of learning.

Table 1: Nature of learning: intention and structure

	Intention to learn		
Structure of the context	*Learning is intentional*		*Learning is non-intentional*
Planned learning activities	***Formal learning***		
Planned activities		***Non-formal learning (or contextual learning)***	
No planning			***Informal learning***

Source: Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004).

([20]) See also: OECD project on the role of national qualifications framework in supporting lifelong learning, initiated in 2002. The report is available at http://ocde.org.

From an academic point of view, more remains to be done to understand what learning is all about. What is it in a lifelong learning perspective? What is learning for adults? In Member States and at European Union level, the terms formal, non-formal and informal have proven useful key concepts. In Member States, at policy level, this aspect of intention to learn has been largely acknowledged.

2.2.3. Validation

The activities covered by this report are named in many different ways in the countries. Nevertheless, the term validation has been accepted as a common term ([21]). It is sufficiently general to cover the various activities in question (ranging from the first identification of learning outcomes, via assessment and/or testing processes, to recognition, certification or accreditation coming at the end of the process). In lifelong and life-wide learning, validation is crucial to ensure the visibility and indicate the appropriate value of the learning that takes place anywhere and at any time in the life of the individual. Three essential dimensions of validation are usually included in the various definitions:

(a) the learning outcomes (be these within a formal, non-formal and/or informal learning setting);

(b) the standards (norms, *référentiels*) against which the assessment takes place (standards can be established by the education and training system or they can be autonomous);

(c) the process whereby a learning outcome is validated.

In the Cedefop glossary (Tissot, 2000; 2004), validation is defined as the process of identifying, assessing and recognising a wider range of skills and competences which people develop through their lives and in different contexts, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

In the Communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001) validation is defined in the same way as by Cedefop, and 'valuing learning' is introduced as an overarching term.

Member States ([22]), agree that validation is a process concerning skills and competences acquired both inside and outside formal education and training and including non-formally as well as informally acquired learning outcomes. In some Member States (Belgium-Fl ([23]) and Norway), Cedefop's definitions are directly referred to. In France, validation is a process of

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([21]) In some countries, notably France, the term has been given a very precise legal meaning. In this context validation is used in a broader sense, covering the processes of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

([22]) In their response to the survey launched by the European forum on transparency of vocational education and training.

([23]) Belgium–Fl indicates it concerns the Flemish community of the country. Otherwise indicated, it concerns the entire country.

assessing knowledge, skills and competences acquired through experience (at least three years) and judged against the national standard of a vocational diploma.

In Sweden, there are different though similar definitions. The concept *validering* has a broad meaning. The Government refers to *validering* as a structured assessment (estimation), valuing and recognising knowledge and competence acquired both within and outside formal education. Three parts can be distinguished. First, for the individual, it is a matter of *validering* of knowledge and competences gained in different ways to get marks, which give access to further education. Second, it is the validation of competence towards certification or sector certification for the labour market i.e. *validering* of vocational qualifications/competences. Third, in pedagogy, it concerns the adaptation of content and practice of the training in relation to an individual's preconditions and previous knowledge.

In the Netherlands, the recognition of informally acquired skills and qualifications, *Erkenning Verworven Competenties* (EVC), is a procedure to recognise formally non-formal and informal learning. In the United Kingdom, the term used to refer to validation is 'accreditation' within the national qualifications framework. The accreditation of prior learning (APL) in the NVQ/SVQ system is defined as the process of collecting and validating evidence of prior learning and achievements to demonstrate current competence.

2.2.4. Main types of validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning covers a range of activities. In some cases, validation is linked to or included in formal education and training. In other cases, validation operates on an autonomous basis.

For validation linked to successful completion of an education or training programme (certificate, diploma), recognition is the end product. It testifies the outcomes achieved by an individual having completed a predefined learning process. This is general practice in formal settings. Usually, a candidate will receive a diploma or certificate valid within a national, regional or sector setting, the credibility and transferability of which will vary considerably. This validation includes prior learning assessment: it links the assessment of any kind of learning to the validation proposed in formal education and training (Austria, France, Ireland, Norway, and the United Kingdom).

For validation of actual competences in relation to officially established standards, norms or references, the certificates of competences can be autonomous or self-contained (examples in Belgium–Fl, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom). This validation has value as such and it can also be related to formal education and training (France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom). Standards define the competences to be assessed, regardless of how and where learning takes place. Usually, validation concerns non-formal and informal learning taking place outside planned education and training. The certificates validate non-formal learning occurring in activities planned to reach work objectives (such as work

organisation in enterprises) and in which learning is a component in the work situation (on-the-job learning).

In several Member States, the opportunity exists for individuals to have their learning assessed against predefined standards without needing to complete all or part of an education or training programme. Usually, this is possible with certificates validating non-formal learning. This signifies that learning outcomes from formal settings can be combined with learning outcomes from non-formal and informal settings, irrespective of how and where they were acquired. Table 2 illustrates the main types of validation.

Table 2: Types of validation and nature of learning

	Formal learning	Non-formal learning	Informal learning ([24])
Types of validation	Formal diploma or certificate (including APL, VAE)	• Self contained validation • Autonomous validation • Link to formally recognised validation	• Self contained validation • Learning should not be validated

Source: Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004).

2.3. Debates on core concepts

At policy level, most countries accept the terms non-formal and informal learning as useful concepts. At research level, inconsistencies are pointed out even if consensus is acknowledged. Intention to learn, the importance of context and active or self-organised character of the learning seem to be widely accepted concepts. Other issues, such as the distinction between non-formal and informal learning are more contested. Some aspects of the academic debate are considered briefly below.

2.3.1. Inconsistencies

A crucial element concerns what is at stake in validating formal, non-formal or informal learning. As noted by Straka (2002), the aspects assessed and validated are the outcomes of learning in a formal, non-formal or informal setting. In fact, to refer to formal, non-formal or informal learning is a shortcut which is partly misleading. The outcomes of learning are assessed and validated, not the learning process itself.

Second, the learning process takes place in a variety of settings: formal, non-formal or informal. The learning *per se* is not formal, non-formal or informal.

([24]) Society may decide that certain informal learning is not to be validated or certified. An extreme example would be an 'active citizenship' competence. Such a competence should not be certified. Nevertheless, learning outcomes of active citizenship activities could be integrated in to the validation of some organisational type of learning.

Third, inconsistencies concern the structure of the setting (structure of the context in Table 1). Are there two (formal and non-formal) or three settings (formal, non-formal, informal)? Can the settings be defined in a mutually exclusive way? What distinguishes non-formal from informal? Can non-formal only be defined as the negative of formal? According to critics, learning is defined only by environmental or contextual criteria, some of which are not sufficiently concise and consistent to be separated.

In agreement with Eraut (2000), Straka (2002) suggests referring to the 'validation of competences (learning outcomes) in formal and non-formal settings'. According to this approach, formal, non-formal and informal learning concerns the setting (structure of the context) and not the learning. In that respect, the distinction between non-formal and informal is not informative. Therefore, it is suggested to distinguish only formal and non-formal on the basis of a clear definition of the term formal. Table 3 indicates the criteria used for such a typology.

Table 3: Environmental conditions and learning types

Environmental conditions	**Formal**	**Non-formal**
Learning types	(Public) school and training system	Workplace, family, peers, others
Explicit	XX	X
Accidental	X	X
Implicit	X	XX

Source: Straka, 2002.

The settings in which learning takes place are defined by either formal or non-formal. According to Eraut (2000) and supported by Straka (2002), formal learning takes place within a prescribed framework for learning (e.g. school syllabus, training regulations for companies) as part of an organised event or package. It is characterised by the presence of a designated teacher or trainer and defined by the existence of external specifications of outcomes. Learning leads to a designated qualification, credit or certificate and is affiliated with the right to further education.

Non-formal and informal learning are defined by their exclusion from the above categories. These can be largely addressed by distinguishing between explicit, accidental and implicit learning (the author does not, however, undertake an identical critical review of these three learning aspects). Straka's emphasis on learning settings is useful and clearly in line with the way formal, non-formal (and informal) learning concepts have been used in the different countries.

2.3.2. Can non-formal learning be defined *per se*?

The problem with the concepts of non-formal and informal learning is their negative character; they define an activity as being residual to and as something else than formal learning. This shows the generally weak understanding of these learning activities. If learning processes are to be fully understood, additional terms like 'self-directed learning', 'self-organised learning', 'work process learning', 'contextual learning', and 'situated learning'

must be reflected (Straka, 2001; Erpenbeck, 1999a, 1999b; Erpenbeck and von Rosenstiel, 2003; Kivinen and Ristelä, 2003). 'Lifelong learning for all' means to include all forms of learning that individuals can possibly develop and would like or hope to have recognised (Colardyn (ed.), 2002).

As in Straka (2002) and Eraut (2000), Colardyn (1996) proposes a 'bipolar' characterisation of formal and non-formal ([25]). In the debate on skills and competences, Colardyn (1996) referred to the characteristics defining learning outcomes in formal and non-formal settings. First, the learning process is defined by its objectives, progression and content, for formal and non-formal settings. Second, specific issues characterise learning in each of the two settings: teaching premise, teaching duration, transfer of knowledge and extent of recognition of prior learning.

In formal settings, the learning objectives assume that learning is homogeneous, as defined by a 'discipline' or as relating to the requirements of a job. The progression in learning has a collective dimension, as it is an identical process for all the students. The content assumes that learning outcomes are centred on specific domains and/or disciplines. In formal settings, teaching premises are formalised and they indicate where and when teaching (and learning) takes place. Teaching duration is defined a priori. For transfer of knowledge, the assumption is that transfer takes place between teaching and work ([26]). Prior learning and/or experience is taken into account only for value for the certificate.

In non-formal (and informal) settings, the learning objectives assume that learning is heterogeneous (as the work and life experience of individuals are). Progression in learning has a strong individual dimension as work and life experience varies from person to person. In non-formal (and informal settings), learning is independent from the teaching premises. Teaching duration is not considered. The transfer is assumed to take place between one work (or social) context and another ([27]). Finally, all prior learning and/or experience can be acknowledged (be assessed and validated).

Authors agree that settings influence learning processes and outcomes. Formal and non-formal settings can be seen as two extremes in a continuum. Between these two extremes many different learning conditions, forms and outcomes are possible. Erpenbeck and Sauer (2000) emphasised that learning process control may point towards more understanding of non-formal and informal learning. According to this perspective, the different learning forms are located within a continuum ranging from externally controlled (teaching) to self-directed or self organised. This reflects that learning in formal settings is structured according to a range of factors beyond the control of the learner: the curricula, the qualification framework, the teaching methods, composition of the class. It might be different for learning in

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([25]) Non-formal would then include informal. The main difference appears during assessment and validation. The unstructured character of the context gives a challenging dimension to the collection of evidence.

([26]) How would knowledge acquired in a curriculum (learning outcomes) be used, for example, in working life?

([27]) How are the learning outcomes acquired in one context transferred to another (work place or social context)?

non-formal settings. Nevertheless, from an individual perspective it is important that these learning forms can interact and be combined (Colardyn, 2001b).

3. National and regional policies

This chapter reviews national validation policies and practices in 14 European Union and EEA countries. In addition, the situation in eight of the new Member States and two candidate countries is presented briefly. The following issues are raised:

- can national (and regional) validation policies and practices be identified?
- can the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders be characterised?

3.1. Validation: a dynamic and evolving field

Clearly defined national policies on validating non-formal and informal learning have been developed by most countries covered by the report. Frequently, these policies take the form of legal initiatives. However, the legal option is not the only possible approach. In many countries, agreements between public authorities and social partners play a role, as do initiatives for better coordination of activities in the public sector. The influence of experimental activities is important.

Very different stages of policy formulation and implementation have been reached in Member States. Three (sometimes overlapping) stages can be identified.

The first stage is characterised by experimentation and uncertainty. The countries concerned are still at an experimental stage (to varying degrees) but accept the need for initiatives. To what extent these initiatives will influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis is still uncertain. Germany, Italy, Austria and Sweden are currently at this stage. Important changes are taking place, pointing towards more active policies.

At the second stage national systems emerge. These countries are moving towards national systems built on a legal and institutional basis. Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Spain illustrate this approach.

In the third stage permanent systems already exist. France, Finland and the United Kingdom belong to this category. It does not mean that further policy development is ruled out. Substantial debate on future developments can be observed. In Finland, the questions raised relate to improving the existing competence based system. In the United Kingdom, it concerns the role played by accreditation of prior learning (APL) within the national education and training system.

This simplified picture illustrates the dynamic character of policies on validating non-formal and informal learning. Political frameworks and institutional structures have yet to be permanently settled and the overall situation can still be described as one of trial and error.

The recommendation of the 31 European education and training ministers in Copenhagen (November 2002) to develop common principles and guidelines for validation must be understood in this context. New validation approaches will affect education and employment prospects and should, therefore, meet high quality standards, reliability, validity and overall credibility. In the following sections, developments in policies and the roles of stakeholders are presented by country.

3.1.1. Austria

Austria has been reluctant to embrace the new approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning (Bjornavold, 2000). No legal, institutional or experimental initiatives have been taken at national level to support new validation methodologies and/or systems. However, initiatives taken during 2003 signal a certain change.

3.1.1.1. Existing national policies

Existing legal and institutional frameworks make it possible to have competences acquired in non-formal or informal settings validated by formal education and training institutions (*Externistenprüfung* of 1979 and *Berufsreifeprüfung* of 1997 are examples). In practice, the individual candidate with (for example) extensive professional experience has the right to sit the relevant tests in formal education and to get a formal certificate or diploma. Also, the existing education and training system (and in particular the vocational part) is very comprehensive and it is sometimes questioned whether there is a need to validate non-formal and informal learning. In addition, vocational evening schools cover the needs of adults who have not completed any formal education and training.

However, validation issues attract considerable interest. Several possible innovations are currently under consideration. One would be to introduce certification committees responsible for coordination, quality assurance and validation in all areas of education and training, including continuing education and training where a larger diversity of provisions exists. A second innovation would be to issue quality labels to those complying with agreed standards. A further approach would be to develop a competence portfolio covering the full range of qualifications and competences. In general, the importance of quality assurance is underlined. It could be reached through voluntary cooperation based on quality circles leading to a quality label guaranteed by the state. None of these potential innovations have, so far, been taken forward at political and or practical level (Ministry of Education, Austria, 2001).

In 2003, the question of validation was raised indirectly, as a part of an emerging discussion on modularisation of vocational education and training. A working group has been established that includes the main players in Austrian vocational education and training. A note issued by the Austrian Chambers of Commerce (2003) presents the main objectives and features of a modularised system. It emphasises the need to reduce radically the number of basic qualification units (275 *Lehrberufe*) and to increased specialisation (through additional layers

of *Wahlpflichtmodulen* and Z*usatzmodulen*). In particular, the additional modules (*Zusatzmodulen*) would offer a better link to continuing vocational education and training and, potentially, their standards could be used as reference for validating non-formal and informal learning. Such a modularisation strategy could represent an opening up of the formal system to external learning outcomes. If such a reform is accepted, a development and implementation period of up to five years is foreseen.

3.1.1.2. Role and responsibilities of different stakeholders

Sectors have started to develop their own assessment and validation approaches, training modules, certificates and diplomas. This acknowledges that competences matter, irrespective of where they have been acquired. These developments take place outside the strictly regulated national qualification system and signal a need for validation, which so far has not been reflected in the overarching national policies. It is worth noting that the reluctance of Austria to embrace new approaches to validation is very much linked to the situation of initial vocational education and training. The dual-system approach, based on a combination of theoretical education in schools and practical training in enterprises, is appreciated as a strong and sufficiently flexible model to meet the wide-ranging needs of individuals and enterprises. As indicated, the judgement is somewhat different when addressing continuing education and training as well as competences developed in enterprises and sectors. It may be assumed that needs expressed outside initial education and training will stimulate innovations in validation policies and practices. The recent focus on modularisation signals the need to make the initial system more flexible and strengthen the link to continuing education and training, non-formal and informal learning.

3.1.2. Belgium

In recent years, several initiatives have been taken pointing towards a more consistent approach to validating non-formal learning. Developments are partly inspired by French and Dutch approaches, but are increasingly adapted to specific needs and conditions at federal or regional level. The country is currently one of the most active in this field. Interestingly, Belgium is one of the European countries most systematically making use of international norms ISO/IEC 17024 ([28]) on certifying personnel (ISO Committee on Conformity Assessment, 2000). This standard is used as a reference for national policies. Considerable experimentation is taking place and it is expected that permanent systems and services will be implemented gradually in next few years.

([28]) Former European norm EN45013.

3.1.2.1. Existing national policies

Adults can attend formal tests in primary, secondary and higher education and training without attending the courses. By 1958, a federal law on access to self-employment had been agreed and allows workers with at least five years of relevant practical experience the right to start up their own business. The experience can either be proved by an employer or through special tests. While not linked to formal education and training, this regulation acknowledges the value of practical experience and work-related learning. In other cases, years of experience gives exemption: for example, five years of professional experience gives a one-year exemption, ten years of experience a two-year exemption (out of a total of three years). Such arrangements exist for nurses with secondary education so that they can be exempted from parts of studies leading to a higher education diploma.

In both Flanders and Wallonia, validation of non-formal learning is linked with policies on lifelong learning. This implies an increased focus on coordination issues. Since different systems of validation operate in isolation, accumulation of credits or transfer of qualifications remains a problem. This is highlighted even more with non-formal learning. The Flemish community set up a coordination mechanism to respond to this challenge (2002). DIVA (*Dienst Informatie Vorming en Afstemming*) ([29]) is based on cooperation between authorities responsible for education, training, employment, economic affairs and culture. The aim is to create a mutually transferable recognition and qualification system. The plan is to link validation of non-formal learning to guidance activities, using the COBRA system ([30]) describing professional profiles. Recent efforts to develop modules may prove important to validation (Flanders). A unit-based system would make it possible for individuals having attended training administered by different ministries (Education, Labour and Enterprise) to combine these (see Chapter 4).

Implementation of ISO/IEC norm 17024 (former EN 45013) has taken place in several sectors, notably for construction, heating and refrigerating, welding, food and catering, metalworking and electricity. The methodology used consists of a portfolio where self-assessment plays an important role. Attention is paid to capturing key competences. After examination, the certificate is added to the 'sector identity-pass' delivered to individuals (see Chapter 5). The ISO standard is used as a basis for certifying individuals as well as accrediting courses.

A recent decree (November 2002) aims to value non-formal and informal learning taking place in clubs, groups, and associations of civil society. It fully recognises the role of the socio-cultural sector in promoting learning. A decree is being prepared for universities to accommodate part-exemptions based on non-academic competences (see Chapter 4). This development is parallel to that observed in Norway and the United Kingdom.

([29]) Training and Alignment Information Service.

([30]) *Competentie en Beroepenrepertorium voor de Arbeidsmarkt*: it is the Flemish parallel to the French ROME (*Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois*; see Section 3.1.5.).

3.1.2.2. Role and responsibilities of different stakeholders

Validation policies have been developed with explicit reference to lifelong learning policies in the Flemish community. In July 2000, an action plan on lifelong learning was agreed by the Flemish Parliament giving specific recommendations regarding the implementation of a new approach to certifying the full range of skills, knowledge and competences held by an individual. The action plan launched a think tank comprising representatives from all Ministries involved (education, labour, enterprise), the social partners and researchers. The result was a recommendation including proposals on validation: it was presented to the Flemish government in December 2001. At the same time, the 'Vilvoorde declaration' was signed, with the Flemish government, the social partners and various other players agreeing on '21 objectives for the 21st century' (November 2001). It identified the development of methodologies and systems for validating non-formal and informal learning as one of the objectives, reflecting the key role it is supposed to play in a strategy for lifelong learning.

In Wallonia, parallel activities have been pursued. In 2001, a law on the right to a *bilan de compétences* (inventory or check up of competences) was accepted. In 2003, the *Communauté Française, Région Wallonne* and the *Commission Communautaire Française* presented a proposal for a systematic approach to validation embedded in an overall strategy aiming at lifelong learning. It is worth noting that the competence descriptions of the COBRA-system (which is the Belgian adapted version of the French ROME) will be an important pillar of the system. The decision outlines an approach where validation is not entirely based on the standards or *référentiels* defined by formal education and training. Employment-related standards are largely used. The relative autonomy is underlined by the explicit and systematic use of the ISO-norm 17024 for defining the main elements of the future system of validation of competences, including quality assurance.

The overarching objective of policies currently developed in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia) is lifelong learning. Broadly speaking, increased coordination between the public authorities that provide education and training is pursued. Transfer of qualifications has been a considerable problem in Belgium, even within single regions like Flanders and Wallonia. The reflection on validation methodologies and the debates on common references or standards aim to change this situation.

3.1.3. Denmark

Validation has become an important part of the political education, training and learning agenda. Furthermore, Denmark has been working closely with the other Nordic countries on validating non-formal and informal learning. While it would be wrong to speak about a genuine Nordic approach to validation, many identical issues have been raised in the five countries (Bjornavold, 2000). In some cases, this has led to a certain convergence. All the five Nordic countries emphasise the need for competence-based and lifelong learning systems where learning in different settings and contexts can be valued and linked in a coherent and transparent framework.

3.1.3.1. Existing policy initiatives

The Adult Education Reform (2001) and the Government action plan for better education (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2002a) set in motion wide-ranging actions on validating non-formal and informal learning. Long before, a variety of different initiatives had been introduced and partly implemented. In 1984, the Parliament agreed on a programme to develop adult education and training treating the question of 'real competences'. It stated that: 'Adults have the right to have their real knowledge and skills documented and recognised, independently of the way these have been acquired'.

This statement has not been followed up in a consistent way but it is considered as still relevant (Hoyrup, Pedersen and Nordentoft, 2003). In 1992, the apprenticeship programme for adults (*Voksenerhvervsuddannelsen*, VEUD) introduced a systematic approach to validating non-formal learning. This scheme made it possible for adults (over 25 years) to be exempted from certain parts of formal initial training based on prior educational or occupational experience. Since 1992, more than 10 000 adults have started training under the VEUD programme. Leading to the same formal certification as initial vocational education and training, VEUD is an effort to address the specific training needs of adults.

At the same time, the SUM system (strategic development of employees: *Strategisk Udvikling af Medarbejdere*) was set up by the social partners (the Confederation of Danish Industries and the Metal Workers' Union) in the industrial sector. SUM is not linked to public sector schemes and plans. The aim is to identify and measure competences within enterprises. It is linked to the collective agreement between the social partners, allowing each employee to attend continuing vocational training for at least two weeks every year. When this agreement was made, the social partners were unable to agree on the content and profile of this training component, questioning who should decide on which courses to attend? To avoid conflict, a toolbox (the SUM system) was created whereby the enterprises themselves were equipped to analyse and describe their own competences and competence needs. The purpose of SUM is to provide enterprises with an instrument to map and validate competences of their own human resources.

The Labour Market Training Act (1995) emphasises the role of the workplace in promoting learning. The Act introduced programmes to assist individuals in identifying their competences with the aim of subsequent training. The duration is of one to three weeks. The content is a combination of assessment and vocational guidance.

Since 1996 under this Act, the labour market training centres (AMU) ([31]) and vocational education and training colleges (VET) have been offering individual competence assessments (ICA) for counselling purposes, resulting in individual training plans. Within ordinary initial vocational education and training schemes, exemption (or credit transfer, the term used in Denmark) can be granted based on prior work experience. Credit transfer 'catalogues' for

([31]) Referred to as continuing vocational training centres (CVTs).

vocational and general or theoretical subjects indicate how and where exemption will be granted inside the formal system.

The individual competence assessments (ICA) offered by CVT centres along with the SUM initiative provide good examples of formative assessment approaches linked to both individual career progression and to human resource development in enterprises.

The Adult Education Reform (2001) may be looked upon as a first step towards a more coherent and comprehensive public approach to validation. It emphasises that stronger and more transparent links have to be established between the various formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. This would include at least VEUD, SUM and ICA initiatives. The long term objective is to achieve a balanced system where: '… the issue of recognition of skills and competences should not be dealt with only from the point of view of the national education system but should be developed to meet the needs of individuals and enterprises' (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2002b). Two elements of this reform are of particular relevance: the basic adult education scheme (GVU) and the advanced levels in adult education and training.

In 2002, the Government presented an action plan for better education (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2002a). The emphasis on validation was strengthened. The plan points towards comprehensive validation, covering a broader range of needs (individual, enterprises, and society). For those lacking formal qualifications, priority is given to introducing an individual right to have 'real' competences validated. This grants access to an education programme and exemption from part of the programme. Certification exclusively based on non-formal competences and part-qualifications will be made available. Finally, documentation arrangements in working life - coordinated with educational planning in enterprises - will be established.

In November 2004, a policy paper was issued by ministers (education; science, technology and innovation; culture; economic and business affairs) responsible for these matters. Discussed by the Danish Parliament (December 2004), it establishes the basis for a permanent system for validating 'real competences' ([32]) (Ministries of Education … (Denmark), 2005).

3.1.3.2. Role and responsibilities of different stakeholders

Vocational education and training is managed by a tripartite system giving shared decision power to the social partners, at central, sector and institutional level. This is well reflected in VEUD where the vocational education committees (bipartite trade committees) are actively involved in the recognition of prior, non-formally acquired competences. The role of the social partners is equally important in the SUM and the ICA initiatives.

([32]) http://www.uvm.dk.

The Ministry of Education is working on an overall strategy for validation, stressing the individual right to validation ([33]), the voluntary character of validation, the need for transparent procedures and high quality in guidance and counselling services. A national system for validation is still in the shaping and future developments will show whether links between different validation strands, in education and work, can be established. Introducing the advanced levels in adult education may indicate that validation will increasingly be used in higher education and will no longer be located only in vocational education and training.

Social partners are less involved, at least at local level, in the basic adult education scheme (GVU). Vocational committees are not directly involved in the actual recognition process. Schools inform the committee of the 'individual training plan' and the committee advises the school on future practice. From the point of view of the ministry, the legitimacy and credibility of comprehensive validation is crucial. Future social partner participation and decentralisation are major issues under discussion.

3.1.4. Finland

Finland was the first of the Nordic countries to introduce a comprehensive national approach to validation through its competence-based system for vocational education and training. As part of a lifelong learning strategy, non-formal learning was integrated in formal education and training.

3.1.4.1. Existing policy initiatives

Since the 1990s, several policy initiatives have confirmed the key-role of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the competence-based system for vocational education and training. Acts on comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools, vocational institutions and adult vocational institutions were passed in 1998. The 1994 Act on National Certificate of Language Proficiency exemplifies the relevance of validation in non-vocational areas, as did the 1995 Law on polytechnics and universities.

These legal initiatives pursue a set of basic objectives, such as strengthening individual learning achievements, improving access to education and training opportunities, and supporting the development of individual talents. Today, the education system is largely competence-based, accepting competences acquired outside formal education and training as equivalent to learning outcomes from within the system. There are three main forms of competence-based qualifications (Koukku, 2003):

- vocational qualifications corresponding to the qualifications which young people acquire in a three-year programme;

([33]) A right to access to VEUD programme.

- further vocational qualifications corresponding to the qualifications of skilled workers (basic vocational training plus studies and three years of work experience);
- specialist vocational qualifications corresponding to the qualifications of specialists (basic vocational training plus studies and five years of work experience).

A large number of people has already benefited from these arrangements, especially at secondary level and in relation to language tests. By 2002, over 16 000 people had acquired a national certificate of language proficiency. In the 1999 competence-based examinations of 12 815 candidates who passed the examinations, only 434 did so without any educational preparation, based solely on their working experience. In 2000, some 18 000 people passed a competence-based examination. While possibilities exist at tertiary level (polytechnics and universities), these seem to be less used or less relevant.

A strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning can be found in the 1999 Development plan for education and research 1999-2004 (Ministry of Education, Finland, 1999). This plan insists on the importance of increasing recognition of prior knowledge acquired in working life, in civic activities or otherwise. The national action plan for employment (NAP) (Ministry for Labour, Finland, 2000) stipulates the need for further developments in validating non-formal and informal learning. According to the NAP, a way of boosting employment is to devise methods for assessing and recognising knowledge and know-how to enable adults to benefit in their studies from skills acquired earlier in working life, civic activities or otherwise. One of the points stressed is that students should be exempt from courses if they have acquired equivalent knowledge and competences through practical work or other experiences.

The Computer driving licence® tests are extensively used (for more information, see Chapter 5). They are administered by TIEKE (Finnish Information Society Development Centre), which grants the permit for educational institutions to arrange the tests and to award the certificate. They are not covered by educational legislation.

3.1.4.2. Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

The National Board of Education plays an important role coordinating the competence-based system. Formally reporting to the Ministry of Education, the board operates as a planning and expert body responsible for primary, secondary and adult education and training (though not for institutions of higher education). The National Board of Education is responsible for a core curriculum on which schools and vocational institutes base their own, local curricula. In the mid-1990s, educational institutions were given more autonomy. This decentralisation means that each educational institution may apply the basic rules for validating non-formal and informal learning according to local needs; the choice of assessment methodology is partly a local matter. There is a separate legislation for universities and polytechnics, which fall within the remit of the Ministry of Education.

The social partners participate in planning and developing the system and are represented at all relevant levels:

(a) the Adult Education Council, set up by the Government, deals with development, research and evaluation in adult education and training;

(b) the training committees, operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, were created to develop contacts between vocational education and working life;

(c) the examination committees, operating under the National Board of Education, were established to organise and supervise competence-based examinations in vocational adult education; they are responsible for arranging examinations;

(d) the consultative committees operate at vocational institutions and develop contacts with local working life.

3.1.5. France

In *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000), France was characterised as one of the European countries with the longest traditions in identifying, assessing and recognising non-formal learning. Legislation promoted in the 1930s was followed by a series of laws during the 1980s and 1990s, concluded by the law on *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* ([34]) in 2002.

3.1.5.1. Existing policy initiatives

In 1934, legislation made it possible to award the title of engineer on the basis of professional experience. Those above 35 years of age with at least five years of professional engineering experience can be awarded the title of 'Engineer graduated by the State'. The procedure includes an interview based on the past accomplishments of the candidate followed by the oral presentation of a written report on the main activities for which they are likely to have responsibility as an engineer. A particular engineer school has responsibility for each specific title.

Since then, several laws have been agreed. The 1985 law enabled individuals who have stopped studying for at least two years and have acquired vocational experience (through work or personal activities) to access a level of higher education. This allows entrance into higher education except for the medical and pharmacology domains.

In 1986, the Ministry for Employment created public assessment centres called *Centres interinstitutionnels de bilans de compétences* (CIBC). They carry out *bilans de compétences*

([34]) Validation has been given a particular meaning in France, referring directly to the provisions of the law. The term validation is used in a broader sense in this report. As will be demonstrated below, formative arrangements like the *bilan de compétences* are covered by our definition; this is not the case in the French legal definition.

(equating to inventories of competences) to help employees to analyse their occupational and personal competences, aptitudes and motivations as well as to define occupational or training plans. There are around 110 assessment centres all over the country, organised in a network ([35]). If they wish, they can associate the social partners or particular actors to their governing board. Private assessment centres also exist. In principle, the *bilan de compétences* provides an exploratory (formative) approach (for more information, see Chapter 5). There are no standards against which to assess the competences as the procedure is not one of validation.

Since 1991, individuals with at least five years of work experience (including one year in their current enterprise) are allowed 24 hours' leave to carry out a *bilan de compétences*. Professionals (psychologists and others) help individuals construct their own 'life, education or occupation' projects. The very positive dimension has often been underlined for individuals in long-term unemployment. The *bilan de compétences* is an example of a formative assessment.

In 1992, the law on *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (VAP, validation of prior occupational learning) enabled individuals with five years of vocational or occupational experience, to be exempt from certain exams leading to a diploma (national certification from the Ministry of Education). Candidates present a portfolio describing in detail the posts held and the occupational experience (various tasks and functions). This written report is then presented to a panel (jury) of teachers and professionals appropriate to the domain. The jury can give credits for courses belonging to the programme (no examination is then required for these courses). This applies also to higher education institutions. These possibilities were expanded in 2002 to vocational training delivered by the Ministry of Employment, AFPA ([36]). Today, 95 of its 350 certificates can be delivered that way.

In 1998, the General Assembly of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry launched the Association for Certification of Vocational Competences (ACVC) ([37]) to validate non-formal learning acquired in work settings (Colardyn, 1999, 2000, 2001a). This certification is a summative assessment.

In early 2002, the law on *modernisation sociale* ([38]) regulated recognition of non-formal learning or *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE) (learning from experience). Assessment of prior learning was made more flexible and broader: it now concerns all diplomas, titles and certificates included in the national register of vocational certifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*). This register is a tool to manage national training supply and provides information for individuals. The National Commission

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([35]) For more information, see: www.bibe.net/federation.htm.

([36]) AFPA: *Association Française pour la formation des Adultes*.

([37]) See ACCP, 1999.

([38]) See: www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

of Vocational Certification (*Commission nationale de certification professionnelle*) is responsible for the register.

This law applies the VAE to all certifications included in the register. The jury can award a full certificate (diploma, title). Informal learning, for example in non-profit activities, is taken into account and the experience has to be at least three years (instead of five years previously). The law is still in its infancy. After a slow start (from 1992 to 2001), the first partial quantitative results (2002) and provisions (2003/2004) show positive signs of increasing interest (for more information, see Chapter 5).

3.1.5.2. Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

Public authorities (several ministries) take policy initiatives, mainly at national, though increasingly at regional, level. The State coordinates the actions through the various ministries awarding certificates (education, employment, youth and sports, agriculture), the chambers of commerce and industries, private providers and the social partners (in particular, the sector awarding the certificates of vocational qualification). The ministries, mainly education and employment, are involved in designing and implementing policies. The social partners and others, such as the chambers and training providers, participate in the various committees and commissions in charge of implementation. For example, the National Commission of Vocational Certification (*Commission nationale de certification professionnelle*), responsible for the national register of vocational certificates, comprises 16 representatives of ministries, 10 representatives of the social partners (five for the employers and five for the employees), three representatives of the different chambers and three of the regions, and 12 qualified personnel ([39]).

Despite a long tradition of legislation on validating non-formal and informal learning, actual practice is limited. Between 1990 and 2000, the *bilan de compétences* (an assessment and not a validation act) reached around 600 000 individuals (Dares, 2000, 2002). In the same period, 19 558 certificates (or parts of certificates) were delivered following (or including) a VAP procedure (1992 Law) (Gagnon, 2000; Ministère de l'éducation, France 2003a, 2003b). Since the 2002 law, the results show a steady increase with 6 760 certificates and/or parts of certificates for that first year of implementation. In 2003, the number of potential candidates (persons seeking information) rose to 15 000: it is estimated that around 13 000 would continue to a certificate (partial or complete).

Over 10 years, an average of around 2 500 to 3 000 candidates annually made use of VAP and VAE opportunities; 60 000 used *bilans de compétences*. In a country where the average one-year cohort numbers around 766 000 individuals, these results could certainly increase in the coming years. The continuous progress is important, as is the increase in interest since the

([39]) See: *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 28.4.2002.

latest, more flexible law (2002). Signals are positive even if from ‘slogan to practice, the way is long’ (Colardyn, 2003).

3.1.6. Germany

Validation of non-formal learning has so far not attracted the same attention as it has in many other European countries. *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000) presented five main reasons for this:

(a) demand has been low;

(b) focus remains on initial education and training;

(c) the dual (vocational) system is based on a combination of school and work-based learning, meaning experiential learning is included in the formal system;

(d) formal vocational education and training is based on *Berufsprofilen* (professional vocational profiles or standards or *référentiels*);

(e) the concept of *Beruf* (vocation), following successful completion of formal education and training specify a training approach and is also linked to wage levels and rules defining rights and responsibilities.

This last point is probably important for understanding the reluctance to make more systematic use of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Existing qualifications very much define the rights and responsibilities an individual holds in the labour market (wages, position). A more flexible validation approach could disturb rights and responsibilities that have been carefully negotiated over time.

In spite of this reluctance, an increasing number of actors criticise the existing education and training system for being too rigid and inflexible. One of the main criticisms is that the link between initial and continuing education is too weak, resulting in a lack of complementarity. Consequently, there is a need for bridging solutions which can utilise the growing (and partly market driven) continuing vocational training (CVT) system in a more systematic way. This could indirectly include a broader use of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

3.1.6.1. Existing policy initiatives

The limited attention given to validation of learning acquired outside the formal system does not mean that learning at work or elsewhere is low. According to a 2000 survey of participation in continuing education and training (*Berichtssystem Weiterbildung*), 67 % of

the population took part in informal vocational continuing education and training. In 1994, the figure was 54 %; in 1997, 72 % ([40]).

Growing awareness of validation of non-formal and informal learning is reflected in numerous research contributions published in recent years (Straka, 2002; Dohmen, 2001; Büchter, 2000). These contributions highlight relevant experiences and perspectives from related fields of work, for example on self-regulated learning. In addition, a growing number of policy initiatives aim at more systematic utilisation of competences acquired outside formal education and training. Five relevant initiatives and reforms linking formal, non-formal and informal learning are presented below:

(a) external testing (*Externenprüfung*);

(b) part-qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) and additional qualifications (*Zusatz-qualifikationen*);

(c) qualification and competence passports and portfolios;

(d) the pass;

(e) the opening of higher education to vocational experiences.

External testing (*Externenprüfung*)

The *Externenprüfung* gives experienced workers the right to sit a journeyman's test without having attended regular training. This is a permanent element of the dual system and is probably the single most important element in bridging non-formal and formal learning. Approximately 5 % of all examinations are based on the *Externenprüfung* annually (which represents around 45 000 individuals and diplomas in an annual cohort of around 880 000 graduates out of an annual age cohort of 1 000 000 individuals).

Part-qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) and additional qualifications (*Zusatzqualifikationen*)

Important initiatives have been taken since the mid-1990s to loosen formal qualification structures. A 1998-survey discovered that 12 % of 20-29 year olds (not in formal education) did not hold any formal qualification. Part-qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) offer a possible solution by crediting individuals for what they have accomplished, even if this does not amount to a full qualification. Such a system would make it easier for individuals not having completed a formal qualification to enter education and training or to access the labour market. A series of experiments (*Modellversuche*) were launched during the late 1990s testing step-by-step qualification, linking education, training and work together in a more flexible way. The development of part qualifications is relevant to validating non-formal learning because it enhances flexible combinations of learning outcomes. Experiences so far are rather limited and it is still an open question whether this approach will become a real alternative for

([40]) The survey was conducted by *Infratest Sozialforschung* on the behalf of Ministry of Education and Research (2000) and targeted the group 19-64 year olds.

the groups targeted. In 1999, guidelines for further and continuing training for individuals with special needs were defined).

Additional qualifications, *Zusatzqualifikationen*, are defined as:

> '… learning in formal, non-formal or informal settings that may be linked to recognised vocational qualifications, and may in this way extend, actualise and increase the relevance of existing national qualifications' (Hanf and Reuling, 2003).

The Federal Ministry of Education has supported these experiments. In 1997, a project addressing the need for reform in vocational education and training was launched (*Reformproject Berufliche Bildung*), introducing additional qualifications as a priority. The concept is not entirely new; it existed as an instrument for retraining in 1970 (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1970) and several experiments (*Modellversuche*) touched on the issue during the 1980s. These qualifications, if implemented, would serve several needs. Enterprises would be given a new and flexible instrument to be used for competence and human resource development. For young people, the qualifications would open up new avenues for career development through apprenticeship (*Karriere durch Lehre*) (for more information: see Chapter 4). Additional qualifications developed by the public education and training system are provided free; units developed by the chambers will normally require a fee (EUR 50 to 500). Additional qualifications normally imply a substantial amount of systematic training, ranging from 20 hours to 200 hours.

Experimenting with part-qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) and additional qualifications (*Zusatzqualifikationen*) may make it easier to combine learning outcomes from formal and non-formal settings. While not a main focus so far, orientation towards a more unit-based system may prove important for opening up vocational education and training to external learning outcomes.

Qualifications and competence passports and portfolios

Since the 1970s, experimental projects have developed regional and sector efforts to address the need to document qualifications and competences of specific groups (unemployed, women returners, drop-outs).

The *Bildungspass-Qualifizierungspass* project (1974) can be described as a portfolio approach to document a broader picture of the competences held by an employee (for more information, see Chapter 5). From 1974 to 1993, 340 000 portfolios were requested. In 1996, 1 % of employees owned such a portfolio (Colardyn, 1996). The *Bildungspass* never became a success and was eventually abandoned. In 2002-03, a total of 65 different qualification and competence passports or portfolios were identified (in *Rahmenkonzept Project Bildungspasses*, 2003). Some successful experiments are developed independently of formal education and training (see Chapter 5) Most of these projects have tried to improve access to

continuing vocational education and training, to rejoin the initial training and to ease entrance to the labour market.

The pass

The *Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifzierung Informellen Lernens* project (Continuing education and training passport with certification of informal learning) started in 2002. It can be looked upon as the first concrete steps towards a genuine national approach to validating non-formal learning. It was developed and financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and implemented with the cooperation of the *Länder*. The objective is to make recommendations (in 2007) to create a further education and training pass that would include vocational, general education and training and continuing education and training (for more information, see Chapter 5).

A link will be established to additional qualifications (see above). A prerequisite is that the passport, in addition to formal learning outcomes, takes into consideration learning and competences acquired outside formal settings.

Opening up higher education to vocational experiences

In November 2003, the Federal Ministry of Education, the representative of the *Länder* and from higher education (*Hochschulen*) agreed on a new approach to validation of external qualifications and competences (Ministerium fur Bildung, Kultur und Wissensschaft, 2003).

3.1.6.2. Role and responsibility of the different stakeholders

The initiatives mentioned above help to increase attention paid to validating non-formal learning. The *Weiterbildungspass* illustrates the key role played by validation in lifelong learning. The German situation also highlights the fundamental issue of the credibility of any validation or certification in the labour market. Social partners play a crucial role in this process. The question of alternative forms of validation is highly controversial as existing job positions and wages are directly linked to formal qualifications held by the employee. To change this system, for example by opening up to alternative validation, could affect the whole qualification-employment system. This complexity may explain some of the reluctance towards introducing new validation approaches. What is clear is that the involvement of the social partners is absolutely necessary to make progress.

The role of the regions (*Länder*) is also of critical importance in Germany. The regions are responsible for education and training and enjoy substantial autonomy. No permanent changes can be made without the involvement and commitment of this level, something which is well illustrated by recent agreements on validation in the University sector (see above) and in relation to the development of the *Weiterbildungspass*.

Any initiative must be based on the commitment of the three main players. Furthermore, initiatives have to take into consideration the strong links between qualifications and job-

positions. This does not change the fact that several central challenges have to be faced in the coming years, all of them related to validating non-formal and informal learning. The main challenges are:

(a) to serve lifelong learning by making it possible for individuals, whether employed or in education and training, to broaden and deepen their initial qualifications;

(b) to establish bridges between different parts of formal education and training and thus support the development of broader based qualifications;

(c) to ensure that additional qualifications cover the 'qualification room' between journeyman (*Facharbeiter*) and master (*Meister*);

(d) to use additional qualifications as a reference point for validating non-formal and informal learning.

All of the recent initiatives (*Externenprüfung*, part-qualifications and additional qualifications, passports and portfolios) can be seen as steps towards a more unit-based system (for further and continuing education and training). In this respect, they each contribute to strengthening links between initial and continuing education and training as well as between learning in formal and non-formal settings.

3.1.7. Ireland

In Ireland, as in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, stronger acceptance of an output-oriented, performance-based model of education and training can be observed (Bjornavold, 2000).

3.1.7.1. Existing policy initiatives

In 1999, the Qualifications Act (education and training) provided the framework for accreditation of prior learning (Department of Education and Science, 2002). Under this Act, individuals are allowed academic credit from learning achieved through work, leisure activities, and community services. Courses, programmes, apprenticeship, training and employment are all recognised as learning opportunities allowing prior learning assessment and validation. Prior competences can now be assessed and validated against a national standard, a main element of the national framework.

Under the Qualifications Act (1999), the functions of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) are:

> '… to recognise higher and further education and training given or to be given to persons who apply for those awards and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the standard determined by the Council'.

The Act defines the 'learner' and the 'programme'. The learner is a person who is acquiring or who has acquired knowledge, skills and competences. A programme of education and training is defined as any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skills and competences and includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment. The links between formal, non-formal and informal learning are made transparent through these definitions. Pathways are open in terms of types of learning, and they are clearly connected to the standards defined or accepted by the councils.

In 2000, the *Learning for life: white paper on adult education* stated that: 'one of the underpinning principles for adult [learning] is a systemic approach which requires that educational policies must be designed to embrace the life cycle, reflect the multiplicity of sites ([41]), both formal and informal, in which learning can take place, provide for appropriate supports such as guidance, counselling and childcare and for mechanisms to assess learning independent of the context in which it occur' (Department of Education and Science, 2000). This underlines the need to coordinate validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The councils assist in providing mechanisms to accredit the programmes, work-based learning and prior learning.

The national agreement accepted between the social partners, 'Programme for prosperity and fairness' (2000), devoted a section to lifelong learning. It promotes the quality, responsiveness and relevance of education and training, both formal and non-formal , in meeting personal, social and economic needs and in promoting citizenship, social inclusion and economic advancement. A key action is providing mechanisms to accredit work-based learning and prior learning.

The international standard on Certification of personnel, ISO/IEC 17024 ([42]) has been introduced at sector level, notably for the industrial abattoir worker in the beef sector. It attempts to equip trainees with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to carry out their work to the highest international standards of best practice, with particular emphasis on food safety and quality. Certification is provided by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and learners receive the same certification as others in further education, with access, transfer and progression opportunities (see Chapter 4). Other sector initiatives can be found in the construction sector (see Chapter 4). The early years training research project is also of interest (see Chapter 5).

3.1.7.2. Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

The Qualifications Act (1999) lists core objectives of the National Qualification Authority (NQA): promoting and facilitating access, transfer and progression. There is a coordinated action involving several departments and councils. The Departments of Education and

([41]) In the sense of 'learning settings'.

([42]) Former EN 45013.

Science; Enterprise, Trade and Employment are involved, as are the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Councils. These bodies are coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority.

Several stakeholders are involved. The awards councils and awarding bodies, the education and training providers, the social partners, community based groups, sectors and network organisations, NGOs and governmental departments have roles and responsibilities.

The National Qualification Authority determines and publishes procedures for access, transfer and progression. The providers of education and training programmes implement them. In projects led by government departments, a state agency will usually be in charge and other partners will be involved in consultation and provision. Locally based projects will often be organised by a NGO that will receive funding and will report to a governmental organisation. It will involve a range of partners for consultation, advice and support.

Stakeholders at regional and local level play an active role. It is worth noting that enterprises have taken a network-based approach to meeting training needs, as illustrated with the Skillnets project. This helps the business community to stimulate training and development for individuals at work (for more information, see Chapter 4).

3.1.8. Italy

Making learning visible (Bjornavold, 2000) highlighted a positive attitude to introducing validation of non-formal learning in the Mediterranean countries. Educational reforms of varying scope have established a political and legal basis for initiatives though validation practices are still at an early stage.

3.1.8.1. Existing policy initiatives

A framework of national laws has been passed since the end of the 1990s. The 1996 employment agreement (Government and social partners) contains guidelines to reforming the training system. It emphasises that:

‘a certification system is a suitable instrument to assure an unitary and visible pathway of lifelong learning to every single individual, to allow the recognition of training credits, and to register the effectively acquired competences’.

This statement addresses issues like the introduction of pathways, credit transfer (modules) and validation of acquired competences. The Occupational Law (1997) deals with alternating training (apprenticeship and training-employment contracts), continuing training, accreditation of training providers, and certification of training credits.

The Compulsory Training and Higher Technical Training Law (1999) required that:

> '… compulsory attendance of training activities until 18 years old be progressively introduced. This compulsory training may be gained also through integrated education-training pathways: educational system, regional vocational training system and apprenticeship. 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.'

This law includes higher technical training and education (IFTS) which it is possible to access through a procedure of accreditation of competences (without a diploma). Credit transfer is thus an important part of the 1999 law. Certified competences take the form of a common currency (credits), enabling transition from one system to the other, emphasising the need to link learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal settings.

In 2000, an agreement between the Government and the regional authorities defined the procedures to establish a national validation system for vocational competence. According to the regulation 'the vocational competences (can be) 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 certified by the Regional Authorities'.

In 2001, the Ministry for Labour published decrees concerning the validation of competences in vocational training. These insist on the need to provide national standards. After establishing a conceptual framework for validation, this may be seen as the first technical steps towards a *de facto* functioning system. Among the questions to be resolved is the share of responsibilities between the Government and the regions. Further, a portfolio has to be established by the regions to document the different certifications: 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.

The main objective of this ambitious policy is to open access to training for all individuals and to value all learning. It also aims at the managing and developing knowledge capital.

3.1.8.2. Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

The Government, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education share the responsibility for developing national policies; regions and autonomous provinces are responsible for implementation. A negotiated process is carried out, involving the ministries, the regions and the social partners. Technical or institutional commissions have been established for coordination purposes.

The recent reforms at national and regional level, combined with collective agreements between government and social partners, point towards important innovations in education and training. This applies, in particular, to the competence based certification system where a broader range of learning outcomes will be taken into consideration. Combined with a credit transfer system, this could significantly change the way education and training functions.

These innovations are considered fundamental to ensuring individuals' opportunities to access competences throughout working life and are part of an ambitious strategy, involving institutions and social partners. The main elements are: extension of compulsory schooling and raising qualifications required to enter the labour market; ensuring the continuity and integration between learning, training and work pathways; and increasing the possibility of capitalising on work experience and learning.

Largely different social and political institutions have agreed on redesigning training supply. It aims to set in place a multiplicity of learning opportunities, guaranteeing the equality of different pathways. This wide reform, with common and strong principles as well as with institutional governance, can be considered as a national policy that moves towards validating non-formal and informal learning. In its first steps, it still focuses on access to training.

3.1.9. The Netherlands

In *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000), a strong acceptance of an output-oriented, performance-based model of education and training was noted in the Netherlands. The Dutch experiences illustrate some of the institutional, methodological and practical problems associated with establishing a system able to integrate non-formal learning within its framework.

3.1.9.1. Existing policy initiatives

In the early 1990s, the government felt that regular education should be made more accessible for adults. In 1993, this led to the establishment of the Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills. The commission included the social partners. It published *Recognising informal skills* (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*, 1994) and proposed a series of measures and activities aimed at boosting the employability of the labour force. This marked the launch of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (*Erkenning van verworven competencies*, EVC). It emphasised the need to increase accessibility to education traditionally based on formal qualifications or the award of certificates.

In 1994, the Cabinet accepted that EVC could make a useful contribution to the labour and training markets, especially for individuals. The scheme had to tie in with existing structures and the stakeholders had to pay the costs. The Cabinet agreed to provide a set of instruments to assist EVC, including the necessary development funding. In addition to several ministries, the stakeholders involved were the schools, national professional education institutions, employment agencies, educational advisory bureaus, enterprises and other players.

The government stated 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 government wants to assist by setting up a system in which informally acquired knowledge and experience, gained outside the formal education system, can be

tested and recognised'. Pilot projects are carried out in enterprises and professional sectors. Public authorities and private stakeholders have their own responsibility in initiating and implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In 1998, the central role of the workplace in learning was acknowledged by the government (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 1998). The same year, the STAR ([43]) presented its recommendations: *Lifelong learning at work*. This was an important contribution to the further elaboration of the concept of lifelong learning.

At the beginning of 1999, the Minister of Economic Affairs appointed a broadly based working party to address this issue. It determined that EVC should not be used to highlight gaps in knowledge and skills. In fact, the opposite is the case: EVC must build on existing knowledge and skills. The scheme therefore uses the motto 'The glass is half full!'. EVC shows that individual skills levels are already high and suggests how they can be further enhanced, contributing to the development of individuals and improvement in managing human capital in enterprises.

The main objectives of the national policy on validating non-formal and informal learning can be summarised as follows: to deploy individual talent; to increase the opportunities open to the individual in the labour market; to improve the match between education and the labour market; and to increase learning motivation and optimise all forms of learning.

In 2000, the *Kenniscentrum* (Knowledge Centre), a unique publicly funded institution, was created. It plays a central role in coordinating national policy. One of the first priorities has been to collect and to disseminate information on all existing practices of validation of non-formal learning. It is involved in many aspects of validation, as in its participation in discussions with the social partners on individual rights. It helps secondary vocational providers to produce a compulsory business-plan on validating non-formal learning and deals with higher education institutions where intake assessment is becoming common practice. As adviser, it contributes to the preparation of the tax law system in which validation of prior learning will be tax-deductible. It is involved in a programme to upgrade the labour force through validating non-formal learning. It has actions directed towards specific targeted populations. The *Kenniscentrum* works closely with COLO (*Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het Bedrijfsleven*), the standard setting body ([44]).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is characterised by the involvement of COLO (with all interested parties represented) and an independent validation body (*Kenniscentrum*) acting as a national quality label institution. The *Kenniscentrum* is not an awarding body (it does not award certificates). It recognises the certificates delivered in a decentralised way (by accepted providers or without training providers). It situates the certificates in a national

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([43]) *Stichting van de Arbeid* (The Labour Foundation), a committee of social partners.

([44]) COLO is the umbrella organisation of 21 national bodies for vocational education, it monitors relevant social developments and the education and labour market policy of government.

framework. For 2002, the EVC monitor showed that around 6 000 individuals from 500 enterprises took part in validation (Hövels and Romijn, 2003). The example of the START programme (Klarus and Wee, 2002) is presented in Chapter 4.

3.1.9.2. Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

In almost all Member States, responsibility for policies on validating non-formal and informal learning rests with the public authorities (either through national ministries, public agencies or regional authorities). In the Netherlands, the responsibilities are shared by public authorities and social partners.

In 1999, to develop validation of non-formal and informal learning, the Ministry of Economic Affairs chaired a working party that included the representatives of the social partners, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fisheries, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Coordinating actions is part of the employability agenda and relies on facilitating a large consensus. Apart from the ministries, the stakeholders are the major social partner organisations (employers and trade unions), secondary and higher education associations, the national labour agency (under ministries) and COLO (the standards setting body).

All stakeholders have their own responsibilities in initiating and implementing a validation policy. For future developments at sector level, the social partners are involved in a discussion about an individual right to validation. Schools for secondary vocational education are obliged to produce a business plan on validating non-formal learning in the coming years. In higher education, intake assessment has to be considered. In addition, there are developments on personal learning funds; on a tax law system in which using validation would become tax-deductible and on a programme to upgrade the labour force with validation of non-formal learning.

3.1.10. Norway

In the Nordic countries, the late 1990s was a period of many initiatives and innovations (Bjornavold, 2000). In Norway, validation of non-formal and informal learning has been a part of the legal system for a long time. Both in the Law on vocational training from 1952 and in the Law on adult education from 1976, the integration of competences acquired outside formal education and training is considered. More recently, the Parliament decided to launch a process aimed at establishing a national system for documentation and validation of 'real competences' ([45]).

([45]) The Norwegian term *Realkompetanse* is defined as 'all formal, non-formal and informal competences held by an individual'. This term has become commonplace in the Nordic countries during recent years, covering a diversity of activities and approaches.

3.1.10.1.Existing policy initiatives

The 1952 Act on vocational training authorised individuals to take the crafts examination based on practical work experience. Interest in this flexible arrangement soared from the mid-1990s and onwards. At its peak in 1997-99, close to 14 000 candidates annually used this opportunity. In a country where an average one-year cohort comprises approximately 60 000 persons, these are very high figures. Sectors such as transport, construction, electro-mechanical industry and health care dominated. The popularity of the scheme may be seen as a reflection of the relatively low level of formal qualifications in these sectors.

The law provided a flexible approach, allowing workers to stay in employment while acquiring formal qualifications. While important to a large group of employees, the law was not seen as an answer to the overall question of how to validate real competences. It offers a flexible route to vocational certification, but broader needs for valuing competences are not fully met. First, only initial vocational qualifications are targeted, leaving important groups of users uncovered (for example, those related to continuing vocational training, higher education and general topics). Second, the competences acquired in a work situation are validated according to the standards set by school curricula. Experiences have to be judged according to these standards, questioning whether non-formally acquired competences are valued in their own right.

The Adult Education Act of 1976 promoted the right to have competences acquired outside formal education and training formally certified. Nevertheless, this scheme has not been widely used. The breakthrough came in 1997 with the launching of the *Competence reform* (report 42 to the Parliament, 1997/98). Validation of *realkompetanse* (the term covering all learning: formal, non-formal and informal) was central. It stated that a national system should be established, 'giving adults the right to have their *realkompetanse* validated without having to take part in formal education and training'. In 1999, the Competence reform led to an extensive three year experimental scheme to develop and test the various elements necessary in an operational national system on validation (VOX, 2002). The ambitious aim to set up a comprehensive national system to validate competences was partly rooted in already existing legal and institutional structures.

The reform addressed the limitations of existing legislation by stating that validation of competences should be provided 'independently of existing examination and testing arrangements', indicating a wish to go beyond the domain of formal education and training. This approach emphasised the need for more balanced interests. An experimental validation project was organised on the basis of:

(a) formal education and training (mainly upper secondary school and higher education) ([46]),

(b) working life, as an integrated part of enterprises and sectors,

(c) voluntary organisations (third sector).

([46]) Law on Universities and University Colleges, 2000.

For higher education, this right immediately increased demand for validation. The experimental project has to gain sufficient methodological and institutional experience to establish a permanent national system. An important objective is to accumulate information on how the needs of education, work and voluntary sectors could be met in a comprehensive way. How could validation by the education, work and voluntary sectors be linked, making it possible for individuals to get credit for learning in different settings?

In relation to formal education and training, validation is divided in two parts: one linked to upper secondary school, one to higher education.

For upper secondary education and training, 12 counties (out of a total of 19) were involved in testing methods and tools for validation; 14 projects were started and 15 000 individuals passed through the various schemes, providing a strong basis on which a more permanent system could be built. The high number of individuals (not only in a Norwegian context but also compared to experiences in other countries) is largely due to the Parliament decision to grant all adults (born before 1998) a legal right to upper secondary education. Access to upper secondary education should be built on an assessment of 'real competences'.

The 2000 Law on Universities and University Colleges enabled applicants above 25 years old to enrol in studies based on 'real competences'. Competences gained outside the academic context can also lead to exemption from parts of a study. More than 6 000 individuals applied for validation during 2001/2002 (the first year of the scheme). Universities or university colleges accepted more than 2000. The universities have the autonomy to decide the criteria and methods used for assessment and validation.

In working life, nine projects were started covering 150 enterprises. More than 6 000 employees underwent validation of competence.

In the voluntary sector, seven projects were launched involving adult and distance learning organisations, folk high school, and youth organisations.

The experimental project has been evaluated (Agenda, 2003) and the Ministry of Education has recommended launching a national system for validating competences (Ministry of Education and Research, Norway, 2002, 2003). This system will be established on a permanent basis and should be able to offer validation in a variety of settings and according to several different needs. As outlined by the Ministry, the ambition of the national system to integrate validation from different settings (education, work, voluntary work) has not been achieved so far. Arrangements have largely been developed in isolation from each other and for the moment it is difficult to see how they can interact.

When moving from an experimental to a permanent stage, as is the ambition, there is an increasing need for coherence and compatibility of methods. In relation to formal education and training, the approach has been to open up all methodologies to everybody, making it possible to 'cherry pick' the tool best suited in the situation and context. To what extent it will

be possible to continue this strategy is uncertain. A certain degree of standardisation, harmonisation or coordination of methodologies seems inevitable.

3.1.10.2.Role and responsibility of different stakeholders

In the mid-1990s, interest in the 1952 Act was very high. The social partners looked upon the scheme as their own, allowing a flexible link between formal education, training and learning at work. This was illustrated when education and training authorities suggested reducing the scheme (in relation to the 1994 reform of vocational education and training). The arrangement is now firmly established as an integrated part of vocational training.

The roles and responsibilities of social partners and other stakeholders have been highlighted by the recent project. Organised within the overall framework of the reform of adult education and training (the competence reform), the experimental project was built on close cooperation between the public education authorities, the social partners and the voluntary sector.

This is reflected in the 1998 Parliament decision that validation of competences should not exclusively be linked to formal education and training. The results of the experimental project can be explained by the ability of the main players to bridge differences. After the end of the project, the methods and systems developed in relation to working life and the voluntary sector are only being followed up to a limited extent. A possible consequence is that questions, primarily related to non-educational standards and to the transfer of real competences between main areas, will remain unanswered.

The approach is decentralised: methodological developments have been left to regional and local projects, counties and municipalities and to enterprises and sectors. This diversity has been planned. It is a way to gain experience in a field characterised by considerable uncertainty.

In working life and in the voluntary sector, the diversity of approaches is even larger. Tools must address the needs of specific employees and employers. This reduces national (and international) coherence. A situation characterised by fragmentation of tools and methodologies does not necessarily support transparency and credibility. This is a major issue, which needs to be solved if the links between the different pillars of validation are to be strengthened and if a balanced national system is to be developed.

To conclude, Norwegian developments since 1997/98 are important in a European setting. They provide lessons on the feasibility of a comprehensive national system for validation. First, the (relative) success (in numerical terms) is closely linked to the right to validation (established in 2000) as a basis for access to upper secondary education. This right seems to have given the Norwegian approach a head start not found in many other countries. Most important, and perhaps surprising in a country with a very high level of formal qualifications, a substantial need for flexible access arrangements has been uncovered. This concerns upper secondary as well as higher education. Second, a national system requires agreement on a set of basic principles and rules. Validation is voluntary, results are the property of the individual

and the needs of the candidate must be taken into account when developing tools and carrying out the assessment. The evaluation highlights the challenges and confirms the success of the project (Agenda, 2003).

3.1.11. Portugal

The success story of the Portuguese shoe industry was presented by Carneiro (1998) to illustrate the huge potential of non-formally acquired learning in the country. Non-formally and informally acquired competences combined with on-the-job and formal training can play a key role in promoting economic and industrial success. The conclusion suggested exploiting all learning opportunities in a systematic way and treating them as a resource rather than a problem.

This perspective is largely shared by Portuguese authorities, even though the focus is just as much on the problems caused by a low level of formal qualifications as on the positive potential of competences acquired outside education and training. Employment and education policy initiatives focus on the low level of formal qualification. In 2000, slightly more than 64 % of the working population held formal qualifications lower than the level achieved when leaving the 9th year of compulsory schooling ([47]). If no measures are taken, according to the National Agency for Adult Education and Training (ANEFA), less than 40 % of the Portuguese working population will hold formal qualifications equal to a 9th year leaving certificate by 2015. This is not considered acceptable: 'Should this be the case, it would be disastrous not only for each citizen but also for Portuguese society as a whole' (ANEFA, 2002).

3.1.11.1.Existing policy initiatives

The Portuguese approach is different from validation in most other European countries which tend to focus on the vocational and professional area to integrate non-formal learning into formal vocational qualifications. The Portuguese lifelong learning policy is focused on closing the gap (compared to other European countries) in basic formal qualifications, using the percentage of the population having achieved qualifications equivalent to the 9th year compulsory schooling as a benchmark. This is expressed as follows:

'Any person aged over 18 years who has not yet finished basic education (4, 6 or 9 years) and wishes to obtain a school certificate equivalent to the 1st, 2nd or 3rd cycles of basic education can apply [for] the recognition, validation and certification of competences' (ANEFA, 2002).

However, the policy is not exclusively focused on formal education certificates. It is also possible to validate competences independently of school curricula through guidelines of key competences established by the ANEFA.

([47]) Corresponding to lower secondary education.

A comprehensive strategy on adult education and training has been launched to overcome the skill gap. The 2001 national action plan for employment (NAP) (Ministry for Employment, Portugal, 2001) requires a combination of efforts to 'reinforce lifelong education and training, particularly for the unemployed population, workers at risk of unemployment and workers with low qualifications, especially young people' (Ministry for Employment, Portugal, 2001, measures 4 and 5). This is reiterated in the agreement on Employment policy, labour market, education and training, signed by the Government and social partners in 2001. Learning opportunities have to be tailored to the needs of the users, professional and life experience must be taken into account when designing education and training and, finally, previously acquired knowledge and competences must be duly recognised.

ANEFA has been given the task of implementing a national system for validating competences acquired by adults in various contexts ([48]). A key element is to set up centres for recognition, validation and certification covering the whole country (RVCC centres). These centres are linked together in a national RVCC-network and largely build on already existing public and private organisations with strong local roots. The main domains covered are: language and communication, mathematics for everyday life, information and communication technologies, and citizenship and employability. An individual going through validation will be assessed according to these four domains.

The result of the validation process is divided in two: a personal record of competences where the prior experiences and learning of the individual are validated (in the four areas) and a formal certificate equivalent to basic education diplomas (3rd, 2nd or 1st cycle certification) (for more information, see Chapter 5).

In 2000, 6 RVCC centres were set up, 22 in 2001, and 14 in 2002. The aim is a total of 84 centres by 2006. By late 2002, close to 20 000 candidates were registered in RVCC centres, at different stages of validation and certification. Around 1 500 individuals had finished certification but this number is expected to increase rapidly as the centre structure is implemented further ([49]).

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has created a vocational qualification system open to learning and competences acquired outside the formal education and training. This system is based on agreements between the social partners and the government (Economic and social agreement, 1991; Vocational training policy agreement, 1991). These agreements resulted in

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([48]) In Portugal, it is referred to as a 'system for recognition, validation and certification'. In this report, it is referred to as validation.

([49]) Validation activity is not exclusively linked to the new national system. Substantial activity took place before 2000. In 1997-98, more than 10 000 individuals were assessed for fourth grade primary school, 8 500 for sixth grade and 41 000 for ninth grade. Of this group of almost 60 000, 50 % were over 20 years old. At secondary level, 35 000 were assessed during 1997-98. The vocational experiences of candidates are not covered by this arrangement. School subjects define the focus of the assessment. Competences not covered by the school curricula will not be treated in any explicit way. The assessments should not consider where knowledge has been acquired, but if it has been acquired.

three laws on vocational education (401/91, 405/91 and 95/92). The aim is to establish 'the conditions for effective attainment of a vocational certification'. Coordination is the responsibility of the Standing Committee on Certification (CPC, at national level) and the sector committees (CTE). The social partners are represented in both these committees. The Institute of Employment and Vocational Training provides technical and professional support. These bodies are responsible for developing and issuing vocational profiles (scope, content and level of a specific qualification). A certificate (CAP) can be achieved either through traditional school-based vocational training, through recognition of qualifications acquired in other systems (equivalence) or through validation of vocational experience.

Another possibility for validating non-formal and informal learning is based on a regulatory decree (68/94). It specifies the conditions for issuing a certificate. The procedure comprises three steps: identification, assessment and certification. Its aim is to open the education and training system by acknowledging the importance of vocational learning taking place outside formal education and training (in work or elsewhere). Experience is limited. However, in a few cases (trainers of vocational training, hairdressing and beauty services, taxi drivers, occupational health safety services and engineers) validation of experientially based learning or competences has begun (2000). Another example concerns engineers (from 1999 onwards) who can have their vocational experience assessed through the procedure referred to above.

3.1.11.2.Role and responsibility of the different stakeholders

Other initiatives have been taken in addition to the validation efforts covered by the Ministry of Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Education. In all cases, social partners and stakeholders are involved with specific responsibilities.

The plan is to integrate gradually these autonomous initiatives into the overall framework of the national vocational certification system. Recently, commissions have been set up in several sectors to prepare integration into the certification system. Examples of trades covered by these initiatives are transport workers, journalists, civil aviation employees, low-voltage electricity workers, merchant seamen and hotel/restaurant and tourism workers. All these groups are covered by sector-internal procedures for validating work experience. For example, in the case of transport workers, the general directory on road transportation has issued a 'professional card' to workers with more than five years in a relevant position and having passed a written test. In journalism, one to two years of experience (length according to prior education) gives the individual a right to hold a professional card.

To conclude, the Portuguese approach to validating non-formal and informal learning is one of the most ambitious in Europe. While it is still somewhat unclear how the initiative in vocational education and training will succeed, the system of RVCC centres administered by ANEFA is very promising. Expected to be fully operational by 2006, it reflects the current Portuguese reality, where raising the level of basic formal qualifications is crucial (see Annex 1). Establishing the standard (called the 'key competences' scheme) helps to identify and validate learning acquired outside formal education and training and not necessarily

covered by traditional curricula. Paying due attention the actual certification (referring to school curricula), the personal record of competences goes beyond formal certification.

3.1.12. Spain

As mentioned in *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000), the Mediterranean countries have a huge reservoir of non-formal learning that needs to be made visible. It is not only a question of making it easier to utilise existing competences, but also a question of how to improve the quality. Frequently, the step from intention to implementation is a long one. In Spain, legal and political moves have been made recently. The introduction of validation practices is now on its way to being included in legislation.

3.1.12.1.Existing policy initiatives

A project proposes to validate prior working experience which can then be taken into consideration in vocational education and training. A law on vocational training and qualifications (*Anteproyecto de Ley Organica de la Formacion Profesional y las Cualificaciones*) was debated in Parliament (Congress and Senate). The main goal is to establish a national system for vocational training and qualifications to integrate the different existing vocational education and training systems. It would make it possible to have prior learning validated and lead to a vocational training diploma. Validation (referred to as accreditation) would be limited to prior work experience; informal learning is not seen as relevant in this context.

To implement this approach, a national catalogue of professional qualifications has been created. This catalogue will act as the main reference for how non-formal and informal learning correspond to or differ from the standards (*référentiels*) set by the catalogue. The National Council for Qualifications (*Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones, Incual*) composed of public authorities, regions and social partners, is responsible for the system.

Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

Validation of non-formal learning would enable the establishment of a procedure under the responsibility of the public authorities. The national system for vocational training and qualification involves both public authorities and social partners.

3.1.13. Sweden

Policies aimed at developing validation of competences form part of lifelong learning (Bjornavold, 2000). The communication on *Validation and adult learning* (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003) treated a national approach to validation as one of several elements within a broader policy framework. Validation must be linked to guidance and counselling, to flexible forms of adult learning and to accrediting education and training providers.

3.1.13.1.Existing policy initiatives

Since 1997, local projects supported by the adult education initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) have demonstrated how validation may be seen as an element in an overall strategy on lifelong learning. Several projects have developed integrated solutions linking validation and guidance closer together (for more information, see Chapter 4). According to the Ministry of Education (2003), almost 8 000 individuals (300 with foreign background) achieved validation in 2000. The total time spent in validation is estimated to match around 70 000 weeks of study corresponding roughly to a mean of nine weeks per head. There is much variation, but these figures give an impression of a growing phenomenon. The experiences from *Kunskapslyftet*, and in particular the importance of making the best use of resources at local and regional level, have provided important input to the validation policy presented by the ministry in 2003. The communication on validation does not suggest the introduction of a legal framework supporting validation of non-formal and informal learning (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003). Instead, several practical and budgetary proposals have been made, aiming at a systematic development of methods and systems.

These initiatives have partly integrated experiences from previous schemes and projects. An example is the programme Immigrants as a resource, initiated in 1988 by the Ministry of Education and Science, to assess immigrants holding foreign vocational qualifications. In the early 1990s, several thousand candidates passed through the scheme. Since 1992, the programme has been decentralised to the local employment offices, resulting in a sharp decline in testing. Local offices choose when and to what extent testing should take place. There are several reasons for this decline but the costs and the complexity of the testing itself are mentioned as possible explanations. Several methodologies are used in various regions with the objective of increasing the flexibility of upper secondary school. At central and regional levels, it is frequently repeated that the purpose of immigrant assessment is to save time and resources. Adults should not have to repeat learning sequences; schools should not waste resources on teaching adults what they already know. The strong link to upper secondary school is seen as both strength and weakness.

Public initiatives to develop methodologies and systems for validating non-formal learning have, until recently, been few. Generally, they have been related to specific groups (immigrants, disabled, unemployed).

Other public or private stakeholders have initiated several validation approaches focused on work-related competences and only marginally linked to formal education and training. The Swedish IT programme (SWIT) is an interesting example of high volume assessment of prior and non-formal competences. Without going into further detail on the specific testing involved and methodologies applied, SWIT illustrates that it is possible to introduce high-capacity systems for assessment with a high level of success (for more information, see Chapter 4).

In the communication (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003), validation is defined as a process aiming '… at structured judgement, valuing, documentation and recognition of

knowledge and experience held by an individual - called 'real competences' (*reell kompetens*) - irrespective of where this knowledge and these competences have been acquired' (in formal or in non-formal and informal settings; in Sweden as well as abroad). Following this validation, individuals should be able to have these competences taken into account in a formal education and training scheme, in the same way as units provided by formal institutions are used today. It is suggested that development should be focused on three areas (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003): assessing the level of knowledge and competences (exemptions or tailoring formal learning to the needs of individuals); guidance to define a starting point for further studies; and documenting actual knowledge and skills when applying for a job or in relation to competence development at the workplace.

3.1.13.2.Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

Regional and local stakeholders have been very much involved in validation. The adult education initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) has provided an important platform for experimentation and has involved social partners. One of the major trade union confederations (*Tjänstmännens Centralorganisation*, TCO) responded by issuing their own report wherein they stated that a general system for validation of non-formal learning is needed (*Tjänstmännens Centralorganisation*, TCO, 1999). However, the ministerial approach referred to is judged too narrow. TCO suggests initiating a tripartite effort towards a system for validation of non-formal learning, using experiences and best practices from neighbouring Nordic countries as well as from the European Union in general.

The Ministerial communication (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003) suggests that education and training authorities and working life (at the appropriate levels) share the responsibility for implementing a system for validation. So far, experimental work has largely used the curricula (or standard) of the comprehensive upper secondary school (*Gymnasieskolan*) as the standard (or *référentiel*). This was also indicated as a solution in the report on *Validation of foreign vocational competences* (*Statens Offentliga Utredningar*, 1998). It is underlined, however, that social partners have to be closely involved in decisions related to workplace or job-related validations. Apart from referring to the need for close cooperation to strengthen credibility, no further details are given. It is acknowledged, however, that existing approaches must be further developed:

> 'For the moment the conditions for a unified, 'all purpose' system are not in place … existing systems should instead be developed to increase their transparency and clarity as regards the kind of documentation offered the individual. A close cooperation between representatives of education and training and bodies involved in validation in working life is important, both at local and national level' (*Regeringskanselliet*, 2003).

The communication (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003) envisages implementing a systematic approach to validation should take place at regional level. The ministry finances a four-year development stage. Regional cooperation between education and training

authorities and institutions, industry sectors and the social partners is a way to ensure that validation is conducted according to high quality standards. Financing validation should be linked to the overall purpose of the exercise: for example, if validation is part of a sector or enterprise scheme, these should carry the costs. Likewise, if validation takes place in relation to formal education and training, costs should be covered.

To conclude, issues related to roles and responsibilities of actors are at the core of today's debates. While the social partners seem to strive for a more balanced evaluation of formal and non-formal learning, government initiatives use formal, school-based qualification as the standard according to which other competences should be measured and valued. The social partners seem to be more concerned with the competences developed in working life (how they can be used, developed, accumulated and disseminated), the interest of the government seems more focused on the need to make public education institutions more flexible (to open the system up for immigrants, for adults with long working experience, to reduce costs). While not entirely contradicting each other, these motivations reflect somewhat different ambitions. Due to the early stage of development, it is fair to say that competences and knowledge acquired outside formal education and training play a relatively modest role in collective bargaining.

The role of non-formal learning in lifelong learning has not been clearly defined. If outcomes from different learning settings are validated according to a common standard (or *référentiel*) this cannot be based exclusively on input from the school. So far, the involvement of the social partners in the practical development of methodologies needs to be improved. The increasing importance of validation is illustrated by initiatives like the *Valideringscentrum* established in Stockholm 2002. Partly financed by the European Social Funds, this validation centre should become a national resource centre for validation, contributing to methodological and institutional development.

3.1.14. The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom advocates an output-oriented, performance-based model of education and training. Learning outside formal education and training institutions is generally accepted as a valid and important pathway to competences (Bjornavold, 2000). Irrespective of the learning context, any learner who can provide evidence which meets the demands of the qualification requirements (standards) will be awarded the appropriate credit. The national vocational qualifications system has served as an example of an alternative to the traditional school and input based model.

In this respect, the United Kingdom already has a long tradition. It illustrates some of the institutional, methodological and practical challenges and issues associated with the integration of non-formal learning (definitions of occupational standards, reliability, validity and quality). Vocational education and training is modularised, a factor which supports the rapid and large-scale introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

3.1.14.1.Existing policy initiatives

Early impetus was provided by the white paper *Working together: education and training* (Department of Employment ... (UK), 1986). It supported the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualification (NCVQ) and increased financial support for the development of occupational standards that form the basis of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). During the late 1980s, significant development activity took place (DfEE, Statistics of Education, 2001) ([50]). The 1997 Education Act defines the framework within which assessment and recognition of qualifications and competences can be accomplished. It sets up the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), combining the functions of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications ([51]). The Qualification and Curriculum Authority is responsible for the national qualifications framework (which, with the exception of higher education ([52]), covers all categories and the five levels of education and training) ([53]). The Qualification and Curriculum Authority holds overall responsibility for guidance and regulation questions related to assessment and recognition.

A similar (although not identical) 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 the Scottish Qualifications Authority's predecessor bodies, the Scottish Vocational Education Council. In Wales, the policy for validating non-formal and informal learning is undertaken jointly by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (Wales, ACCAC), the Welsh Curriculum and Assessment Authority. NVQs accredited by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority with the advice of Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (Wales) are respected in Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish vocational qualifications are accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority based on the same national occupational standards as NVQs. They are available in Scotland and may be used in England. Wales has pioneered developing a single post-16 credit and qualification framework. A quality assurance framework has been established making it possible to offer credit for 'small learning opportunities', potentially opening up flexible interaction between formal and non-formal learning opportunities. The same developments can be observed in Scotland; the credit transfer schemes increase the flexibility of the system.

The objectives of these policies are to improve economic performance, transparency of recruitment practices, adjust supply and demand in education and training, and measure the progress of the workforce towards supporting economic performance. Exploration of potential links to formal education through use of credits and the creation of the Sector Skills

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([50]) It presents statistical data on results from 1994/95 to 1999/00.

([51]) For more information, see: www.qca.org.uk/qualifications/.

([52]) Under the responsibility of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

([53]) Level 1: foundation; level 2: basic craft; level 3: advanced craft, technician, supervisor; level 4, higher technician, management; level 5: professional.

Development Agency could influence how workforce development is taken forward. The latter could lead to renewed emphasis on learning from work experience, as well as its assessment and certification.

Three approaches are presented here:

(a) validation and vocational qualifications (NVQs and GNVQs);

(b) validation, prior learning and prior experiential learning (APL and APEL);

(c) other validation in adult and community learning contexts.

(a) Validation and vocational qualifications (NVQs and GNVQs)

The national qualifications framework is based on an accreditation system. The NVQs are part of the national qualification framework. The Qualification and Curriculum Authority accredits qualifications in relation to one of the three following categories: occupational related; general in the general national vocational qualifications (GNVQ); vocational in the national vocational qualifications (NVQ) ([54]). Currently, the occupational category called NVQs is the only one in the vocational or occupational domain and it is widely used ([55]). NVQs are accredited by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority and based on national occupational standards (NOS) ([56]) (or, occupational standards) established with significant input from employers ([57]). NVQs and GNVQs are highly modularised (unit based). Modules can be combined (added) to form a complete (occupational) qualification (certificate), also specified by standards within the national qualifications framework.

NVQs are job-specific vocational qualifications aimed largely at people who left full-time education. They follow specific criteria related to prior knowledge, attainment or experience, as candidates do not necessarily have to follow any course or programme of learning. In that sense, NVQs do not distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal learning. They are independent units (modules defined as general, vocational or occupational) and it is not compulsory to follow courses to be awarded NVQs. The assessment is independent of the mode, duration and nature of learning and the use of prior achievement or learning to gain credit is intended to be both intrinsic to the assessment approach and easily done.

([54]) S1 1996/2374 (Implementation Regulations) Directive 92/51/EEC. Learning and Skills Act 2000. The equivalent legislation for Northern Ireland is The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, Approval of courses leading to external qualifications.

([55]) SVQs accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (similar to NVQs).

([56]) The national occupational standards (NOS) define the competences required for a specific occupation. They form the basis of NVQs. In addition, NOS can provide competence frameworks, which can enhance the professional development of individuals. The nature of assessment for NVQs, which is based on measuring competence, mean that this may include validating skills gained in non-formal contexts as well as during formal training.

([57]) Similar systems exist in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

NVQ was the first extensive national initiative to propose a credible alternative to traditional school-based education and training. It gave the opportunity for recognition of both learning through work experience and the combination of learning in and out of school (and any other formal learning setting). NVQs are called the vocational route and co-exist in parity of esteem with the academic and the mixed route (general and vocational qualifications). Within the National Qualification Framework and outside of it, the diversity of approaches is important. It highlights new issues that have arisen over the last 15 years as the national qualification framework has been developed and used. These issues arise from the control necessary to ensure quality, reflected in reliability and validity of certification.

Since their introduction in 1987, no fewer than 3.2 million NVQs/SVQs had been awarded up to the end of September 2000. The majority of these were at level 2 (59 %), with about 19 % at level 1 and 22 % at level 3 or above (DfES, 2001). By mid-2001, 3.3 million NVQs/SVQs were awarded. 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. Difficulties in capturing results of validation policies are raised and will be debated further.

(b) Validation, prior learning and prior experiential learning (APL and APEL)

Terms such as accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) are widely used, although there is still confusion as to what they mean in practice among employers and individuals.

Further and higher education institutions recognise learning outside the formal context ([58]). There is some use of assessment of prior learning (APL) as a means of entry to higher education, but the main use is to achieve credits towards university awards. Universities can take into account relevant learning and provide formal accreditation against academic programmes of study. Accreditation of prior learning (APL) can be used to gain access to studies for individuals lacking formal entry qualifications but holding relevant experience. It can also reduce the number of modules needed to gain a qualification. Assessments at this level are done relative to the criteria established by the college or the university. Typically, the candidate will establish a portfolio to be assessed by an approval board. This board will check the authenticity of the evidence, its relevance to the study in question, the breadth of the learning demonstrated as well as the currency (recent or not) of the learning. Assessment of prior learning for higher education was heavily promoted at the beginning of the 1990s and became established as a non-traditional route to higher education (though often not to the most prestigious courses). It still raises a variety of reactions (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2003, August 29). Assessment of prior learning for higher education is still an

([58]) For more information, see: www.ucas.co.uk/higher/candq/apl.

important element in government policies aiming at an expansion of higher education, especially for disadvantaged groups.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), in the Access to higher education recognition scheme, provides a national framework for entry to higher education for adults who do not have traditional requirements (DfES, 2002). Currently about 15 000 adults per year access higher education in this way.

(c) Other validation schemes in adult and community learning contexts

Many other validation schemes exist to tackle non-formal and informal learning. Often, the purpose is to validate programmes of non-vocational learning, mostly in adult and community learning contexts (arts, crafts and leisure). Bodies and awards intended to cater for informal and non-formal learning operate outside of the national system. For example, there is the National Open College Network and the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) ([59]), which offer their own quality licence similar to the standard Investors in People. Yet, the City and Guilds senior awards illustrate an approach that has capacity to bring in experience. It is specifically work-based, and the awards are highly regarded. City and Guilds also offers an award based on a profile of achievement that is suggested as useful for developing basic skills and for supporting occupational development outside of the NVQ system. The Association of Colleges intended to foster links between 'foyers' and further education colleges (examples of current practices can be found in the section on partnerships between further education colleges and foyers, www.foyer.net). Foyers offer accommodation and access to training and employment to disadvantaged young people of 16 to 25 years old. The foyer movement addresses the educational needs of the homeless ([60]). Off the streets and into work (OSW), the largest coordinated guidance, training and employment programme for the homeless in Europe, seems to have some success in synergising between charity and voluntary sector organisations mainly, specialising in pre-employment training ([61]). Experiments and experiences from these voluntary organisations suggest that it could be the delivery rather than the award that really matters when working with disadvantaged individuals.

3.1.14.2.Role and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

The main players in validating non-formal learning are the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (accreditation and overarching quality assurance), the awarding bodies (certification and its quality assurance) and the training and education providers (assessment centres, assessment). In the context of public support, the funding involves the Learning and Skills Council in England and Education and Learning Wales (ELWa). In Scotland, there is

([59]) For more information, see: www.ncfe.org.uk.

([60]) For more information, see: www.foyer.net.

([61]) For more information, see: www.osw.org.uk.

the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. While they existed, the training and enterprise councils (TEC) actively provided information to develop units for the national occupational standards (NOS). Recently, sector-based organisations like the national training organisations (NTOs) have played a key role in setting national occupational standards. This function is part of the responsibilities of the sector skills councils introduced in 2002.

In experiments involving sectors, stakeholders may be different from those outlined above. For example, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), ministries, employers and regional development agencies, largely developed the TUC guide. It is intended to help learning representatives in negotiating training leading to NVQs and in advising their members to undertake assessment.

3.1.15. New Member States and candidate countries

This section presents a synthesis of the findings emerging for eight new Member States (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and two candidate countries (Bulgaria and Romania) ([62]). Results underline that it would be important to further the knowledge and understanding on issues such as resources invested in implementing policies, assessment methods, quality assurance procedures and initiatives at sector and enterprise levels.

The general picture can be presented in the following way:

(a) three countries (Estonia, Romania, Slovenia) have adopted national policies and taken concrete steps for their implementation;

(b) three countries (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta) have enacted legal frameworks allowing for some validation of non-formal and informal learning but enforcement of these frameworks has not yet advanced;

([62]) As for the 15 Member States, the survey is a first step in the longer-term process of setting up a systematic European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Member States and candidate countries. The main objective of the ETF initiative, which was taken in agreement with the European Commission and Cedefop, was to coordinate the collection of similar information in new Member States and candidate countries and so support from the start their association in this phase of the European work towards common agreed principles. At the same time, it is hoped that this collection of information provides a good opportunity to take into consideration the specific needs of these countries and facilitate exchange of experience. The ETF relied on the support of the national observatories for vocational education and training (at least in the Phare candidate countries), which identified and contacted a limited number of experts within the relevant institutions. The European Training Foundation (ETF) sent an adapted version of the questionnaire created by the technical working group of the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications to the candidate countries (December 2001). Answers were received from 10 countries (the exceptions being Estonia and Latvia). For Estonia, Malta and Slovenia, an additional source of the information has been the contribution by representatives of these countries in the seminar on Recognition and validation of skills and professional experience, organised by the ETF and the Ministry of Education in France (January 2002, Paris).

(c) four countries (Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia) have legal possibilities for validation of working experience. They are available for specific purposes or in specific occupations (mostly, crafts and skilled worker level);

(d) in addition, Hungary is developing a process to validate competences.

Enforcement of the legal framework has made progress in Estonia, Romania and Slovenia. In Estonia, the legal act supporting the development of curricula based on occupational standards, has opened up the possibility for getting access to official vocational certificates through validation of occupational experience. In Romania and Slovenia, the policy aims at establishing a parallel route for validating skills acquired outside formal education. This route is linked to career progression and employment promotion purposes. In Romania, implementation is along sectoral lines (currently, telecommunications, road transport, food industry). In Estonia and Slovenia, it is progressing along occupational lines. For example, in Estonia, 215 vocational standards have been developed and the delivery of the certificates concerned mostly the professions of real estate agents and assessors. In Slovenia, standards are approved in 38 occupations (end of 2002). In all the three aforementioned countries, the validation of non-formal learning is based on the adoption of standards.

In Bulgaria, one of the objectives of the law on vocational education and training (1999) is to promote opportunities to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education. The main thrust of the law is to set the procedure for accrediting training providers. It also lays the basis for validating non-formal learning through confirming an individual right to certification and through setting national education standards for vocational qualifications against which knowledge and skills (formal as well as non-formal) can be assessed.

In Lithuania, the legal basis for the validation of learning (knowledge and skills) obtained in the non-formal adult education was introduced in 2001. The validation could also cover modular qualifications. At the same time, a law on education envisages extending formal validation to competences acquired in informal settings.

The Maltese system came into force at the end of 2000 through the setting up of a Professional and Vocational Qualifications Award Council. It aims to develop an integrated approach for validating learning outcomes (formal/non-formal /informal). The basis would be occupational standards. However, the development of standards is still at an early stage. Since 1990, an operational system allows individuals to have their skills assessed by the trade testing boards. It awards a journeyman’s certificate.

In Hungary, there are legal provisions to facilitate the promotion of non-formal and informal learning. The national vocational qualifications register lists accredited courses. The outcomes of courses can be recognised provided they are accredited. In addition, there is the opportunity for individuals to prepare for vocational examinations as well as the right of an adult learner to request a preliminary validation of learning acquired when applying for training. At national level, a policy for validation is being drawn up.

In Poland, a legal procedure for validating non-formal and informal learning through formal qualifications exists for skilled workers or craftsman. It was introduced in 1993 by joint decree of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. In addition, in certain occupations and crafts (e.g. protection worker, engineers and technical staff in the electrical power sector, most categories of craftsmen, work safety and hygiene officials), professional associations can issue State recognised certificates. The National employment action plan (Ministry for employment, Poland, 2002) envisages developing a national list of standards based on job requirements and establishing a unified validation system linking formal and non-formal learning.

In Slovakia, despite the absence of a comprehensive national policy for validating non-formal and informal learning, several recent initiatives have been reported concerning certain professions. For example, access to professional activities regulated by the law on small business will be possible for non-holders of formal education certificates. It will be feasible for individuals who have completed non-formal courses in accredited training institutions to pass an exam. Also, the formal qualification examination related to pedagogical skills (a prerequisite for teachers) may be substituted by a combination of professional experience and the demonstration of the skills through participation in national competitions or by writing textbooks.

Cyprus has started with a pilot scheme (limited number of occupations) to design occupational standards as a basis for training specifications. The plan includes establishing standards and related procedures and mechanisms for validating competences.

To summarise, several findings and transversal issues can be highlighted. With the exception of three countries (Estonia, Romania, and Slovenia) where concrete application of legal provisions has started, either the legal framework is in its earlier stages of implementation or new policy is still at a conceptual level. In most cases, the public authorities have been the main initiators with the Ministry of Education or Labour keeping the leading responsibility of coordination.

In most countries where a legal basis has been set, implementation is delegated to specialised public institutions, most often of a tripartite nature. The role of the social partners is embedded in the legal framework. Often, a prominent role is awarded to professional chambers (commerce, industry and crafts) as employer representatives. The participation of all partners would need, however, to be investigated further.

A key common feature among new Member States and candidate countries is the particular priority they attach to developing occupational standards. Developing standards is viewed as the first logical step before defining the procedures and mechanisms for assessment, validation and certification. In a limited number of cases, the adopted policy aims at developing a comprehensive system, allowing for the integration of formal education with non-formal and informal learning (e.g. Estonia, Malta). With the exception of a few countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Slovakia), the initiated practices or the planned policies indicate awareness of

the need for a global approach (to promote validation of both non-formal and informal learning).

Replies to the survey point out the perception of the multi-purpose character (both education and employment related) of the objectives of validation policies:

(a) facilitate access to further training and lifelong learning;

(b) improve the employability of individuals;

(c) contribute to higher transparency in training;

(d) increase flexibility in achieving qualifications;

(e) promote European and international comparability of workforce qualifications;

(f) enhance workforce mobility;

(g) increase quality of training delivery.

A decade after the start of the transformation, positive developments can be seen. These include increasing participation rates in education and rapidly growing demand for access to higher education. It reflects the importance education has regained as a factor determining income levels.

Most countries have also highlighted the use of their proper definitions of terms such as validation, non-formal and informal learning. Notwithstanding the linguistic adaptations, there are core common elements across the various definitions, which may indicate a shared understanding of the issues and challenges (Fragoulis, 2000; ETF, 2002).

3.2. Conclusions: main objectives of national policies

Identifying and validating learning acquired outside formal education and training institutions has become a core element in national strategies for lifelong learning. Political initiatives have been taken in most countries. Nevertheless, the total number of individuals covered by the new approaches is still limited (see Annex 3). These initiatives lead to several methodological challenges (standards, quality, reliability and validity). The validation of non-formal and informal learning also raises the issue of the legitimacy of the certification process (who is qualified to certify, why, according to what criteria?). This requires thought about the roles of the public authorities (national and relevant levels), of the social partners and of other actors and stakeholders, which may vary from country to country (for example: training providers, professional organisations, chambers of commerce, NGOs).

National policies cover three central objectives. Examples below illustrate how these policy objectives have been articulated in some Member States.

Examples of main objectives of national policies

Belgium (Fl)

Individual development, strengthen competitiveness
To set up a certification system

Finland

Acquiring upper secondary and initial vocational education qualification
Regulation of access to formal education
For a given qualification, the student can compensate with studies, practical work or experience acquired

France

Improve access to diplomas, awards and certificates

Ireland

Promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression

Italy

Improve access to training opportunities for all individuals
Model of management and development of 'knowledge capital'

Netherlands

Deploy individual talent (link to labour and economic market)
Improve education and labour market relationships
Improve learning motivation and optimise all forms of learning

Spain

Establish a national system where both public authorities and social partners participate to integrate the different systems of vocational education and training. The accreditation of prior learning and work experience

Sweden

Raise the level of education up to upper secondary
Validate foreign vocational competences

United Kingdom

For non-vocational learning: to propose different assessment, programmes and aims
Improve economic performance

Source: Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004).

The main political objectives pursued by Member States and candidate countries can be characterised as follows.

The first objective is to address individual learning needs, and emphasise that all learning is valuable. This objective is closely related to strategies on lifelong and life-wide learning. It requires that individuals are granted flexible access to institutions capable of taking into consideration the full range of competences held by individuals (Bjornavold, 2002; Sohlman, 2002). This political objective is expressed by a large number of Member States.

The second objective is centred on economic issues. Validation is part of a policy to strengthen competitiveness and to improve economic performance. It is asserted that this can be achieved by managing knowledge capital in a more efficient way.

The third objective is centred on institutional issues. Validation can improve the functioning of education and academic institutions by making them more flexible and open to learning outcomes acquired elsewhere. Flexibility and access of education and training institutions are at the core of this objective.

The overview of national policies and practices on validating non-formal and informal learning highlights areas of convergence. Institutional and methodological solutions are being pursued: legal and political strategies tend to converge. In Member States, the search for common approaches implies that public and private actors review and update concepts and principles on validating learning. While many Member States are increasing the flexibility of formal systems by opening up to non-formally acquired competences, today, few have yet presented solutions to the challenge of bridging different learning areas and outcomes in a balanced way. The areas of convergence and the future possible steps towards an integrated lifelong learning strategy are examined in the following chapter.

4. Areas of convergence

The analysis of national policies, innovative experiments and practices on validating non-formal and informal learning emphasises areas of convergence, similarities or common features implemented by Member States. As described previously, current initiatives mainly concern formal education and training and aim to improve transparency. Public and private actors in this field face two major challenges:

- how to reduce the rigidity of initial education and training to enable links with continuing and further education, with training and learning and to fulfil the requirements of lifelong learning strategy?
- how best to support life-wide learning and make it possible to bridge formal, non-formal and informal learning in a lifelong learning perspective?

In most Member States, validation is controlled by formal education and training authorities. Redefining concepts and principles for validating competences (learning outcomes) is done only in a limited number of situations. In spite of these limitations, continued efforts to respond to challenges can be described through four distinct common features.

First, national standards (norms, *référentiels*) exist in most Member States (Section 4.1.). These standards are used as stepping-stones to introduce validation of non-formal and informal learning. Some Member States mention standards other than those defined by ministries (for instance; sector, ISO).

Second, modules are introduced. Modules and/or units are often linked to the implementation of systems for validating non-formal and informal learning. An increasing number of countries organise their formal education and training through modules, making it easier to delimit learning domains suitable for validation. In some countries modularisation is a controversial issue, conflicting with a notion that learning should be holistic, not artificially separated into bits and pieces. In any case, modules imply defining pathways so that individuals (as well as educational institutions and employers) can find their way in the systems with guidance as needed (Section 4.2.).

This leads to the third feature: developing pathways (or links and bridges). Numerous efforts to link formal, non-formal and informal learning can be observed (Section 4.3.). While clearly important, validation is not the only solution to bridging learning areas and outcomes. Various credit transfer schemes are gaining importance, both at national level (Denmark and Scotland) and at European level with the European credit transfer system (ECTS). A possible credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) is also envisaged and proposed.

Finally, the fourth common feature is the commitment of social partners and other stakeholders (Section 4.4.). Systematic and strong commitment of social partners in approaches to validation is common. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is seen

as a way of breaking down the isolation of formal education and training systems and helps to strengthen links to working life and society. The involvement of social partners and a broad range of other actors is necessary to accomplish this task and to provide confidence.

4.1. Standards

National standards (norms, references) ensure the unity, coherence and transparency of education and training. In the last decade, standards have gradually turned into a key question when reforming education and training systems. Standards have become the focal point for discussions on the profile, flexibility and quality of education and training. Standard setting methodologies have improved. An open and explicit reference to national systems or standards is present in the certificate supplement of the Europass.

4.1.1. Standards in the Member States and Norway

Developing coherent approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning implies clarifying questions related to standards. Most countries covered by this study, use the existing national standards of the formal system to validate also non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is illustrated below.

Standards

Austria: the strictly regulated national qualification system provides the standards (*Berufsprofilen* or occupational profiles) for formal vocational education and training. Social partners have a strong role in setting the standards.

Belgium: standards exist but they differ between the various coexisting regional education and training systems. Debates are currently taking place concerning the possibility of establishing ‘common references or standards’. The international norm ISO/IEC 17024 on Certification of personnel, (former European norm, EN 45013) is a reference in sectors and enterprises.

Denmark: formal initial and continuing vocational education and training operate according to the standards set by the Ministry of Education in close cooperation with the social partners.

Finland: standards exist for the three types of competence-based qualifications. Formulated in detail at local level by schools and social partners, they are reviewed (and endorsed) by the purposes.

France: The Ministry for Employment also sets standards, for example for training in AFPA ([63]) the Association for Vocational Training for Adults. The ROME ([64]) provides standards use for guidance and assessment in the employment agencies.

Germany: occupational profiles (*Berufsprofilen*) play a key role in vocational education and training. They define the requirements to teaching input as well as learning outcomes (examples can be found on the BIBB website). By law, there is a mutual obligation from public authorities (at federal and regional level) and social partners.

Ireland: national standards are important elements in the national qualifications framework (2003) responding to the Qualifications Act of 1999. Learning in various settings can be assessed in many ways, providing it is connected to the national standards set by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Italy: recently (2001), in a decree on vocational qualifications (Ministry for Labour), the establishment of a national certification system was linked to the development of competence standards.

Netherlands: national standards exist and are the responsibility of COLO (*Centraal orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het bedrijfsleven*), an independent body with all stakeholders represented.

Portugal: national standards exist and all learning can be validated against the standards at secondary school level.

Sweden: the various experiments on validating (non-formal and informal) learning have largely referred to the curricula of the comprehensive upper secondary school, (*Gymnasieskolan*, general and vocational education and training).

Norway: national standards set by school curricula prevail for all validation (formal, non-formal and informal). The issue of non-educational standards (other than school curricula) has been raised but not resolved.

United Kingdom: national standards are the responsibility of the national occupational standards (NOS). They form the basis for the NVQs and the GNVQs (for more information, see Chapter 3). Standard setting is one of the most difficult and delicate aspects of a validation system as underlined years ago (Wolf, 1995).

Taking into account cultural, social and economic differences between countries, it seems that much could be achieved by closer cooperation on standard setting methodologies. This does not mean that learning requirements should be standardised across Europe. Focus should rather be on the methodologies, techniques and procedures used for defining and setting

([63]) *Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes*.

([64]) ROME: *Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois*. For more information, see: www.anpe.fr.

standards. Increased cooperation in this field could strengthen mutual trust between Member States, making it easier to identify similarities and differences.

4.1.2. Methodologies for standard setting

Recent lessons from European countries underline the role of standards (occupational and educational) as instruments to help link education and work. They are useful to many: teachers and ministries, employers, economic planners and politicians; vocational education and training planners, career guidance and counselling practitioners; students (young and adults) and parents. International and European organisations have been working on clarifying approaches and methodologies. The European Training Foundation (ETF) offers an interesting example of this (for more information, see: European Training Foundation, 1999 to 2002) ([65]). Established in 1991 with a mandate to support the development of vocational training systems in the candidate countries, the ETF was immediately confronted with the challenge of standard setting. The fact that no consistent European Union standards existed (and is actually included in Articles 149 and 150 of the EU-Treaty (www.europa.eu.int)) emphasising the principle of subsidiary in education and training) made it necessary to pay particular attention to the standard setting methodologies. The ETF methodology distinguishes between three categories of standards or, more exactly, three steps to follow in a chronological order to define national standards for education and training purposes.

Occupational standards, in the ETF methodology, are called employment specifications. These standards provide a description of the job (work analysis) and outline the requirements for performing this job. These occupational standards (or employment specifications, occupational descriptions, *référentiels d'emploi*) can be looked upon as the starting point for any standard setting methodology. When used for education and training, they are established by the educational authorities; often other public authorities (employment) and social partners are involved. See for example: the ROME ([66]) standards in France and the COBRA ([67]) in Belgium-Flanders.

Education standards are termed learning specifications and describe what an individual needs to learn to be able to perform the job described in the occupational standards. It explains the curriculum, defining entry level requirements, subjects to be taught, time to be devoted to each of these, and in which order they must follow each other. Educational standards can also be described as input-oriented.

Assessment standards are termed assessment specifications. These standards describe the actual testing procedure; how individual competences should be identified and assessed

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([65]) For additional information on this work, see: www.etf.eu.int.

([66]) See: www.anpe.fr.

([67]) Flemish parallel to the French ROME.

according to pre-defined learning objectives. They provide information on examinations, duration, frequency and grading as well as on the form (summative or formative).

These three categories (or steps) can be found in national contexts in an explicit or implicit manner. Examples of methodologies developed in Germany, France and the United Kingdom illustrate how these categories or steps are combined.

Germany

In the dual system, the final certificate confirms that the minimum levels of requirements specified in the training standards (profile) have been met. The training profile addresses four points ([68]):

- the occupation where the holder of the certificate is entitled to operate;
- the duration of the training;
- the field of activity, the general context of the occupation and its components;
- the occupational skills and competences to be reached at the end of the training and how these are to be tested.

The profiles cover all three steps or categories of standards discussed above; their holistic character is seen as a major strength. It also explains difficulties in introducing modules or validation based on learning outcomes acquired in other settings.

France

The diplomas of the Ministry of Education are based on national standards:

- the occupational standard (*référentiel d'activités professionnelles*), describes the content and the organisation of tasks and activities, the conditions, aims, and objectives. It groups occupational activities close enough to form an entity;
- the diploma or certification standard (*référentiel de diplôme*) is an inventory of capacities, competences and knowledge required for awarding the diploma concerned;
- the training standard (*référentiel de formation*) describes the programme and the pedagogical organisation of the education or training programme;
- the assessment standard (*référentiel d'évaluation*) specifies by what means the pedagogical objectives are assessed to ensure that capacities and acquired knowledge have been integrated.

The social partners (employers and employees) participate in defining standards. For assessment standards, their participation is more limited; education authorities are in charge of the definition and the social partners comment on it. This work is organised by the

([68]) A detailed presentation can be found on the website: www.bibb.de.

consultative occupational committees (*Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives*). The same standards are used for the assessment of prior experience (VAE) ([69]) ([70]).

In the Ministry for Employment, the setting of standards follows a similar procedure, as does the assessment of prior learning. A person seeking full qualification through assessment of prior learning will, after having completed all modules (each module ends with a part certificate of occupational competences), sit for an interview. The interviewer is required to ensure the person has the full mastery of the various prescribed *acquis*. The jury is composed of professionals of the relevant domain. Having successfully completed all steps, the candidate receives a vocational training certificate. The 2002 Law (*Modernisation sociale*) has reinforced the strengths between the various bodies involved and the National Commission of Vocational Certification (*Commission nationale de certification professionnelle*) is now overseeing the standard setting process.

In the United Kingdom, the NVQ system stands out as one of the more important standard setting initiatives of the past decade ([71]).

The United Kingdom

In the already extensive experience of the United Kingdom it is considered that setting standards has proved to be the most difficult and challenging part of designing a competence or performance based vocational qualification system. While early efforts concentrated on narrow task-analysis, a gradual shift towards broader function-analysis took place. This shift reflects the need to create national standards describing transferable competences. Observers have noted that the introduction of functions was paralleled by detailed descriptions of every element in each function, prescribing performance criteria and the range of conditions for successful performance. The length and complexity of NVQs, currently a much criticised factor, stems from this dynamic. Wolf (1995) is of the opinion that standard setting has entered a 'never ending spiral of specifications'. Research on the challenges facing NVQ-based assessments concluded that pursuing perfect reliability leads to meaningless assessment (Eraut, 1996). Pursuing perfect validity leads towards assessments that cover everything relevant, but take too much time, and leave too little time for learning.

([69]) This approach started in the Ministry of Education and has been expanded to several others including agriculture, youth and sports.

([70]) Example of standards: some of the recent standards are published on the website of the Ministry of Education. The complete set of standards represents around 50 pages and includes the various standards mentioned above. The standards are organised by level of schools (primary, lower secondary and Lycée) as well as by type of diploma.

([71]) Nevertheless, debates on tools and instruments to measure should certainly not be underestimated (see Chapter 5).

This statement reflects a general challenge faced by all Member States. As in input-based systems, the countries where output or performance-based systems have played a key role (the United Kingdom), the balancing of reliability and validity is a main concern. Outcome-oriented systems have also been criticised for paying too little attention to teaching and learning quality.

The examples from Germany, France and the United Kingdom illustrate that the three steps in standard setting can be combined in different ways. All countries face the challenge of balancing reliability and validity, the question of how to avoid a never-ending spiral of specifications not necessarily strengthening the relevance of validation. The examples illustrate a different balance between input and outcome elements. However, a tendency to emphasise learning outcomes in standard setting can be observed. An example is the establishment of an Irish National Qualifications Framework with the aim of shifting towards an outcome oriented system supporting validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4.1.3. Relevance of standards to validation of non-formal and informal learning

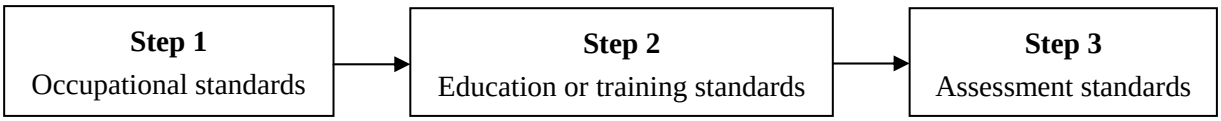
Lifelong and life-wide learning makes it necessary to pay attention to the three steps in standard setting: occupation, education and assessment. The first defines where to go (the objective), the second how to get there (the learning processes) and the third, how to ensure one is there (to check if learning is acquired).

In a lifelong learning perspective, the three steps in standards setting enable countries and institutions to support traditional education and training models (formal learning, as part of an input-driven process) and alternative models where a wider range of learning forms are accepted. The three categories or steps are the basis for validating learning outcomes:

- when skills and competences have been acquired in a formal education and training setting, the three categories or steps are important for assessment (and further validation), see Figure 1;
- when skills and competences are acquired in non-formal and informal settings ([72]), occupational and assessment standards are necessary for assessment (and further validation), see Figure 2.

([72]) Meaning: regardless of where learning takes place and how it is organised.

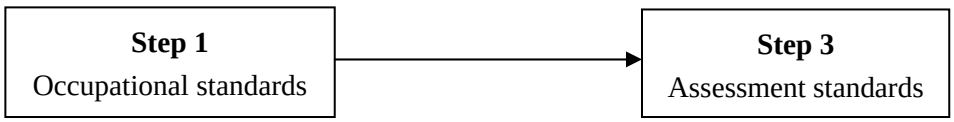
Figure 1: Types of standards needed to assess (and validate) formal learning



Source: Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2005.

For formal education and training, the three categories or steps of standards (where to go, how to get there and how to ensure one is there) are crucial. Educational standards may be formulated with varying degrees of flexibility. They play an important role in ensuring high quality teaching and learning. In a holistic approach (Germany), they define the learning process. Nevertheless, they may also be divided into modules or units which can be validated (for example as in Ireland and the United Kingdom).

Figure 2: Types of standards needed to assess (and validate) non-formal and informal learning



Source: Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2005.

The relationship between occupational standards and assessment standards enables validation of non-formal and informal learning. The principle behind this approach is that one knows what is assessed (occupational standards) and how it is assessed (assessment standards). There are no constraints as to the learning form or sequence (which is positive in the sense that a variety of learning outcomes are accepted, negative in the sense that the learning process mistakenly may be taken for granted). Emphasis is on what to assess (occupational standards) and how to assess (assessment standards).

The following examples (France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) of validation of non-formal and informal learning illustrate the reference to either national standards defined by ministries of education or labour (with the participation of social partners) or to autonomous standards defined by occupational or professional bodies, Chambers or other organisations.

France

Association for Certification of Vocational Competences (ACVC)

The ACVC was launched in 1998 by the General Assembly of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The certification concentrates on non-formal learning in work settings, mainly for methodological reasons (Colardyn, 1999, 2001a). The ACVC, in accordance with the European Norm 45013 (now ISO/IEC 17024), created a procedure to define its standards, called assessment standards which contain the following elements:

- the unit of competences (name of the competences);
- the elements that define the unit of competences;
- the duration of validity;
- the examples of proofs, documentation of evidence.

Ireland

In the construction sector, certification is offered to people already working. The target groups are tower crane drivers, telescopic mobile handlers and scaffolders. The partners involved are the National Training Body, the Construction Industry Training Committee and specialist working parties for specific occupational groups. The assessment of prior learning aims to provide new entrants and experienced operatives who have achieved recognised levels of skill and experience with an opportunity to attend training and assessment programmes leading to formal certification and registration. Certification is provided by FETAC ([73]): learners receive the same certification as individuals in further education with access, transfer and progression opportunities. In early 2002, 3 056 registration cards were issued.

The National Training Body and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) provide another example. The target groups are operatives in the non-craft sector of the construction industry (plant operatives, roofers, construction operatives). The services provided are certification of linespersons through a combination of accrediting prior learning, distance learning and formal education. The Electricity Supply Board aims to promote training and certification for specific non-designated occupations, maintaining a record of operatives in specific construction occupations who achieve, or can demonstrate that they have already achieved, a recognised level of competence. It also aims to provide such operatives with a suitable means of identification; to raise standards of health and safety awareness to reduce risks and accidents throughout the industry; to promote the use of skilled operatives within the construction industry and provide certification for international recognition. Certification is provided by FETAC. Learners receive the same certification as in further education with access, transfer and progression opportunities. In early 2002, 300-400 linespersons were involved and 60 achieved certification.

([73]) Further Education and Training Awards Council.

The Netherlands

The National Body for the Economic and Administrative Professions (ECABO) is responsible for the content of secondary vocational education, in eight categories (secretarial work; company administration; commercial work; logistics; automation; legal work; information services and security). This body developed the recognition of informally acquired skills called the *Erkenning van verworven competencies* (EVC) on an independent basis. In general, the EVC procedure is recognised by the social partners and validation is broadly applicable to all the named categories.

Recognition of acquired competences is a means of allocating formal recognition to learning outcomes acquired outside formal education. The competences of a candidate are listed and compared with partial qualifications from the national qualification structure. The results of this comparative study determine for which partial qualifications immediate exemption can be granted, for which components a practical exam is required, or in which cases further training is needed. Recognition of acquired competences is carried out by educational institutions. ECABO offers them support, for example, in the form of specific instruments for carrying out practical testing. In 2001, 10 validation procedures were executed by ECABO in several sectors, mainly in secretarial work and company administration.

In Heineken, recognition of acquired competences was provided for employees in 'enterprise administration'. The assessment (criterion referenced interview) took place at the workplace. It provided recognition of acquired competences and complementary education could be followed, if needed, to achieve a diploma, for the benefit of career development. ECABO carried out validation (information, portfolio screening and assessment) for two Heineken employees. The regional training centres (*Regionaal Opleidings Centrum*, ROC) accredited and provided the complementary education programme.

START (an assessment procedure for industrial managers), a temporary employment agency, and the regional training centre Titus implemented recognition of acquired competences for secretarial activities within the scope of a work/learn project (valuing acquired competences and reducing training costs); 19 adults attending the project achieved the qualification *Directiesecretaress*. Titus asked ECABO to execute the validation procedure for one partial qualification. It also provided the complementary training required. START provided the work part of the project.

The goal is to give exemptions for parts of the vocational high-school curriculum. Interviewing is part of a multi-method and multi-assessor procedure and is highly context directed. The standard used is the national competence profile for industrial managers (level 5). It is translated into competence indicators (assessment criteria). The candidate presents an authentic situation to an assessment team made up of a teacher and an experienced manager in the industrial sector. The team has followed training according to the START method and is able to use the competence indicators. Questions are asked about:

- the working **S**ituation (organisation, products and production methods, management style, facts and figures about the organisation);
- the specific **T**ask to fulfil (responsibilities, targets and outcomes);
- the **A**ctivities of the candidate (what do you do to perform well or to attain your outcomes);
- the **R**esults or outcomes (on what results or outcome are you assessed by the company or the organisation, what should you deliver, create or produce including product specifications, do's and don'ts);
- the **T**ransfer of competences (what-if questions and assuming-not-this-but-that-happens questions: general problems, client reaction, machine or process problems).

Validating non-formal and informal learning is at an early stage of development. Most enterprises start with a pilot, and evaluate the project to identify the benefits for the employee and the employers. It is not yet an integrated scheme in personnel policy but, validation (EVC) is seen as a valuable tool. ECABO has developed a validation procedure and provides the service of (partly) executing the procedure. It is also possible to pass the procedure on to regional training centres. ECABO guards the quality of the procedure and has formulated criteria to guide this process.

In several tax offices (Tilburg, Eindhoven, Roosendaal and Heerlen), reorganisation of the office resulted in a decreasing number of jobs at a certain level. To remain in the office, employees can transfer to other position. Therefore, they must complete education at senior secondary vocational administrator level. Many employees had acquired these skills informally and ECABO executed the validation procedure (information, portfolio screening and assessment) to recognise the (work) experience. The Regional training centre accredited the exemption recommendations for the employees to attend complementary education.

Sweden

In terms of standards, the Programme immigrants as a resource (PTVI) (1988) shows that too close a relationship to schooling (to the national standards used in upper secondary curricula) may be a weakness. If non-formally acquired competences are supposed to be similar to those developed in formal education and training, there is a risk that important competences are defined as irrelevant. The challenge is to develop an assessment approach where equivalence rather than similarity is supported, thus accepting the fact that formal and non-formal learning are different and may have different, though equally valuable outcomes.

United Kingdom

The Access to higher education recognition scheme programmes, accredited by the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education, prepare adult learners for entry to higher education. The target groups are adult learners without the traditional qualification requirements for entry to higher education. In this context, the Quality Assurance Agency defines adult as

above 21 years old on the date of entry to higher education. The services provided and functions fulfilled are:

- establishing and developing a national framework of standards for validating agencies' approval, validating provision and certifying learner achievement;
- approval and monitoring of the authorised validating agencies (AVAs). Currently, 25 agencies are approved within the scheme;
- validation of access programmes to higher education by the authorised validating agencies, (submission by provider institutions, mainly further education colleges);
- assessment of learner achievement by the providing institution, within a framework approved by the agencies;
- monitoring of validated programmes and verifying learner achievement by moderators appointed by the agencies;
- certifying learner achievement by the authorised validating agencies, bearing the logo of Quality Assurance Agency to signify validity within the national scheme.

The scheme has grown since its inception in 1989 to a mature and well-developed set of quality assurance procedures, which still maintains an important commitment to locally based activities as a driver of quality. Among the innovatory aspects of the scheme which are now well developed are:

- a shared design basis for programmes, based on units of achievement, which permits sharing of innovation and best practice in curriculum design across authorised validating agencies and providers;
- a framework of credit accumulation and transfer which permits individual learners to move between different programmes, providers and authorised validating agencies without loss of recognition for their achievements;
- developing arrangements for accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL) within the framework of certification;
- combining work-based and/or community-based practical or project-based activities within the overall framework of institution-based provision;
- arranging 'exemption' and 'advanced standing', which allow certificated achievements outside the scheme to count towards achieving an Access to higher education certificate;
- central resourcing of the scheme is minimal. In comparison to similar, less successful initiatives (e.g. GNVQs) the Access to higher education scheme is a model of effective resourcing. Currently about 15 000 adults per year progress to higher education via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service ([74]) (e.g. to sub-degree courses or to part-time provision). This constitutes about 30 % of certified adult full-time entrants to higher education per annum.

([74]) UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the United Kingdom central organisation through which applications are processed for entry to higher education.

4.1.4. The crucial role of standards

To conclude, standard methodologies and standards building are important elements of lifelong learning policies. The standards enable combining learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Occupational, educational and assessment standards fulfil different functions but are connected. Occupational standards are indispensable; educational and assessment standards make no sense without this starting point. For formal, non-formal and informal learning, formulating occupational standards as a reference is crucial. They give coherence to the learning assessed, especially when no teaching is involved (which is the case when learning is assessed regardless of how it was acquired).

An old but never ending debate concerns the capacity of occupational standards to take rapid changes into consideration as occupations change fundamentally over a period of a few years. For example, job requirements for car mechanics have changed dramatically and are now placed between mechanical and electronic competences. Transversal skills such as communication competences and problem solving capacities are difficult to describe. The success of validation depends on a solid definition of occupational standards flexible enough to leave room for evolution and able to capture transversal and social skills (occupational standards define where to go).

The quality of educational standards (how to get there) and assessment standards (how to check if learning is acquired) will all need to be ensured. Educational standards (how to get there) can answer multiple purposes, but for validation of non-formal and informal learning they might not be the answer. In that case, where to go (occupational standards) is the crucial point rather than how to get there (educational standards). In any case, much progress remains to be achieved in Member States concerning the assessment standards and their capacity to fulfil quality principles.

The success of validation approaches also depends on the interpretation of standards. This has been illustrated in Norway in relation to the debate on what is meant by 'equivalent competences'. First treated as a theoretical question, it becomes clear that answers are linked to the interpretation of standards. Whether competences from non-formal learning are equivalent to the qualifications defined in the curricula lies at the heart of the exercise. 'Central to the practice of much assessment of prior learning is a notion of equivalence, which rests on a metaphoric interpretation of the candidate's experience, looking for what it resembles within the definition of a subject area' ([75]). However, it is suggested that a more radical way of approaching assessment of prior learning is to consider it in terms of a '… system that allows for what can be considered to be a richer and more empowering set of potentialities and possibilities' (Starr-Glass, 2002).

([75]) The standards as understood in this report.

4.2. Modules

Module-based organisation of education and training systems is relatively common in Europe. It exists under different names (credit-based, unit-based) and according to different principles. Modules are defined as a particular organisation of education and training that treats parts of the curriculum as separate elements which can then be concluded independently from one another and combined according to the needs of individuals. It is assumed that education and training organised in modules allows individualised learning paths. Learning can follow the individual's personal career objectives and/or the requirements of the labour market. The popularity of modules also reflects the rate of technological and organisational change, affecting both individuals and enterprises. The development of modules in education and training systems in Member States and Norway is described briefly below.

4.2.1. Modules in the Member States and Norway

Modules

Austria: modules have not been introduced in initial education and training. In continuing training, sectors have introduced modules leading to certification. In 2003, discussions were started on a unit-based approach in initial training. Flexibility and diversity of learning forms have been emphasised.

Belgium: several years of work experience may lead to exemption from a year of studies (formal education and training). Reforms aim at more flexible transfer mechanisms, based on modules and credit transfer.

Denmark: education and training is organised in a flexible way. A variety of practices permits exemptions based on prior education or work experience (VEUD), modules (AMU and open education) and single subject courses (AVU and HF). A 'credit transfer catalogue' exists for vocational general education and continuing vocational training (CVT). The Better education' initiative (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2002a) proposes exemption from part of education or training based on non-formal learning outcomes.

Finland: modules are fully integrated in the competence-based qualification system. The programme for an individual takes into account previous studies and work experience. Validation of non-formal learning has almost exclusively been linked to this type of competence oriented and unit-based education and training.

France: with the 1992 validation of non-formal learning (VAP), exemptions from courses were permitted but a complete qualification could not be achieved. The 2002 Law on *modernisation sociale* includes VAE ([76]) and makes it possible to accumulate credits (which reflect units) in such a way that they form a complete qualification.

([76]) VAE: *Validation des acquis de l'expérience.*

Germany: initial education and training has made limited use of unit- or module-based approaches. Recent pilot projects related to part qualifications and additional qualifications may prove important steps in this direction.

Ireland: credits and modules are built into the system. Following the needs of individuals, modules can be combined with learning outcomes acquired at work, in leisure time activities and through community services.

Italy: recent education and training reforms insist on modules and credit transfer, for example across regional borderlines. The 1999 Law on Compulsory Training and Higher Technical Training strongly emphasises this approach. Discussion on validation is intrinsically linked to the overall discussion on modules and credit transfer.

The Netherlands: vocational education and training is based on a modular approach referring to the national qualification framework introduced in 1996. Experiments on validation have been closely linked to this structure.

Norway: a modularised system does not exist. Important steps towards a flexible system have been taken, especially relating to the validation of *realkompetanse*. This illustrates that validating non-formal learning can be introduced without a fully developed modularised system.

Sweden: modules constitute an important part of comprehensive upper secondary education and training (more than 800 units can be identified). Validation of non-formal and informal learning is closely linked to the module structure.

The United Kingdom: modules are largely used by the national qualification framework and of the higher education recognition scheme. NVQs and GNVQs are extensively modularised. Credit and credit transfer schemes exist, although in different forms in England, Scotland and Wales. This is supported by widespread use of accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), in initial, further and higher education.

The introduction of modules is a widespread reality in Member States. From the point of view of managing education and training systems (public authorities), modules raise two issues:

- first, they require a definition of content and therefore are related to standards;
- second, careful attention has to be devoted to their organisation and combination into a qualification. This last point is important as individuals may need guidance to combine modules in an optimal way.

These two issues are examined in more detail below.

4.2.2. Modules and standards

The design of education and training by modules rests on standards. In formal education and training a close relationship exists between occupational and educational standards. The occupational standard describes the job performance and the educational standard describes what the person needs to learn to be able to perform the job. Among other things, the educational standard describes the curriculum, the time devoted to a subject, and the order of studies which can be used to organise the teaching process in modules. Depending on the country, the educational standards explain, in more or less detail, the teaching plan of the different subjects and the entry requirements ([77]).

An example of links between modules and standards is illustrated by the NVQS in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom

The NVQs form a system of modules in which each unit is defined by a standard and an assessment methodology. Modules can be combined (added up) to form a certificate. National standards describe the skills and knowledge needed to be able to perform effectively at work. Qualifications are organised in five levels ([78]) which are divided into sets of modules. For example: 'Administration, level 2' includes tasks like 'use and maintenance of equipment and how to develop efficient working relations'. The units are described by several elements, such as: to follow instructions and use the equipment; to maintain the equipment clean and functioning; to create and develop efficient working relationships with other members of personnel; and to welcome and help visitors. Furthermore, for each unit and element, performance criteria are defined as well as a variety of situations and knowledge required.

4.2.3. Modules as prerequisites for validation

An education and training system (initial and continuing) organised in modules facilitates implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning; it may even be considered as a prerequisite. From a management perspective the function of modules is to introduce flexibility into the system as illustrated by Norway and France (with the latter VAP). From the individual's point of view inclusion of validation in the formal system is not always the ultimate goal; modules are flexible answers to validation regardless of whether they acquire complete qualifications or not.

([77]) The ETF methodology does not enter that level of details. Often, countries do.

([78]) Level 1 is the lowest and level 5 is the highest.

Validation can be ‘incomplete’: prior experiences do not comply with the requirements of a full qualification. In these cases, the candidate will be exempted from parts of the programme (Belgium, Denmark, Italy) and will have to follow at least one course and to pass one examination (as in France until 2002).

Validation can also be complete: a full qualification can be granted on the basis of validation (France since 2002, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

Belgium (Fl)

In Flanders, three major providers of vocational training exist. They depend on, and are financed by, the Department of Education, the Flemish Public Employment Service (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*, VDAB) and the Department of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (VIZO). Until now, transfer of credits between these three systems has not been possible. An initiative has been taken to develop common competence standards and to introduce modules. This is done with the involvement of the social partners. An individual, during his entire life, will be able to go from one system to another without having to start from scratch. A procedure is already foreseen to recognise non-formal learning or formal learning from other providers (VIZO, VDAB) to reduce the time spent in formal training. An agreement including the development of common modules was signed by VIZO and the Department of Education (December 2000). In the construction sector, development of modules started in 2003.

Denmark

If a request for exemption concerns a school subject, the school in question handles the request. If the reduction of training time is more than four weeks, the relevant trade committee is consulted. The same applies if the exemption concerns practical parts of the programme. Rules for recognising prior learning are formulated in the regulations of each vocational subject. In healthcare programmes, which are regulated by separate legislation, the county or municipality as competent authority decides on matters of exemption. Having received a recommendation from the school, practical work experience can result in part exemption from the training programme.

Germany

The aim of part qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) is to give early school leavers credit for the education and training they have actually completed. It describes the appropriate qualifications and the relationship to formal education. This (experimental) unit-based approach may facilitate the combination of learning outcomes from formal and non-formal settings. It could help opening up vocational education and training to accept external

learning outcomes.
Italy The Employment Agreement between the Government and the social partners (1996) contains guidelines to reform the training system. It aims at ‘a certification system as a suitable instrument to assure a single and visible pathway of lifelong learning to every individual, to allow the recognition of training credits, and to register the acquired competences’. This statement covers issues concerning pathways, recognition of credits (modules) and acquired competences. The objective to improve portability of credits was restated in 1999. Certified competences will result in credits that can be transferred from one system to another. Linking (the different systems of) formal and non-formal learning is a central issue in these policy initiatives. At present, the different regional qualification systems operate separately from each other and one of the aims of the reform is to allow mutual recognition and transfer.

The examples presented are related to vocational education and training. However, modules are extensively used in higher education and, consequently, pathways also define bridges between different levels of education. Increasingly, universities admit, based on validation of non-formal and informal learning, students with a vocational background. Examples from Belgium and Norway illustrate this. From a management point of view of the formal system, modules can be help to create more flexible pathways (Belgium).

Belgium: higher education A decree for universities has been considered, shortening learning pathways by giving exemption from parts of study based on non-formal learning experiences or relevant work experience. The universities will develop their own assessment criteria and overall control will be ensured by a peer-review system.

Norway: higher education Since 2000, Norwegian universities and polytechnics have admitted students who do not possess traditional academic qualifications based on validation of their ‘actual competences’. This approach has been a success in numerical terms; more than 3 000 applied during the first two years, out of which more than a third was admitted to studies. The scheme gives access to studies but will normally not be used to give exemption from one or more courses or modules. The universities themselves define the validation criteria.

Modules appear in different forms in the Member States covered by this study. Lack of modularised systems seems to be paralleled by absence of systematic approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning. The existence of modules tends to speed up the introduction of validation of non-formal learning. Exceptions can also be observed, for

example in Norway and Denmark, where active policies on validation have been set in place in a context of limited modularisation.

A strength of modularised systems is being able to define limited domains of qualification and competence requirements (through standards). The limited scope makes validation feasible. A large learning domain becomes more complex to assess (with valid and reliable methods) and requires excessive time and resources (Black, 1998).

As the organisation of modules in education and training develops, it raises even more questions. How can the consistency of a module be ensured? Can modules be too big or too small? Will modules come into conflict with a 'holistic' approach to education and training? Would a modularised organisation improve or undermine the effort towards quality in education and training? From an institutional and organisational point of view, modularisation increases flexibility. Learning pathways should adapt better to the needs of the individual and/or the labour market. However, under which conditions would increased organisational flexibility improve quality of learning? Many of these issues remain to be debated in and between Member States.

Nevertheless, a modular or unit-based approach opens interesting perspectives for validation. Evolution in individual and labour market needs can partly explain the growing importance of modules. Individuals need their learning outcomes acquired in different settings to be transferred from one system to another, between enterprises, sectors, regions and countries. This aspect explains the urge for credit transfer in and between systems.

In Member States, these developments call for active validation policies, in relation to the formal system as well as independently from it. At the European level, a contribution to issues such as transparency and portability of qualifications consists of the recently adopted European portfolio, the Europass. Continuing work on a European qualifications framework (EQF) undertaken by the European Commission can be seen as an initiative supporting active validation processes (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of this initiative and its implication for validation).

4.3. Pathways

As indicated in the previous sections, validating non-formal and informal learning is predominantly linked to formal education and training. The first reason for this (examined in the section on modules) concerns the management of the formal system and its willingness to increase flexibility of education and training provision.

A second reason examined in this section, relates to improved organisation of different pathways for learning. The majority of national initiatives take place within vocational education and training, aiming to improve pathways between initial and continuing education as well as between education, training and work practice. General education is less involved

in validation, although Portuguese developments partly cover this category. Higher education institutions (universities and polytechnics) are increasingly introducing validation of non-formal learning into their activities. The aim to raise the educational attainment of the population ([79]) leads to the development of systems for validating non-formal and informal learning; these can then be integrated into formal qualifications or remain 'autonomous'. Both types of validation help the upgrading process and they both help to define pathways, enabling a lifelong and life-wide strategy to be implemented.

4.3.1. Improving pathways within formal systems

Public authorities can establish systems for validating non-formal and informal learning by linking them to qualifications, diplomas and certificates. Schools can integrate validation of non-formally acquired competences by inviting candidates to sit for traditional, formal exams. These arrangements make it possible for individuals with an alternative learning career to acquire a validation delivered by the formal system, potentially resulting in the award of a formal qualification. Many countries have integrated this flexibility into their permanent system (Austria, Belgium, Germany and Norway), acting as a kind of safety valve, making it possible for adults to have their experiences formalised. These approaches are gradually being supplemented by initiatives combining traditional tests with new validation processes. The following examples illustrate how this gradual opening of the formal system is being organised.

Belgium

A scheme addresses vocational teachers (in secondary schools and schools for continuing education for adults). This procedure gives teachers the formal right to teach in subjects where they lack a formal diploma but can document experience and actual competences. The approach was introduced in 1975 and was improved by the 1997 decision of the Flemish Government concerning relevant work experience as proof of capability to teach (*Official Journal*, 19.11.1997). The candidate may present a variety of proofs, for example a declaration of the employer, social security documents, income tax bill, and documents from the municipality. When a request is submitted by a teacher, the school opens a file on work experience and follows the procedure laid down in the decision.

Recently, a decision was taken that more than nine years of relevant work experience permits a teacher to give technical courses without having obtained a diploma in teaching. For part-time education in art it is possible to become a teacher on the basis of 'artistic fame'. In higher education it is possible to become a part-time teacher based on the specific competences acquired through work experience. The person can be nominated as a full-time teacher provided that his or her work experience exceeds 15 years. The same system exists in

([79]) Part of the Lisbon Stategy.

universities when the person does not have a doctorate diploma, but has exceptional scientific achievement or specific scientific competences.

Germany

Additional qualifications (*Zusatzqualifikationen*) and further education and training (*aufstiegsorientierte Qualifikationen*)

Additional qualifications aim to link learning in any setting (formal, non-formal or informal) to formal vocational qualifications. So far, they have been developed in two main directions: task oriented qualifications, giving sector and enterprise specific qualifications and competences, and *aufstiegsorientierte Qualifikationen* serving as steps or ladders to progress to a higher qualification level. Additional qualifications should motivate individuals to attend further, continuing education and training. The chambers of commerce and industry (*Industrie und Handelskammern*) and the chambers of craft (*Handwerkskammern*) have been active in this development. At present, approximately 40 % of all additional qualifications are language related. For the rest, they have been developed in relation to production methodologies, management skills and information and communication technology. For additional qualifications developed by schools, the focus has been on foreign language and customer services.

Ireland

Skillnets

Skillnets is a response by the business community to the need to stimulate training and development of people at work. The partners involved are business/employer representatives, employees, the Departments for Trade, Enterprise and Employment, universities, institutes of technology and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The approach is built around training networks where companies get together and decide what training is needed, how and to whom it will be delivered. There are many sector-based networks in industries as diverse as pharmaceuticals, electronics, restaurants and small retailers, which are developing courses, core competences and accredited training that are relevant for their individual sector. There are also companies getting together in their local region to bring training into their area and make it accessible to local industry. Some will access certification through completion of a full training course, some top up their existing skills with a training course before accessing certification; others access certification through a system of accreditation of prior learning.

From the outset, Skillnets has given priority to training leading to a nationally recognised, formal certificate. Half the Skillnets are working in partnership with FETAC and provide training leading to nationally recognised, formal qualifications. Other Skillnets will access certification through higher education institutions. It is still difficult to say exactly how many certificates have been achieved; so far, there are 58 networks nationally with 10 686 trainees

altogether.

Italy

The *Educazione continua in medicina* (ECM) programme and its validation process support updating of competences for medical staff. This is structured in a validation system that permits recognition of at least 150 points (training credits) in three years. Training credits estimate diligence and time spent by medical staff for continuing updating and for improving the qualitative level of their activities. Training events that provide credits are: congresses, seminars, meetings, vocational courses, and distance-learning activities. The ECM aims to indicate priority objectives and themes on which to concentrate training activities and then to evaluate those training events. The National Commission recognises the training to be included in the programme (according to quality indicators, importance of training and pedagogical activities, subject relevance, and user's evaluation and quality management systems).

United Kingdom and Scotland

The NVQs are independent units (like modules) and it is not compulsory to follow courses to be awarded a NVQ. In that sense, formal and non-formal learning are not differentiated and all assessments relate to the national standards. A similar situation exists in Scotland with the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which was established under the provisions of the Education Act in 1996.

In the perspective of lifelong learning policies, 'guidance and counselling' is often mentioned as a priority area (European Commission, 2002). Policies and practices in guidance and counselling are needed to complement initiatives in education and employment. The Swedish example presented below illustrates the important link between validation measures and guidance.

Sweden

In the region of *Gothenburg*, efforts to coordinate identification of prior and non-formal learning with guidance and counselling resources have led to systematic mapping of an adult's experiences and abilities. While not leading to any formal recognition, the process of identifying more or less hidden competences is seen as crucial for counselling. Teams consisting of teachers, psychologists, and other professionals work together with the candidate to set up a tailored study plan. This illustrates that the link between guidance, counselling and assessment is not always easy to make and underlines the formative role of assessments.

Some Member States also underline that validation must be strengthened through increased attention to the needs of individuals, enterprises and trades. There is a need to see how validation in education and training can interact with validation in working life and in society in general. Often, isolated solutions have been created and a comprehensive and far-reaching approach is needed. The use of existing systems has been closely linked to formal education and training (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2004).

Denmark

The basic adult education scheme (GVU) offers a flexible opportunity for adults with low levels of formal education to access training and to have their prior, non-formal learning recognised (reducing training time accordingly). To gain access to the scheme, an individual must be over 25, have at least two years of relevant work experience and theoretical qualifications corresponding to lower secondary leaving examination. VET schools undertake individual competence assessment, focusing on theoretical and practical qualifications and competences. It is indicated that the school should look beyond the existing 'credit transfer' catalogues (for upper secondary education) and recognise a broader range of non-formally acquired competences.

As part of the adult education reform, an advanced level has been introduced. Access to advanced adult education is based on at least two years of relevant work experience. The school assesses the relevance of work experience in relation to the chosen education programme. Unlike basic adult education, work experience will not lead to exemption from parts of the formal programme; the focus is on breaking down institutional barriers between existing providers. Advanced levels of adult education can be described as a parallel competence structure, allowing for flexible combinations according to the needs of adults with prior occupational experience.

The aim is to tailor education to the practical and theoretical competences already held by the individual. It is acknowledged that the issue of validation has been treated too much from the perspective of the formal education system and that the needs of individual citizens, enterprises and sectors must be taken into account.

4.3.2. Pathways and 'autonomous' validations

Experiences from the Member States covered by this study suggest that validation cannot simply be seen as a tool to improve formal education and training. Validation relating to formal education and training is important, but does not offer a complete answer to the

challenge of valuing learning. Focus on formal education may hinder taking into account the needs of enterprises (competences and human resources development) and the labour market (for example how competences of disadvantaged groups can be assessed to strengthen their employability). Some countries (Denmark, France and Norway) have raised the issue of 'autonomous' validation, reflecting the concern that valuing learning will be entirely based on the judgements of formal education and training systems.

A lifelong learning strategy requires a balanced approach to validation where different needs are addressed, not only those of formal education and training. An increasing number of autonomous initiatives challenges the monopoly of education and training systems in validating learning outcomes. These initiatives can be exemplified by two main approaches.

First are validations based on international norms (like European norm 45013 and ISO 1702 on Certification of personnel) agreed upon by international organisations. These norms focus on the quality of the procedures applied (including defining standards: see Section 4.1.1.). Trust and reliability are crucial elements (remove any doubt about the integrity of the assessors, ensure the credibility of the judgement). This quality assurance includes, for example, audits by international teams and specialised accreditation bodies. These validations exist in sectors (security, information technology), professional organisations and in the voluntary sector.

Second, sectors of industry or service have established their own standards and validation schemes. This has been a common trend in many of the Leonardo da Vinci projects supported by the European Union since 1995. Frequently, the objective is to define a common European qualification and competence standard for a variety of purposes (validation of experiences, design of education and training programmes, setting up of sector based qualification). Initiatives from multinational companies (for example in the ICT-sector) to set qualification and competence standards should be mentioned. In the cases of companies like Microsoft and CISCO, the success is such that the standards have affected competence validation even at national level in Member States (for an overview of sector initiatives; see: http://cedefop.communityzero.com/sq).

Examples presented below illustrate different approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning, showing how legitimacy can be established outside the domain of formal education and training.

The IT proficiency test (Finland)

A very particular situation exits with the IT proficiency test, known as the European computer driving licence (ECDL). Originally developed in Finland (with the help of the European Leonardo da Vinci programme), this test is used in a large number of companies, organisations and countries. The test is marketed as autonomous of any computer software and is not controlled by national educational authorities. Much effort has been put into emphasising the European character of the test, signalling a broad and strong basis.

Consortium for validation of competences (Belgium, French community)

In 2003, a consortium comprising public authorities and relevant stakeholders was established to implement validation of non-formal and informal learning through validation centres able to perform independent and neutral assessments. The validation procedure is free and open to everyone. A legal 'title of competence' can be awarded to individuals after a successful assessment.

BELCERT (Belgium)

BELCERT has been set up by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and is responsible for the accrediting bodies to certify personnel (EN 45013). BELCERT is regulated by the laws ([80]). The Norm EN 45013 was adopted by the Belgium Institute for Normalisation on 02.04.1993 and became NBN-EN45013. BELCERT has been a full member of the European cooperation for accreditation (EA). The following organisations are involved: federal ministries (army, environment, and economic affairs), regional departments from the Flemish community, French community, German speaking community and the Brussels Region (education, labour, public transport), social partners, users/consumers. Regular consultations with the interested groups of certification bodies CERTIBEL take place.

([80]) 20.06.1990 (*Official Journal* 22.08.1990), 22.12.1992 (*Official Journal* 05.02.1993) and 06.09.1993 (*Official Journal* 14.10.1993).

Association for Certification of Vocational Competences (ACVC) (France)

In accordance with European Norm 45013 (now ISO/IEC 17024), the ACVC (see Chapter 4, section on standards) created a procedure to ensure the representation of all interested parties (employers and employees or individuals) in assessment procedures. This committee reviews the occupational and assessment standards to award certification of vocational competences. Rules and procedures have been established to manage assessment centres, to provide training for assessors and to set up appeal procedures.

The industrial abattoir case (Ireland)

The partners involved in the industrial abattoir worker in the beef sector are the National Training Agency and the representatives of the sector. The sector provides access to APL certification as well as training of workers. Today, 11 centres have been approved.

SWIT: IT programme (Sweden)

In 2000, the Swedish information technology (IT) programme (SWIT) received a high number of applicants, more than 80 000. This highlighted the need for a high capacity assessment and selection methodology. The purpose of the methodology developed was to identify persons capable of completing the relevant training as well as those suitable for the various IT functions. Eventually, a methodology, based on a combination of interviews and highly formalised tests (individual numerical/logical/language skills as well as social/relational skills) was used. The formal tests were given to establish a basis for more personalised interviews aimed at the final selection of candidates.

The SWIT assessment was tailored to the specific needs of Swedish IT enterprises and developed in close cooperation with them. Unlike many national approaches discussed in this report, SWIT was able to work according to a rather limited set of criteria and to standards established in a working situation and environment.

These examples illustrate that validation can have a different basis from that provided by formal education and training. The role of European and international norms (like EN 45013 and ISO/IEC 17024) is of particular interest. Addressing the procedures for assessing individual competences (not training programmes or education/training institutions) ([81]), these

([81]) Certain ISO norms give a 'label' to training programmes or to education and training institutions. This has been used for many years in many countries, where education and training is open to international competition. ISO is the International Organisation for Standardisation. It creates national standards institutes in countries and develops voluntary standards, which are intended to add value to all types of

norms can be characterised as general principles to strengthen the overall transparency, trust and credibility of validation.

To summarise, these validations are autonomous as they are not linked to formal education and training systems (or qualifications) and their basis of legitimacy is different. Developed in relation to the labour market, autonomous validation initiatives may balance the predominance of school-based formal validations. This requires, however, that attention is devoted to the question of legitimacy. Some projects supported at sector level, for example through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, have not been able to transform interesting initiatives into permanent arrangements. Among other things, this can be attributed to lack of involvement of key stakeholders, making it difficult to achieve a sufficient level of trust (to a sector-based certificate, qualification).

For individuals, these autonomous certifications can be useful in and of themselves and they can also be used to validate non-formal and informal learning. This illustrates application of the principle of lifelong and life-wide learning that any outcomes, skills, competences acquired and demonstrated once should be taken into consideration. In addition, these certifications can be inserted into a portfolio enhancing flexibility of learning pathways (even to formal qualifications).

These developments call for careful attention to coordination mechanisms between public authorities as well as with social partners and other stakeholders.

4.4. Stakeholder and social partners: converging roles

Validation policies rely on the active involvement of a broad range of actors: national authorities, social partners and regional and local actors, training providers, voluntary organisations, professional associations, and chambers of industry and commerce among others. This was illustrated in Chapter 3 (on the role and responsibilities of stakeholders) and reflects the basis of legitimacy required for successful approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning. In *Making learning visible* (Bjornavold, 2000) the metaphor of money was used to illustrate what is at stake. To print money, one can invest in advanced technology, but without the confidence of citizens and markets its value will be zero. The same applies to validation. The technical quality of an assessment is important, but of no meaning if users, for instance, the labour market, refuse to acknowledge the value. Validation is not a purely technical question, but very much an issue of redefining how learning is valued in society.

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business operations. Published under the designation of International Standards, ISO standards represent an international consensus on the state of the art in a particular technology (which can be education, training and assessment of competences) (ISO, 1998). Many training providers and educational institutions (such as higher education institutions) have ISO labels, especially when dealing with foreign countries. The ISO label certifies the training provision, not the individual following the training.

The involvement of social partners and other stakeholders is of critical importance for legitimacy, which can be addressed through a series of questions:

- does a certificate (formal, non-formal, informal learning outcomes) have value at national, regional or local level? Is it limited to certain institutions (sectors), to single enterprises?
- to what extent does the involvement of stakeholders (public authorities, social partners, sector players, multi-national companies) affect the value of a certificate?
- will validation of non-formal learning open access to higher education, to the labour market and to international mobility?

For all these questions, the role and responsibilities of the stakeholders are decisive in the credibility of validation. Answers will vary by country, reflecting educational, cultural, social and economic traditions. The following section discusses how the involvement of stakeholders has evolved.

4.4.1. Stakeholders

Usually, public authorities and social partners are the main stakeholders in implementing national policies on validation. There are numerous other actors, covering a broad range of interests, who participate in consensus building on these issues.

A variety of stakeholders

Austria: some sectors have initiated validation approaches based on modules, leading to continuing education and training certificates and diplomas. These initiatives are not linked to initial education and training.

Belgium (Fl): a broad range of stakeholders has been involved in the Flemish efforts to develop a system for validating non-formal and informal learning. This includes Ministries of Education, Employment and Economy, the Social Economic Council, the Educational Council and the social partners.

Denmark: traditionally, formal vocational education and training is managed by a tripartite system in which the social partners have jointdecision-making power. This is the case with the individual competence assessments (ICA) of the AMU labour market training system. Their role at central and local level in implementing the latest reform (non-formal and informal) is less clear. *In fine*, the credibility of validation in the labour market is closely linked to the participation of social partners. They are the sole actors in the SUM (strategic development of employees; *Strategisk Udvikling af Medarbejdere*) initiative in the metal sector.

Finland*:* decentralisation is extensive, thus attributing an essential role to each education institution. The autonomy of the institutions is balanced at the national level through the

overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education. At local level, balance is introduced by the inclusion of social partners in the examination committees. Social partners are active at all levels especially through their participation in committees (Adult Education Council; Training Committee; Examination Committee; Consultative Committee). The national certificate of language proficiency provides an interesting example of coordination; the stakeholders are the National Board of Education, the language examination committee and the test organisers (universities). The certificates are signed by a representative of the body organising the tests and the assessor. By 2002, over 16 000 people had acquired a national certificate of language proficiency.

France: ministries (mainly education and employment) share responsibility at national level. State representation in regions coordinates implementation of validation policies. Social partners and actors such as chambers and training providers participate in the various committees in charge of implementing the *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE).

Ireland: policies on validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning are the responsibility of the National Qualification Authority. Implementation of policies at regional and local level requires the involvement of several stakeholders: awards councils and bodies, education and training providers, social partners, and community based groups, sector and network organisations, non-governmental organisations and government departments. Actual provision (training and assessment) is the role of local stakeholders: they report to a local governmental organisation or body. Several initiatives have been taken at sector level, for example in the construction sector. The partners involved are the National Training Body, the Construction Industry Training Committee and specialist working parties for specific occupational groups (see example presented in the section on standards).

Italy: regions and provinces are responsible for implementing policies decided at national level by ministries (education and labour). All actors (ministries, regions and social partners) participate in coordination commissions.

The Netherlands: responsibility for validating non-formal and informal learning is shared between public authorities and social partners. All other stakeholders have their own roles in implementing policies. This applies to secondary and higher education associations, national labour agencies, COLO (the standards setting body) and the *Kenniscentrum*. ECABO ([82]) represents different sectors and forms a national body of vocational training providers; it is responsible for the content of secondary vocational education in eight sectors.

Norway: reforms on validating competences were based on an agreement between public education authorities, social partners and voluntary organisations. Counties and municipalities, sectors and enterprises are involved at local and sector level.

Portugal: ministries (labour and welfare, education) are responsible for implementing the

([82]) ECABO: the national body for the economic and administrative professions.

plan to raise qualifications which include the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences. This is based on former agreements with the social partners who are involved in the Committee at national and sector level. At sector level, the Committees are being integrated into the certification system (for example, in journalism and transport).

The United Kingdom: a variety of stakeholders is involved. Generally, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority, awarding bodies, education and training providers and councils play a key role. In specific projects, voluntary organisations may be committed (see for example, the Foyer movement, Off the street into work). This may also be the case for sector based organisations, professional organisation and trade unions. Another example is provided by adult and community learning where the Open College network validates programmes of non-vocational learning. These programmes are mostly related to arts, crafts and leisure-time activities.

In the Access to higher education recognition scheme, the following stakeholders and partners are involved:

- the Quality Assurance Agency underwrites the currency value of awards within the scheme.
- higher education institutions publicly support the scheme via involvement in the Quality Assurance Agency generally and through membership of the committee responsible for overseeing the scheme.
- further education colleges and universities are the key partners in establishing and maintaining local authorised validating agency structures. Each agency has its own identity within the scheme.
- the moderators are drawn from other (i.e. non-provider) institutions within the scheme. Higher education institutions secure confidence in the scheme by involving moderators.
- authorised validating agencies employ staff with technical and developmental responsibilities to ensure consistency in assessment and moderation and to develop quality improvement in different programmes. Most authorised validating agencies have an Access to higher education forum, within which tutors, moderators and learners can meet to discuss improving local provision.
- access tutors are actively involved in designing each programme, including designing assessment activities.

The variety of other and/or autonomous stakeholders involved in coordinating validation of non-formal and informal learning is impressive. These autonomous stakeholders illustrate that valuing learning is important to an audience broader than the one of the traditional education and training. It opens new coordination challenges.

4.4.2. Coordination challenges

The variety of stakeholders involved in validation requires extensive coordination. The main players involved, and the coordination of actions under the national policies on validation of non-formal and informal learning, involve:

(a) public authorities, usually Ministries of Education, Employment and Economy/Finance. In several countries Ministries of Health, Agriculture and others are involved;

(b) national qualifications authorities (agencies). Although closely linked to the ministries, in most countries these are separate players, exercising considerable autonomy;

(c) social partners. These are involved in designing national policies on validation. Nevertheless, in the majority of Member States, social partners are only partly involved in implementing validation policies which are largely controlled by public authorities at different levels. The Netherlands may be seen as an exception as public authorities and social partners share responsibilities. The social partners exercise much more control at sectors and enterprise level.

(d) other stakeholders. As validation is introduced in higher education and as autonomous initiatives developed (sectors, enterprises and chambers), the number of stakeholders involved increases. This is obviously also the case when validation is taken into 'the third sector' by voluntary associations.

Coordination challenges may be looked on as a forewarning of what will be required in a lifelong learning 'system'. Lifelong learning, as it has been identified in the European policy context, brings together different stakeholders in different contexts to enable full use of existing knowledge and experience. This challenge is illustrated by the following examples.

Coordination of initiatives

Belgium (Fl): coordination between education authorities and social partners on guidance, training and validation issues is the responsibility of the *Dienst Informatie Vorming en Afstemming* ([83]) (DIVA). Set up in 2003, DIVA can be divided into four main elements. First, a coordinated research and experimentation effort is pursued. As many as 34 projects covering a wide range of methodologies and approaches are followed. Second, a common portfolio methodology is being developed, partly based on a prototype introduced by the Department for Labour. Third, it is considered important to contribute to a uniformity of evidence (and learning outcomes). Fourth, the question of implementing a fully integrated, coherent validation system (EVC-system) in Flanders is addressed by DIVA. Such a system will be based on the commitment of all interested stakeholders (they must feel that they own the portfolio), and a guarantee of equal opportunities and equal treatment of candidates. This strategy involves setting up assessment centres. While not entirely devoted to assessment, the

([83]) Training and Alignment Information Service. See also: http://diva.vlaanderen.be/home.aspx.

competence centres developed by the Department for Labour in cooperation with educational authorities and social partners, will combine guidance, training and validation/certification issues.

France: *Professionalisation Durable*, a Leonardo da Vinci project, aims at developing a common European model to set European standards (*référentiels*) at the level of post-secondary vocational education and training. A first model was presented in 2002, based on the involvement of public and private actors from nine Member States. This model, tested in motor industry logistics and in hotel management, has attracted substantial attention and several countries have signalled interest. *Professionalisation Durable* illustrates that coordination is at the core of international cooperation in education and training to bridge national differences.

Ireland: coordination of initiatives between public and private actors is illustrated in actions where education institutions and industry sectors cooperate on validation (construction and electricity supply).

The Netherlands: coordination of initiatives between the public authorities is broad and inclusive. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy and Finance are involved. The *Kenniscentrum* has proposed a change of tax laws so that that validation costs become tax-deductible thus reducing direct training expenditure for individuals and enterprises.

4.4.3. Responsibilities of public authorities

The organisation of public arrangements varies. For example, decentralisation goes very far in Finland and sharing of responsibilities between public authorities and social partners is very important in the Netherlands. Various stakeholders, social partners and others, have roles and responsibilities in designing and implementing measures. In some Member States, educational institutions at regional or local level have a dominant role and responsibility. At national level, it can also be entities such as the qualification authority or the national board of education.

For example, in the United Kingdom and Ireland, qualification authorities or national boards of education are responsible for implementing initiatives with a high degree of autonomy. In Ireland, the introduction of a national qualifications framework covering all levels of education and training has been important for developing validation practices and allows the National Qualifications Authority to play an increasingly active role. In Italy, the Regions and autonomous provinces are responsible for implementing general rules; ISFOL play an important role, but cannot take initiatives independently of the autonomous regions which hold the main responsibility for policies in this field.

In most countries, national authorities play a crucial role in implementing new validation systems. This is exemplified in Finland by the National Board of Education, in Ireland by the national qualification authorities, in England by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority

and in Portugal by ANEFA. These bodies normally possess a certain level of autonomy and can be looked upon as stakeholders in their own right, having significant impact on the choice of solutions and their implementation. An example is provided here concerning Sweden and the *Skolverket*.

Sweden

In general, social partners and local stakeholders are heavily involved in developing validation approaches. The decentralised nature of recent experiments is in line with the variety of stakeholders involved. Sharing of responsibilities between social partners and public authorities is envisaged. A regional networking model developed in *Västra Götaland* illustrates how a variety of actors are involved and their capacity to cooperate. Cooperation bodies have been established where representatives of the municipalities, university colleges, labour market authorities, social partners and sectors are involved. The responsibility for implementation is given to each institution, including sharing of costs and sensible use of available human and material resources. Experiences so far indicate that this model is cost-efficient and mutually beneficial. An important argument in favour of a regional networking model institution is too weak to provide this kind of services. The network makes it possible to find the necessary resources. The regional networking model is interesting from a user point of view. A fragmented system of validation working exclusively from the point of view of narrow institutional interests will hardly be able to support a lifelong learning strategy where building bridges between different areas of learning is crucial.

The discussion illustrates that coordination cannot be reduced to a technical issue, exclusively focusing on the efficiency of information flow, the division of responsibilities and the distribution of resources. Coordination is even more about involvement and commitment and how to ensure that solutions can be trusted. Most countries are taking this challenge seriously. This is illustrated by the fact that social partners and stakeholders are involved in developing and implementing standards and methods for validation. No successful validation strategy can be developed without carefully considering its legitimacy.

Overall coordination responsibilities

Belgium: the coordination of the actions involves many actors (public authorities and social partners) and the entire validation process is under the responsibility of the Flemish Ministry of Employment and Tourism (Flanders). In a proposal of the French Community, several public authorities (education, employment, and training) comprise the direction committee of the consortium for validation; stakeholders involved in the sub-committees in charge of standards.

Denmark: the Ministry of Education coordinates actions in favour of individual rights to validation. The role of the social partners has not yet been redefined.

Finland: the very decentralised operating approach is based on local education institutions. The National Board of Education coordinates the actions, except for higher education.

France: the Prime Minister's office is responsible for coordinating the initiatives of the various ministries (acting as awarding bodies), the chambers of commerce and industry, private providers and social partners.

Germany: the Federal Ministry of Education and Research coordinates actions with the *Länder*. In some experiments, such as the additional qualifications, actors like the chambers of commerce and industry and chambers of crafts are very active.

Ireland: the National Qualification Authority has developed procedures to coordinate the various ministries involved (Education and Science; Enterprise, Trade and Employment), various councils (The Further Education and Training Award Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council). The universities are also involved in this coordination effort.

Italy: coordination takes place between the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education and the universities, the regions and the social partners. National coordination is assured through technical or institutional commissions set up by the Ministry.

The Netherlands: coordination of actions is part of the employability agenda. It takes place between the ministries of Economic Affairs, Social affairs and Employment, Education, Culture and Science, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fishery, and the social partners. The Ministries of Health Care and for Internal Affairs are involved. Coordination demands a broad basis to facilitate consensus on validating non-formal and informal learning.

Norway: following the competence reform (adult education and training, lifelong learning), experimental projects have been based on close cooperation between public authorities, social partners and voluntary organisations.

Portugal: national and sector level committees coordinate the implementation of a national system designed by the National Agency for Adult Education (ANEFA). Social partners are involved at all levels of this work. Many professional and sector associations are involved within this framework.

Spain: the State coordinates the developments started through the National Council for Vocational Education and Training. The council comprises representatives of ministries at national levels, of the regions and the social partners.

Sweden: roles and responsibilities are debated. Regional cooperation includes education and training authorities and institutions, sectors and social partners. At national level, close cooperation with social partners is taken for granted, reflecting the need for legitimacy.

The United Kingdom: several regional authorities coexist. In England, the role of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority is central. This is also the case for the parallel bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish vocational qualifications are validated (accredited) by the Scottish Qualification Authority, based on the same occupational standards as NVQs.

Decentralised but similar procedures operate through the United Kingdom to ensure coordination.

4.5. Convergence: valuing learning

The discussion of standards, modules, pathways and participation illustrates the political character of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The core issue is how to value learning:

- should all learning experiences be judged according to the same standards?
- in setting standards, what should be the balance between learning input and outcome ?
- is it possible to value components of a learning experience and how could these components be delimitated?
- who should be involved in making these decisions?

These questions are central to developing validation and are underlined by different and sometimes conflicting interests.

5. Assessment and validation

In the multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe (Cedefop, 2004), Cedefop defines assessment and validation as follows. Assessment is the sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills and competences) of an individual and typically leading to certification. Validation is the process of identifying, assessing and recognising experience, knowledge and competences acquired by people throughout their lives and in different contexts, in formal education and training, at work and through leisure time activities (Cedefop, 2000, 2004; European Commission, 2001). Validation is also defined as 'the process of accumulating evidence that supports the appropriateness of the inferences that are made of candidate (student) responses for specified assessment uses (Moskal and Leydens, 2000; Bond, 1996). Validation is the confrontation of actual results or performance to a pre-established reference (or *référentiel*, norm or standard).

This chapter presents a range of assessment and validation methodologies used in Member States. The first section underlines the need to refer to a broad range of assessment and validation methodologies. This then covers all acquired learning (in formal, non-formal and informal settings), qualifications and competences. The second section deals with the functions of assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessments take place during a learning process to identify learning outcomes and how they can be further developed. Summative assessments lead to formal recognition according to a predefined standard or norm. Both formative and summative assessments are important parts in any validation strategy. They are frequently combined.

The third section examines the portfolio used in many Member States for validating non-formal and informal learning. The Portfolio also serves to explore competences or individual potentials or even to certify particular and specific competences. Here emphasis is given to the portfolio as a flexible tool able to accommodate many goals. It usually includes a *curriculum vitae* plus different types of information on education, training, career, diplomas, qualifications, skills and competences. The discussion in the fourth section of the chapter covers a range of approaches (national, sector and enterprise based) for assessing non-formal and informal learning and especially how to collect evidence of competences and learning acquired outside formal education and training. Several assessment methods are explained and examples are proposed.

The fifth section focuses on the quality of methodologies, addressing issues of reliability and validity. The sixth and concluding section summarises the development of validation methodologies and, in particular, insists on the complementarities of methodologies and procedures for assessment and validation; this is necessary to respond to the diverse needs of individuals through different but coherent validation procedures.

5.1. The challenge: inclusion of qualifications and competences

Some main characteristics of non-formal and informal learning were discussed in Chapter 2; these are usually defined in contrast to formal learning. However, the contextual character of non-formal and informal learning is crucial and should point towards a positive definition. The intention of the learner is a key criterion which helps distinguish between non-formal and informal learning. This distinction can be understood in terms of control, expressed through the distinction between externally controlled learning processes (for example controlled by education authorities and institutions) and self-directed learning (controlled by the learner).

The distinction between ‘qualifications’ and ‘competences’ may be helpful (Erpenbeck, 1999a, 1999b; Erpenbeck and von Rosentiel, 2003). Qualifications are the outcomes of formal education and training or certified non- or informally obtained skills and competences, defined according to standards or norms and located in a framework of levels, curricula, programmes and modules. Through certificates or diplomas, these qualifications signal that a certain amount of knowledge has been acquired in accordance with the required standards. Competences are explained in a different way. While obviously related to qualifications, competences capture the ability of the individual to make use of knowledge and experiences (in a self-organised way, tacitly or explicitly and in a particular context). ‘Having acquired competences’ means that an individual is able to use and combine his knowledge and skills when facing new problems and situations. The aspect of self-organisation is important and has consequences for the individual’s ability to develop a certain level of competence. This phenomenon has been observed by many; Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) underline that moving from a novice stage to an expert one is characterised by increased contextual understanding and a steadily growing ability to apply rules and knowledge in a flexible and open way.

This distinction between qualifications and competences is relevant for identifying, assessing and recognising learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. It influences the use of methodologies. One reason to introduce methods for validating non-formal and informal learning is to capture the added value provided by learning taking place outside formal systems. This is not possible by taking qualifications as the exclusive reference. Validation procedures must be able to address competences, understood as the way individuals make use of knowledge and skills in new and open situations.

Research has showed that competences consist of several different elements, for example personal competences (personal dispositions, motivation), occupational or methodological competences (instrumental dispositions; ability to solve specific intellectual or physical tasks) and social-communicative competences (cooperative and communicative dispositions). All these elements must be combined to apply knowledge successfully and actively in a concrete context. Frequently, traditional tests in formal education and training focus on occupational and methodological (instrumental) competences. While important ([84]), an exclusive focus on these competences could be misleading. The added value of non-formally acquired competences addresses the fundamental question of how assessments and validation methodologies are able to grasp qualifications and competences.

A challenge concerns the tension between objective measurements and subjective interpretation (Erpenbeck and von Rosentiel, 2003). Validation procedures must reflect a broad range of approaches. It is, therefore, not a question of dogmatic choice between one method and another, but rather a question of how to combine them. The focus on competences leads beyond quantitative approaches aimed at objective results. The important personal, social and communicative dimension of competences makes it necessary to develop methodological approaches allowing for a complete interpretation and understanding of learning outcomes. As illustrated previously (Chapter 3), many methods pay attention to the complex, contextually-bound and self-organised character of non-formal and informal learning, for example by allowing for simulations and for possible dialogue periods between assessor and candidate.

No single method of assessment provides a complete overview of skills and competences held by an individual. It does not make sense to say that one assessment approach is ‘better’ than another. The question is rather when to refer to the one and when to refer to another? Each approach has its own objectives and strengths and is, therefore, suited for certain (limited) purposes. Different approaches will coexist and should be combined.

([84]) Normally addressed by occupational and educational standards.

5.2. Formative and/or summative assessments

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a complex and challenging practice which requires a precise understanding of the task at hand. A distinction must be drawn between formative and summative assessments.

5.2.1. Formative assessments

Formative assessments aim to provide systematic feedback on the learning accomplished, potentially leading towards a final outcome of some sort; the aim is not to give formal recognition of finalised learning outcomes (Taras, 2002). The following example illustrates the learner's progress towards understanding the final learning objectives and how to achieve them.

Example: learning multiplication

When a child learns multiplication in elementary school, several learning steps can be distinguished: multiplication with one digit and no 'carrying'; one digit and carrying; two digits no carrying; numbers that include a zero; two digits and carrying. A formative assessment may target one of these steps, for example multiplication with two digits plus carrying. This assessment aims to identify how well a pupil masters this particular task, not whether his or her multiplication skills are fully developed.

Examples of formative assessment can be found in Denmark and in France. The following examples from Denmark illustrate that formative assessments can play an important role in organisations and enterprises, providing feedback on internal competence developments.

Example: continuing vocational training scheme (CVT in Denmark)

In the continuing vocational training scheme, individual competence assessment (ICA) can be described as a formative assessment in the sense that it aims to clarify the individual's training needs and it does not lead to any formal recognition of prior learning. The target group is both unemployed and employed individuals. Where enterprises are involved, the outcome may be a set of individual training plans defined according to human resource development needs determined by the employer. At individual level, the main purpose is to develop individual training plans and to offer preparatory training. ICA may last up to three weeks but may also be carried out in two to three days when establishing a training plan. It is interesting to note the broad character of these plans, covering general, technical and personal training needs. The ICA is based on interviews targeting personal priorities as well as prior learning, written tests, practical exercises and simulation. The combination of elements varies according to the test centre and the enterprise/individual in question.

Example: SUM (strategic development of employees; *Strategisk Udvikling af Medarbejdere*)

(Denmark) ([85])

SUM builds on three fundamental principles. First, companies are the users of the methodology; no external parties (experts) are involved. Second, dialogue between employers and employees is the core element. Third, a modular approach is used so that enterprises may choose from a selection of methodological elements according to the exact needs of the individual company. The SUM approach covers identification and assessment of competences with the aim of furthering career development. It does not, however, cover recognition in the sense that a link to formal qualification is established.

Example: competence check-up (France)

The French inventory or competence check-up (*Bilan de compétences*, 1991) is a guidance and counselling tool with no intention to validate. In principle, there are no standards to assess against. The check-up takes place in an assessment centre. The centre helps the candidate to carry out a self-assessment (*auto-évaluation*) to establish a future occupational or training plan. Broadly speaking, this self-exploration is intended to open new career or training possibilities. The objectives (as defined by law) are:

- to take stock of occupational and personal experience;
- to identify acquired knowledge, competences, attitudes related to work, training, social life;
- to make explicit the potential of the individual, to collect and arrange elements to define a personal or occupational 'project';
- to help manage personal resources;
- to structure occupational priorities;
- to assist career choices and career changes.

The check-up follows a procedure prescribed by law. Three stages can be distinguished:

- in the preliminary phase, the needs and expectations of the candidate are discussed and information on methods and techniques is provided;
- in the investigation phase, the candidate analyses his or her own motivation and occupational interests, identifies competences and occupational aptitudes and, eventually, assesses general knowledge. This information enables the candidate to define the possibilities for mobility;
- in the conclusion phase, the candidate receives an oral presentation of the results. Then a synthesis document is presented. This document, written by the professional in charge of guiding the candidate, summarises the reasons for the check-up, the competences and aptitudes and how to relate these to the objectives of the candidate. Finally, advice is given

([85]) SUM is an HRD initiative which has been agreed upon in the metal sector – see Section 3.1.3.

on steps necessary to reach the objectives in question.

This synthesis document is established under the responsibility of the assessment centre. It restricts the information presented to what could be useful for implementing the candidate's plan. Totally confidential, the information remains the exclusive property of the candidate. The technical tools used are all techniques used by professionals for guidance and counselling (psychologists). This may include personality tests (which are not used in assessment leading to validation). Other professionals present information on career and on training: trainers, counsellors, and specialists in human resources.

Instrument for competence assessment (ICA, Sweden)

This competence assessment model encompasses qualitative and quantitative methods. It is not linked to any particular sector or occupation. The methodology supports career planning and competence development in enterprises. The approach is formative and the focus is directed towards competences:

- acquired through work;
- which can only be acquired through practice;
- emerging from new ways of organising work;
- of a transversal character.

The assessment method is based on dialogue (interviews), combined with structured analysis and feedback to the candidate.

In this example too, the developments in organisations and enterprises are underlined. Enterprises are an important target for formative assessment and could be given a more prominent role in the updated European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (ECOTEC, forthcoming 2005).

5.2.2. Summative assessments

Summative assessment aims at formal validation of learning outcomes. Certificates and diplomas provided by formal education and training authorities are the result of summative assessments linked to educational standards. In the discussions on how to validate non-formal or informal learning it is frequently taken for granted that identification and assessment processes should be followed by some sort of 'formal stamping', implicitly taking the summative approach for granted. As illustrated in the previous section, this is not always the case. However, when summative assessments are being pursued, links to occupational or educational standards have to be established (see Chapter 4).

Summative assessments are not limited to national education and training; a range of initiatives can also be observed in enterprises and sectors. The following examples illustrate this variety of approaches.

Examples in Belgium

The certification of welders by the Belgian Institute for Welding Techniques is an example of summative, competence-based assessment in a particular occupational area (sector). National standards are set in cooperation with European and international cooperation partners. Similar approaches can be identified in the construction sector (VCA-attest), heating and refrigerating sector (STEK-certificate), metal sector (e.g. corrosion) and food and catering sector. Sector related approaches to car repair (EDUCAM) and electrician (VORMELEK) certification also exist. These sectors provide certification at two levels, for courses and for individuals. Following assessment of the individual, a particular certificate will be added to a sector identity-pass.

Example: Tool mechanic in pressing and transformation technology in Audi (Germany)

Part of the assembly procedures and techniques of the Audi 8 rear lights have been changed to ensure better sealing. To achieve the desired shape in accordance with the requirements set by the enterprise, the cutting, pulling, transformation and separation of tools had to be changed. Every candidate is given a specific assignment, e.g. 'changing the parts of the pulling tool'. To test whether candidates meet these new requirements, a formal assessment procedure has been developed. This consists of four stages resulting in an enterprise internal certificate. The four stages are:

- planning and preparation (four hours);
- change of parts, manual or machine based bending and joining (14 hours);
- quality check (one hour);
- documentation and presentation of work (seven hours).

Source: Abschlussprüfung Werkzeugmechaniker/in Stanz- und Umformtechnik, Audi 2001.

Example: the Association for Certification of Vocational Competences (ACVC, France)

In accordance with European Norm 45013, the ACVC certifies vocational competences. Characterisation of the competences is based on what can be verified in the daily work or life situation of individuals. Traces of the individual activities are used as evidence of competence. These traces vary according to the activity in question and should not be confused with externally observable behaviour. Many intellectual tasks cannot be observed externally; traces or proofs have to be found in written work or other productions.

To maintain coherence between small units of competences represented by the certificates of

competences in enterprise, the *Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois* or ROME (operational trades and employment register) is used (ROME, 1995). Each unit of competences to be certified refers to the ROME, indicating the field(s) of activity and the jobs concerned. This is noted in the assessment standards ('links to the ROME' and 'areas of activity and employment'). By nature, the content of such a certificate is narrower than a diploma but it can be meaningful in several jobs. Thus, the ROME (1995) helps to identify the links between the various certificates. Another way to maintain coherence is through the relationship with national diplomas: in fact, each unit of competence is related to one or several diplomas (of the Ministry of Education). This also appears in the description of the assessment standards.

Example in Ireland

The early years training research project establishes a mutually recognised system of accreditation for early childhood care and education. The project provides a core standard for work in this field, a system for accreditation, training of mentors and assessors and a core standard allowing for flexible learning. Until now, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) has certified a limited number of individuals. A parallel example is provided by the construction sector (see description in Chapter 4).

Example in Belgium (francophone community)

In mid-2003, a legal proposal to establish a system for validation of competences within vocational education and training was passed by Parliament. This agreement recognises the need for both employers and employees to have recognition of learning, skills and competences acquired outside of formal settings. A major objective is to establish pathways between different education, training and learning systems within the French speaking community.

The proposal introduced a consortium for validating learning, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings; it is based on close cooperation between the relevant public authorities and the social partners. It pursues two aims: reinforcing employability and mobility for workers; and reinforcing social cohesion, especially for those without a diploma or certificate.

5.2.3. Combinations of formative and summative assessments

In formal education and training, formative and summative assessments are integrated parts of the regular process. An example is provided by the dual system in Germany, in which the

school certificate is delivered based on continuous assessment, involving formative and summative elements.

Example: linking formative and summative assessments in the dual system (Germany)

The rules and procedures for certification in the dual system are defined by federal law. The final certificate consists of three parts; an employer certificate, a school certificate and a national examination.

The employer certificate is a summative assessment based on what the individual did in the work situation and is related to occupational standards. It certifies whether the performance of the individual during the working period was in agreement with the relevant training standards. It also provides complementary information based on longer-term observation. Legally, this certificate is considered as a work reference provided by the employer. It follows legal specifications (prescribed by the law on vocational education and training).

The school certificate consists of a formative assessment established by the local education institution; it represents continuous assessment of the student. Each region (*Land*) has its own particularities for this school certificate: it is a school report fundamentally different from the certificate provided by the employer.

The final certificate is based on an examination (the journeyman test). This part of the certificate is a summative assessment: it is a national test, uniform, administered to all individuals applying, and aiming to assess minimum competences ([86]). The enterprise and the school participate in organising the examination and the financial costs are covered by the employers organising it. Dual system assessments are linked to national educational standards (the national examination). However, through the employer certificate, the certificate is related to a specific occupational context, signalling that theoretical knowledge has been applied in a practical context.

This combination of different certifications is unique to the dual system (as in Germany and Austria). The employer certificate has value *per se*, as a legal reference. However, the employer certificate does not have a certification value *per se*; its formal value is realised only when accompanied by the two other certificates.

In non-formal and informal learning, examples of linking formative and summative assessments are found in Portugal (ANEFA procedure and the vocational education and training).

([86]) It is established and administered by the enterprises and schools which give an opinion as to the performance reached.

Example: linking formative and summative assessments (Portugal)

The ANEFA approach is based on a procedure close to that of the *bilan de compétences* (France). However, it links to formal certification procedures. The ANEFA procedure consists of three separate stages. First is the recognition of competences ([87]). At this stage, guidance is an important element in clarifying the expectations of the individual and explaining what can be offered by validation. This guidance is followed by an assessment, involving a variety of methodologies and instruments. So far, no harmonised methodological approach has been developed. Second, a stage of validation is launched, aimed at official assessment of the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual. If this official acknowledgement goes beyond the issuing of a personal record of competences a third stage focusing on the formal certification will be launched.

Example: vocational education and training (decree 68/94, Portugal)

In vocational education and training (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 1991), a three-step procedure opens up formal education and training to competences acquired at work or elsewhere. The assessment includes the three following steps:

- Application, guidance and prior identification of skills. At this stage, the vocational file of the candidate is studied. The aim is to establish an overview of the work history of the candidate, including details of formal and non-formal training and learning. Immediate training needs should also be identified. The candidate should provide relevant proof (evidence) of training and work experience according to the demands set by the certification system. Following this paper-based stage, a phase of assisted self-assessment is foreseen. Specialists supplied by the social partners explain the activities and the competences required by the vocational profile. Following the standards set by the job profiles, a vocational certification manual details how to proceed in each specific job area. It is expected that this will show the match or the mismatch between the competences held by the candidate and the requirements set forth by the profiles. Guidance will be a crucial element of this stage.
- Assessment. It is stated that assessments can take different forms, the main elements being a formal analysis of the *curriculum vitae* prepared in stage one, the second being a technical interview and the third consisting of tests drawn up in accordance with the certification manual. The technical team, composed of three members, carries out the interview and supervises the practical tests. The team may include social partners.
- Certification. This is the formal act of issuing a vocational aptitude certificate proving that the holder has the competences needed to carry out the relevant job.

([87]) According to the terminology of this report, it would be characterised as 'identification of competences'.

These examples in Portugal illustrate the role of guidance when identifying and assessing competences. This is obviously related to the (frequently) tacit and contextual character of these learning outcomes and the need to clarify what is meant by competences. Dialogue between candidate and assessor (or other persons involved in the process) is a central characteristic.

The practices in France and Portugal illustrate the strong advantages of combining formative and summative assessment in single systems; assuring that individuals receive precise feed-back on their competences and on their learning progress. The combination of formative and summative assessments is a usual practice in formal education and training; it is even more necessary when assessing outcomes of learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

5.3. The portfolio

The portfolio is a way of presenting a synthesis of the personal, social and occupational knowledge and experiences to highlight competences. It is used in validation at national, sector and enterprise level (for internal reasons of promotion and career management) in many Member States.

Outcomes of assessments as well as various types of evidence collected by the learner can be included in a portfolio. Eventually, to achieve a validation, the content of the portfolio (or certain parts) can be judged, approved, and assessed by an assessor, a teacher and/or a jury. What constitutes allowable evidence for documentation is specified by law. For example, there is the right to assessment; individual ownership of the results and confidentiality of information (sometimes, with the right to appeal). The strength of the portfolio is its capacity to record continuous development of competences, not necessarily for the purpose of validation but for information and support of lifelong learning.

A portfolio consists of different elements from formative and/or summative assessments which are brought together. The first element in a portfolio is the *curriculum vitae*. It has a self-declarative component which is a focal point for every individual involved in assessment and validation. It presents information on education and training, career and personal skills and competences. This information is also included in the Europass CV. Current developments in the Europass CV emphasise the need to assist individuals in declaring their non-formally acquired competences (which could eventually be partly achieved by introducing electronically based help-tools). An example is the self-declaration document currently being developed by the European metal industry (based on a pilot-project of the Federation of Norwegian Manufacturing Industries ([88])). The Flemish Public Employment

([88]) See website: http://tbl.no/index.php?lang=en.

Service (VDAB) have also developed attempts using the CV as a tool for declaring competences rather than for declaring exclusively formal qualifications.

5.3.1. A rich synthesis of multiple aspects

The portfolio achieves several objectives: exploring competences, validating them, and, in a certain precise context, certifying them.

In a lifelong and life-wide perspective, the portfolio is an ideal tool for documenting evidence of skills and competences especially when the evidence collected relies on several methods of assessment. In Member States, portfolio practices pursue three goals which can be characterised by specific procedures (Colardyn and Björnavold, 2004):

- to explore: the check-up or inventory of competences is a guidance procedure rather than a validation tool proposed by the assessment centres, especially in France ([89]). It documents learning, skills and competences but does not validate or certify them;
- to validate: most generally, evidence is documented through the use of a portfolio which includes assessments of prior learning. The evidence, collected following different techniques, is brought together in the portfolio, and is then validated (in relation to formal certification or not);
- to certify: the certification of competences (*per se*) are used by sectors (for example, plumbing, electricity, others, in Belgium–Fl) but also to certify, regardless of sector (European computer driving licence; ACVC, in France) or even at national level (Belgium, francophone community). In terms of its quality procedures, it makes an explicit reference to the requirements of the European or international norms (EN or ISO) ([90]).

5.3.2. Exploring competences and learning outcomes

The exploration process is illustrated by the French *Bilan de competences* (Law of 1991). Some characteristics of this portfolio approach are recalled below (details of the three-step procedure have been presented in previous chapters).

The competence inventory or check-up (France)

The check-up follows a procedure prescribed by law and contains elements which have had a decisive impact (at least in France) on the concept of portfolio:

([89]) Reminder: in France, validation policies (specified by laws) do not include competence checks (*bilans de competences*, see Section 3 for more explanation). As a guidance procedure, their various steps are well defined, carefully assembled and therefore of interest to many Member States.

([90]) Each of these approaches is explained in detail above.

- it is voluntary for the individual (the employee) who has to agree;
- a synthesis document summarises the results;
- the candidate owns the results and is the only recipient of them;
- results can be communicated only with the express agreement of the candidate.

The portfolio belongs to the candidate and can be used as a complete document or as separate pieces.

5.3.3. Validating competences and learning outcomes

Portfolios used in validation of non-formal and informal learning can be found in several Member States. Some brief examples are provided below ([91]).

Example: engineer graduated by the State (France)

The 1934 legislation made it possible to award an engineer title based on professional experience (see Chapter 3, France). For individuals over 35, with five years of professional experience, the procedure is as follows:

- an interview (on professional experience),
- a written report on main activities,
- an oral presentation of the report.

The complete formal qualification can be obtained through assessment of prior learning.

Example: the *Bildungspass Qualifizierungspass* (1974) and the *Bildungspass* (2002-2003) (Germany)

The *Bildungspass Qualifizierungspass* (1974) can be described as a portfolio. Together with formal education and training, it included documentation of experience and practice, thus giving a more complete picture of the skills and competences of a person.

Today, the many different (qualification and competence) passports or portfolios, *Rahmenkonzept Project Bildungspasses*, are independent of formal education and training. They are not part of a coordinated initiative and are based on a wide range of methodological and institutional approaches and principles. In the labour market or in educational settings, credibility is questionable. Apart from a few successful cases, like the *Qualipass Baden-Wurtemberg*, the *Qualifizierungspass BBJ*, the competence handbook of IG Metall and the *Berufswahlpass des Nordverbundes*, these initiatives seem only to a limited degree to be used on a regular basis.

([91]) These examples are placed in their national context in Chapter 3.

Example: Continuing education and training passport with certification of informal learning
Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung Informellen Lernens
(Germany)

The project Continuing education and training passport with certification of informal learning (*Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung Informellen Lernens*) which started in 2002, is financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and carried out in close cooperation with the *Länder*. The *Weiterbildungspass* is also meant to strengthen the acceptance of continuing vocational training programmes and provisions among employers, indirectly introducing quality control based on the requirements of the training passport. The pass should be:

- compatible at European level,
- an incentive for lifelong learning,
- simple and not lead to additional bureaucracy,
- cost-efficient and not lead to extra burdens on enterprises and branches,
- credible,
- compatible with the concept of *Beruf* (see Chapter 3, Germany),
- compatible with the formal education and training system,
- open to self-assessment,
- support the integration of documentation, self-reflection on education/career planning.

It is planned for four years: a recommendation for a national training passport would be made by 2007.

Example**:** documenting a portfolio (the United Kingdom)

Assessment of vocational qualifications permits collection of evidence from work (or elsewhere) to document competences in real situations. To support that process, a manual for assessors and verifiers exists to ensure that all performance criteria are met; training is provided and required (leading to a NVQ assessor qualification). The portfolio is established by the candidate to be presented and assessed by the assessor. It follows a quality procedure and is verified by a verifier. In parallel, NVQs follow an accreditation procedure as well as the centres delivering the certificate.

Assessments follow distinct steps, concentrating on collection of evidence (of prior learning) and requiring that the candidate is able to demonstrate mastery of practical tasks in authentic work situations. A first step consists of guidance. The candidate is informed about the process, which forms it will take, which requirements exist and what eventually may be the result. Second, a period of evidence collection starts where the candidate has to document previous achievements eventually to be presented in a portfolio format. When the portfolio is considered complete, assessment takes place with the help of an expert assessor. This

assessment can involve written tests but will, in most cases, consist of direct observation of actual competences in a practical work situation. This process will eventually lead to award of a unit or units, given that an independent verifier verifies the process.

In Ireland, the approach taken under the Qualifications Act (1999) and consolidated with the national framework (2003) goes in the same direction: the assessment validates the actual performance in work or in daily life regardless of any education or training. Portfolios are largely used in Portugal (see examples in Section 2 of this chapter).

5.3.4. Certifying competences and learning outcomes

Validation can also be autonomous (as defined in Chapter 4). It then stands in its own right by reference to European or international norms (EN or ISO) and not to a diploma, a qualification or a national standard. This approach applies three major quality principles at the core of European and international norms: the independence of training and certification; the assessment done by third parties and the involvement of the interested actors or stakeholders.

Several experiments and practices have already been presented in earlier sections, such as BELCERT in Belgium, the European computer driving licence (ECDL TIEKE) and the ACVC in France.

Example: the European computer driving licence (ECDL)

The successful candidates receive a certificate of IT proficiency. The candidate's skills in information technology are measured at three levels of testing ranging from beginner to advanced user. The examination takes the form of a skills test. These are arranged by training organisations, ranging from upper classes of comprehensive schools to universities. Many companies also arrange tests for their staff.

As evidence of the success of this certificate, TIEKE (Finnish Information Society Development Centre) reported that by the end of 2001, 100 000 people had acquired an A certificate. In addition, several thousand people had taken part or parts of the test. The A certificate test can be taken at some 400 training organisations or companies all over Finland. Some 2 850 AB certificates have been granted. At this level, 149 training bodies in Finland arrange training and tests.

5.4. Assessment of learning outcomes: collecting evidence

This section presents methods for collecting evidence of learning outcomes, skills and competences. Several methodologies can be identified based on specific assumptions on how the outcomes of learning can best be captured. For purposes of simplification, a five category classification is suggested.

This classification proposes a first analysis of the main characteristics for validating non-formal and informal learning procedures in policies and practices at national, sector, enterprises and NGO level. It is a starting point which can be easily used by Member States and stakeholders (Colardyn and Björnavold, 2004). This classification should facilitate exchange of experience and mutual learning in relation to validation techniques and methods between Member States; it is neither a handbook on assessment methodologies nor a record of the last innovations in methodologies and practices.

More complete and updated classifications covering national and sector initiatives are forthcoming, as in the update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (ECOTEC, forthcoming 2005).

In many cases, these main methodologies can be combined, though their outcomes vary. The competences identified in a multiple choice test are different from the evidence collected by observing a work situation. The following methods for collecting and presenting evidence on learning outcomes are distinguished here:

- traditional tests or examinations,
- declarative methods,
- methods based on observation,
- simulations,
- evidence (physical or intellectual samples) of work (or other) practices.

Each category is briefly characterised and examples are presented.

5.4.1. Traditional tests and examinations

The candidate answers questions (oral or written) concerning a predefined domain of study. The questions can concentrate on a precise domain or be of an interdisciplinary type. The assessor is a teacher but can be a ‘neutral’ (a teacher who has not been directly involved in teaching the candidate). Traditional tests can be divided into three main forms: fixed response tests, closed response tests and essay-forms.

(a) fixed response tests are exemplified by multiple choice approaches. The candidates have to choose among fixed alternatives and indicate if something is true/false or select from lists of alternatives. These tests are frequently adapted to an electronic format;

(b) closed response tests address some of the questions raised above by giving the candidate room for reasoning and demonstrating his or her competences. These tests combine the strict character of fixed response with the relative openness of the essay;

(c) essay types of tests require complex reasoning by the candidate and ability to apply knowledge to a particular question. This challenges the candidate to select, assemble and integrate knowledge and understanding.

With open or essay tests, validity is even more challenging. With a low statistical level of validity, the test can give a stronger and meaningful appreciation of what the candidate knows and his or her skills, competences and learning outcomes. If not carefully handled, even traditional tests and examinations can give a distorted picture of the knowledge and competences held by the candidate.

These forms of traditional tests and examinations can be illustrated by the examples of essay types of written examination extracted from the *baccalauréat general* (end of high school examination, France, 2002). They illustrate how open essays may help to identify the factual knowledge and the ability to apply knowledge in a new setting and according to an unexpected angle.

Examples of essay (*baccalauréat*, France)

In the literature section of the *baccalauréat général*, the letters examination lasts for two hours. It consists of two questions on works by authors studied during the school year. For example, on the subject of the French author Queneau, the first question (with a weight of 12 out of 20 points) is as follows: 'In Chapter V of *Fleurs Bleues*, the *Duc d'Auge* declares that repetition is one of the most smelling flowers of rhetoric. What role does repetition occupy in the novel?'. The second question (with a weight of 8 out of 20 points), asks what roles graffiti play in *Fleurs Bleues*.

In philosophy, the examination lasts for four hours. Students must choose one out of three possible subjects. Sample questions are: 'Is memory enough for the historian?' and 'Are requirements for justice and for liberty separable?'. Alternatively, the student would be asked to demonstrate the philosophical interest of a 20 lines excerpt from an author studied during the school year.

Source: Extract from the *Baccalauréat* (France), 2002.

The example of the *Externenprüfung* (see Chapter 4, Germany) is illustrative for learning occurring in non-formal and informal settings.

The *Externenprüfung* (Germany)

The *Externenprüfung* (external test) provides experienced workers with the right to take part in the final examination (the journeyman test or *Abschlussprüfung*) together with those having followed the ordinary route through the dual system. Although important, the *Externenprüfung* only provides access to a test, it does not provide any independent or particular methodology aimed at identifying and assessing specific experiences. In this respect, the *Externenprüfung* is designed according to the content, principles and structure of the formal pathway. The competences acquired outside the formal system, irrespective of how different they are from those produced in the formal system, have to be presented and restructured (by the candidate) according to the principles of the formal system.

5.4.2. Declarative methods

The candidate declares and justifies (orally and written) that his or her knowledge and experience corresponds to a particular set of requirements specified in standards (occupational and educational). A panel (third parties) uses this declaration as basis for judging recognition. Declarative methods are used to support formative and summative assessments. Examples can be found in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.

Declarative methods (including forms of self-assessment) are important for validating non-formal and informal learning. Identification of learning cannot take place without involvement of the candidates, strengthening their awareness of prior learning experiences. Declarative methods are relevant to enterprises. Many of the initiatives supporting employees in making competences visible use declarative elements.

Example: VAP and VAE (France)

The previous *validation des acquis professionnels* (VAP) and the current *validation de l'expérience acquise* (VAE) ([92]) exempt candidates from certain exams leading to a diploma or certificate. A declarative technique is used to identify the competences in question. Candidates produce a written report describing in detail the posts held and the occupational experiences (various tasks and functions). Then, the candidates are asked to do an oral presentation to a panel (jury) of teachers and professionals. This procedure (written report on relevant elements of past experience and oral presentation) applies for vocational education and training as well as for higher education institutions and constitutes the basis for awarding credit for courses or certificates for modules.

([92]) See description in Chapter 3, France.

In Germany, experiments on part-qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) have introduced declarative techniques to assess competences relevant to a particular qualification-unit. This declarative technique does not preclude eventual participation in the external test of the dual system (*Externenprüfung*).

Part qualifications (Germany)

It is acknowledged that the labour market credibility of part qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*) is crucial. Therefore, it was agreed to develop a particular kind of documentation or evidence supporting their transparency and acceptance. This recommendation, followed up by BIBB, led to the introduction of a part-qualification certificate (*Nachweis*) in 2001 ([93]).

The evidence (proof) presents the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual. It is assumed that this information will ease entry to the labour market and to the external test of the dual system. The evidence (proofs) describes the qualifications and its relation to formal education; it also indicates the time used to acquire these qualifications. Commentators (Hanf and Reuling, 2003) have pointed to several problematic aspects that need to be resolved. For the moment, it is not indicated how the qualifications described were acquired, nor how seemingly identical part qualifications may differ from each other in terms of prior experience and actual understanding of the subject.

In Germany, continuing work aimed at establishing a national passport for continuing education and training relies on declarative techniques, as indicated below.

The passport for continuing education and training with certification of informal learning (*Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung Informellen Lernens*) (Germany)

Self-assessment, integration of documentation and self-reflection on education and career are included in the assessment methods proposed in the project for a competence pass started in 2002.

Recent Norwegian experiments on validating non-formal and informal learning have used declarative methods.

([93]) See www.bibb.de/nachweis.

Example of declarative methods for assessment (Norway)

Documentation of competences related to working life makes it possible for employees, on a voluntary basis, to have their real competences documented. It is emphasised that approaches must be simple and coherent; they should be tailored according to users with particular needs, they should include social competences and they should be compatible in an international setting. The documentation resulting from these approaches must be relevant both to education and training and to working life or the labour market. It is envisaged that this documentation will consist of two main parts, a *curriculum vitae* and a competence declaration signed by the employer. The Federation of Norwegian Manufacturing Industries (TBL ([94])) has developed a method using an electronic format. Employees are guided through a range of specific and general tasks, eventually resulting in a personal competence profile. This profile is a basis for a dialogue with the enterprise. If a common understanding is reached, this profile is signed by both parties and then used as a basis for continuing training and career development. This method has been taken forward at European level and may serve as an example also for other sectors.

In documenting real competences related to voluntary work it is emphasised that documentation should be voluntary and tailored to context. Simplicity is an asset and each individual should be responsible for completing the information him or herself. The final document should be signed by the organisation/institution in charge of the activity. It is envisaged that this documentation be used as a supplement to formal certificates.

5.4.3. Methods based on observation

Following certain strict and precisely defined rules and methods, an assessor (third party) observes a candidate *in situ* and judges whether he or she applies the knowledge, skills and competences described in a standard. Observation methodologies are demanding and require systematic training of assessors. Methods based on observations are relevant to validating non-formal and informal learning as they enable the assessor to observe competences applied in real settings rather than isolated fragments of knowledge. Potentially, the validity of this approach is high but remains difficult to ensure.

Airasian (1991) states that ‘rather than asking people to tell what they would do, performance assessment requires that they show what they can do’. Observation of candidates in real situations can give access to competences difficult to capture by other means. Observation can be strengthened through dialogue with the candidate. This may allow additional understanding of the competences held by the candidate. Observations can take place in real

([94]) See website: http://tbl.no/index.php?lang=en.

(authentic) work settings or in a simulated work situation. Both approaches are illustrated below (teachers, workers in industrial food technology).

Example: recruitment of teachers (The Netherlands)

Observation is used to assess the competences of candidates lacking formal qualifications in teaching. The assessment helps to map individual achievements and to plan a tailor-made training course directed at the competences not yet achieved.

The candidate has to prepare a teaching session at a primary or secondary school. The candidate is allowed to select the subject; the assessors (an experienced teacher and a teacher of the teacher training college) observe the work activities of the candidate.

The assessors use a checklist of about 30 competence indicators based on national competence standards. This reflects the entire work process, covering the introduction of an activity, instruction or individual coaching during the learning activities, and evaluation of the learning activities with the pupils. The assessors record their observations, translate them into scores and compare them to draw a final and shared conclusion. The assessment results are discussed with the candidate and the assessors formulate a competence development plan. The plan describes the achievements of the candidate and the competences to develop to become a full professional.

Source: Klarus et al. (2000).

However, observation of real work activities is not always possible due to characteristics, safety, time constraints and other factors. In these circumstances, a form of 'backward looking observation' can be used. The assessor works with the same assessment materials as in a real observation except that the scoring of competence indicators is not based on direct observation, but on the assessor's experience in working with the candidate.

Example: procedure used in industrial food technology, cheese production (The Netherlands)

After completing a portfolio and after having received guidance, the candidate decides on the elements of the national qualification standards (levels 2 or 3) for which he or she wants to gain recognition (exemption from the training course).

A trained assessor supervises the candidate. The reason for using company internal assessors is that most candidates have bad experiences with traditional examinations. Another reason is that internal assessors are able to translate the general descriptions of the national qualification standards into situation-specific criteria for assessment. The assessor (supervisor) fills in the assessment forms using his experience of the candidate's work

quality. The assessor can use his knowledge of other sources of evidence, like performance appraisal, personal development interviews or assessments that were part of ISO-procedures, quality procedures (hygiene) and the results of participation in workplace instruction or working groups.

Over 150 persons have been certified at Frisco Cheese and 10 at Friesland Nutrition.

Source: Klarus and Smulders, 2000.

The central role played by the supervisor may be questioned. While the experiences from 'backward looking observation' in the Netherlands are positive, it must be carefully considered how impartiality can be assured; training and supervision are obviously important prerequisites. In Belgium (Fl), a similar approach exists for vocational teachers at secondary level. Another example is given in documenting a portfolio (the United Kingdom).

5.4.4. Simulation

Certain competences cannot be tested in real life (due to safety and cost reasons). For example, aircraft pilots are trained partly using simulation techniques. The principle is to place candidates in a context that presents all characteristics of the real work (or other) situations so they are then able to demonstrate their competences. Simulation requires careful study and job analysis to be prepared properly. Reliability and validity will depend on the preparatory phase (job analysis). Third party judgements are preferable.

Example: simulation used to assess competences on maintenance (AFPA, France)

The situation consists of a two-hour test at the end of a module on 'control and maintenance of enterprises local networks'. Consulting documents is permitted. The test is composed of two parts. The first (12 out of 20 points) focuses on organisation and consists of four questions. The second part focuses on maintenance and consists of four questions.

In the first part, the local computer network of an enterprise (departments, number of users, software) is described to the candidate who then has to outline how different aspects of this network can be designed, organised and safeguarded.

The second part of the test presents an error message on a screen. The candidate is asked to explain the significance of this, to identify possible hypotheses to explain the error, to indicate the order in which to test the hypotheses and indicate the means used to verify each step.

5.4.5. Evidence (physical or intellectual samples) of work (or other) practices

Based on the descriptions in the occupational and assessment standards, the candidate collects (physical or intellectual) evidence of learning outcomes (related to a work situation, voluntary activities, family, or other settings). The following examples illustrate this.

Example: shop assistant, competence test in wrapping up (The Netherlands)

During busy periods (December for example) the candidate assists the cashier in wrapping up at least five different types of packages (how to use different kinds of wrapping materials for various items such as glass and toys). The candidate needs to take into account the wishes of the customer and be able to work quickly and neatly.

Following this, an assessment takes place where the candidates explain what they did. The assessor judges the acquired competences on the basis of the finished products and of the approach to work:

- did the candidate follow a planned approach?
- did the candidate take into account safety issues?
- was he or she friendly to customers and colleagues?
- did the candidate work independently?
- did he or she work quickly?
- did he or she work precisely?
- did he or she take initiatives?

During the assessment, these aspects are judged on a two-point scale. Score zero if a particular aspect is insufficient or doubtful; score one if the particular aspect is satisfactory or good. The parts that are weighted are: preparation, implementation, evaluation and professional attitude. For preparation to evaluation, a maximum of 10 points can be scored and the candidates pass with seven points. For professional attitude, a maximum of nine points can be obtained and the candidates pass with six points.

Source: Baanbreker *Certificaattrajecten vmbo-bve Competentietoetsen*, Citogroep, 2001.

This example illustrates the complexity of assessing non-formally acquired competences. Focus cannot be limited to specific, instrumental competences; for example, personal and social-communicative competences have to be taken into consideration. The last category is of critical importance in services and any assessment overlooking this would be incomplete.

The practice in Audi (see Section 5.2.2.) can be used to exemplify how evidence is extracted from a work situation (in addition to being an example of observation). The candidate is given seven hours to complete and document a piece of work which then turns into a physical

representation of competences. Pictures taken at different stages of the work can also be used as evidence. The several examples detail evidence extracted from work-related situations but this approach can be relevant in many other situations, both in relation to voluntary work and family activities. Presenting physical or intellectual evidence is an important approach in demonstrating competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

5.5. Qualities of methodologies: reliability and validity

The five main methods to collect evidence have been reviewed. Each method can stand on its own, or be complemented with evidence collected following several different methods: this increases reliability and validity. A portfolio composed of evidence collected through several methods gives additional potential to increase reliability and validity. For the individual, it assures credibility and transparency of the portfolio.

The techniques or methods developed to collect and document evidence of non-formal and informal learning must comply with strict quality requirements and provide sufficient reliability and validity. Methods must be transparent (procedures and techniques must be clear to all involved) and cost efficient to offer a credible alternative to the traditional way of valuing learning.

Establishing reliability (always measure the same) is a prerequisite for establishing validity (be sure of what is measured) (Gay, 1987). This section addresses some questions of validity and reliability with reference to the work of Moskal and Leydens (2000, see http://edresearch.org).

5.5.1. Reliability

Reliability refers to assessment score consistency. For example, in a reliable test, a student would expect to attain the same score regardless of when the assessment was completed, when the response was scored, and by whom. In an unreliable assessment, a candidate's score (results) may vary based on factors that are not related to the purpose of the assessment. Reliability concerns the results, the scores or the grades that are not supposed to vary from one assessor to another. Reliability also concerns inconsistencies in the scoring or grading process that may appear because of factors such as fatigue, mood or reduced attention by the assessor. A first practical rule is always to establish scoring (grading) criteria in advance.

Much attention and effort has to be devoted to defining the scoring or grading questions: are categories well defined? Are the differences between categories clear? Would two independent assessors arrive at the same score for a given answer on a particular question? Checklists to illustrate all nuances in and between scoring categories may improve the process for assessors (for their training and their own supervision). Such checklists could be handled like database information to help clarify categories.

With certain techniques, such as observation, simulation or evidence extracted from real situations, the scoring categories may be embedded within a specific context. This means that results may be systematically lower for those unfamiliar with this particular context. It also indicates that attention should be paid to transferability of competences to other contexts and situations. The crucial and central role of standards setting (occupational, educational and also assessment) is emphasised as a focus on what is to be measured and how. These are essential dimensions in improving reliability. For many techniques and methods, the application of some of the clarification principles briefly presented above could improve reliability. In validation of non-formal and informal learning from other Member States, it is an essential and central issue to develop trust and confidence.

5.5.2. Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which the evidence confirms that interpretations are correct and that the manner in which the interpretations are used is appropriate (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999).

Validity in relation to content refers to the extent to which a candidate (student) response to a given assessment instrument reflects his/her knowledge of the content of that area. For example, a history exam using complex language structures may unintentionally measure the reading comprehension of students rather than their historical knowledge.

The same remark can be made for the declarative instruments used in assessing non-formal and informal learning. A mason is trained to build walls, not necessarily to write and talk about building. This argument may be used in most cases involving competences. The choice of validation methodology may systematically undermine the validity of the validation. This point is also touched on by Wheelahan et al. (2002) commenting on the need to ensure '… that individuals from various disadvantaged groups are not further disadvantaged by the use of assessment instruments that rely heavily on high levels of literacy, when these are not intrinsic to the learning or competency outcomes'. Careful attention has to be paid on 'how to assess what'.

Another example, given by Moskal and Leydens (2000) concerns a mathematical test that primarily includes addition problems. It would provide inadequate evidence of a student's ability to solve subtraction, multiplication and division problems. Correctly computing 50 addition problems and two multiplication problems does not provide convincing evidence that a student can subtract, multiply or divide.

More examples are provided by the authors and it is clear that the questions raised apply to all the various techniques presented above. How can one make sure that observations of a candidate capture his/her knowledge and competences? The same applies to simulation and evidence extracted from work. If the context created for simulation is biased, this may seriously hamper the validity (and reliability) of the assessment.

5.6. Concluding remarks: learning and validation

Most of the techniques developed to collect and document evidence can be used to assess learning, skills and competences in formal, non-formal and informal settings (see Table 4).

Table 4: Complementary dimensions of assessment techniques

	Formal learning	**Non-formal and informal learning**
Formative assessments	• continuous controls • declarative – VAP/VAE • competence check-up • evidence from real situation (work and/or others) • simulation • observation	• declarative – VAP/VAE • competence check-up • evidence from real situation (work and/or others) • simulation • observation
Summative assessments	• exams and tests (including tests external to the school system, such testimony of employers) • declarative • evidence extracted from real situation (work and/or others)	• evidence extracted from real situation (work and/or others) • simulation • observation

Source: Colardyn, 2002.

Formative assessment used in formal, non-formal and informal learning assists in developing training plans, career development and access to employment. Formative and summative assessment results in obtaining diplomas or certificates in education and training systems, validation of modules, or certification of units of competence.

Supporting diverse assessment methodologies ensures that each individual finds an assessment method and a validation or certification procedure well suited to his or her needs. In a lifelong learning perspective, diversity in routes to qualification, including certification of competences *per se*, not necessarily related to formal education, should be an option available to everybody. This is an important element in raising the overall skills and competence levels of the population, in making better use of existing human resources and in favouring social and economic inclusion.

To conclude, there is no indication that the challenge of validating non-formally and informally acquired competences has led to the development and introduction of genuinely new testing and assessment methods. Initially, all the categories listed above are well known in formal education and training. However, as addressed in the discussion on the difference

between qualifications and competences, the object to be measured is different and more complex, making the requirements of reliability and validity even harder to reach.

National policies and practices on validating non-formal and informal learning have strong areas of convergence. In a lifelong and life-wide perspective validation systems also converge in the attention paid to including outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.

As a principle, a strategy for lifelong learning should allow individuals to build up and to combine learning from various settings (formal, non-formal and informal) and taking place throughout one's life (from cradle to grave). Greater transferability between approaches in different countries and at different levels needs to be ensured. To do this, Member States have to exchange experience concerning assessment methodologies: they have to pursue discussions on how assessment is carried out.

Assessment methodologies for validating non-formal and informal learning share common features: a limited number of methodologies to collect and document evidence can be characterised. It often seems as if each validation procedure would require its own particular assessment method but the methods are based on a few similar principles, even if adapted to specific situation and contexts. The assessment and validation approaches mentioned in this chapter can be included under the umbrella of the Common principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2004).

6. Comprehensive national validation approaches and common European principles

Since 2000, policies and practices for validating non-formal and informal learning have developed all over Europe, at national level as well as in sectors, enterprises and voluntary organisations. This trend continues; in many Member States validation procedures have acquired a permanent character in education, training and learning systems ([95]).

This tendency shows that validation of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly being accepted as an integrated and legitimate part of mainstream education, training and learning policies and systems in Europe. This does not mean that individuals can freely transfer and accumulate learning outcomes across national and institutional borders. Learning taking place outside formal education and training systems is still treated with scepticism by many stakeholders. An important challenge in the years to come will be to change the perception of

([95]) The report points out that there is an absence of quantitative information on the outcomes of these policies and practices; while some quantitative information is presented in Annex 1, this is neither complete nor comparable.

learning; what matters is not where learning takes place, but what has been learnt. This requires acceptance by all stakeholders that there is no automatic link between learning context and learning quality; high (and poor) quality competences may be acquired in any learning context or setting.

Section 6.1. briefly summarises the main trends in validating non-formal and informal learning, raising some of the issues that will need further consideration in the coming years. Sections 6.2. and 6.3. present the Common European Principles as agreed upon by the European Union Education Council in spring 2004 and examine how these common principles can contribute to achieving greater coherence in national validation approaches. Section 6.4. presents the link between overarching European policies on lifelong learning and validation; the recent initiative to develop and implement (by 2010) a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) supporting lifelong learning is of particular significance in this context.

6.1. Trends in validating non-formal and informal learning

In 2000, approaches to validating non-formal and informal learning were still predominantly experimental; very few examples of fully implemented systems could be identified in the European Union. Today, an increasing number of countries have introduced legal and institutional frameworks for validating non-formal and informal learning, and these have become an established element of the existing education and training systems. This tendency is closely linked to other initiatives, notably the introduction of standards for describing learning outcomes, the development of modularised and credit based education and training systems and the strengthening of guidance and counselling services. Some countries have made an effort to link these different elements within coherent national frameworks and an increasing number of other countries are considering this option.

This general tendency to strengthen validation policies and practices does not hide the fact that several incoherencies and paradoxes remain.

Convergence can be observed, especially in validation methodologies. This is partly a result of extensive exchange of experience among European countries and it demonstrates that common solutions can be developed through voluntary cooperation. Too often, however, validation approaches are seen as isolated islands operating within strict boundaries as self-contained and self-sufficient systems. This creates problems (in particular) for individuals trying to combine learning outcomes from different contexts and settings. The crucial issue is communication between systems; individuals as well as institutions and stakeholders face a fundamental challenge in establishing bridges, liaisons and links between different validation systems to make lifelong learning a reality.

The integration of validation into mainstream policies is, to a certain extent, paradoxical. The majority of countries use validation as a means to increase flexibility of formal education and

training systems and to accommodate alternative learning pathways. But promoting validation simultaneously challenges the role of formal education and training insofar as validation of non-formal and informal learning may fulfil goals different from those served by formal education and training. This challenge to the formal system is accentuated by the increasingly important role played by enterprises and sectors in developing assessment and validation instruments for internal management purposes, frequently referring to a formal job-profile or to the function of the employee. In most Member States, validation approaches developed by enterprises and sectors remain isolated from validation approaches developed in formal education and training. In addition, international norms (ISO and EN) are used to certify competences in associations, enterprises, professional bodies, or others. These autonomous certifications serve the individual by providing recognition of their learning outcomes in specific contexts (sectors, professional associations). For enterprises, it often ensures quality in their services and human resources.

The co-existence of these very different validation systems is necessary and important. If these systems continue to operate in this self-contained manner, this diversity may easily result in competition, creating rather than reducing barriers to transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes. This competition between different validation systems highlights the key-issues surrounding valuing learning:

- who should decide how a learning outcome is valued?
- who should eventually set the standards used for assessment?

The fundamental issue is whether lifelong and life-wide learning can be realised as long as different validation systems are unable to communicate and, even more importantly, as long as they fail to recognise each other's value.

The need for increased coherence and communication between validation systems was the direct background for the initiative in 2002 to develop a set of common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning.

6.2. Common European principles

In 2002, 31 European ministers of education and training, the European social partners and the Commission asked for the development of '… common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels' (*Copenhagen Declaration*, 2002).

Following technical preparations coordinated by the Commission, the EU Education Council agreed on a set of Common principles for identification and validation of non-formal and

informal learning, in May 2004 ([96]). These Council conclusions address all stakeholders involved in validating non-formal and informal learning; explicitly inviting the Member States, the social partners and voluntary organisations to use the principles as guidelines for future policy developments. The principles should be implemented on a voluntary basis and fully respect the rights, responsibilities and competences of the relevant stakeholders. The role of the principles is to 'encourage, guide and inform' policies and practises and thus support '… the development of high-quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning' ([97]). While not prescribing any particular approach or system, they provide a platform where different actors can share information and communicate, thereby improving coherence within and between systems.

The common principles fall under four main headings:

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

(b) obligations of stakeholders: stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

(c) confidence and trust: the processes, procedures and criteria for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

(d) credibility and legitimacy: systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interest and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.

Finally, the process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. It should be assured that those who carry out assessments are professionally competent.

([96]) An expert group was appointed by the European Commission in February 2003, work started March 2003. The Irish presidency of the EU agreed to present the conclusions of this Expert group to the EU Education Council in May 2004.

([97]) European Commission, 2004. See website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/docs/official/keydoc_en.html.

6.3. The role of the common European principles in supporting coherent national validation approaches

The common principles challenge everybody involved in validating and valuing learning to pay increased attention to the overall coherence and quality of approaches and systems being introduced. Their level of generality allows each country or sector to tailor solutions to their specific needs, requirements and situations.

The common principles are part of the Education and training 2010 strategy ([98]) agreed by the Member States and the Commission in February 2004. The common principles on validation can be seen as one of the first concrete results of the request to build a common European policy (along with principles for guidance and counselling and principles for quality assurance in vocational education and training).

The common principles do not impose restrictions on methodological and institutional choices and innovations. The aim is to add value to existing approaches by improving the overall quality of validation approaches, thus strengthening comparability, coherence and mutual trust. For this purpose the concepts of confidence, impartiality and credibility are essential.

6.3.1. Confidence

Confidence concerns the transparency of procedures, standards and assessment criteria. It implies availability of information: all individuals, institutions and stakeholders involved must be able to articulate an informed judgement of the approach proposed. Transparency is a key word and requires:

- well-defined standards;
- clear information on how assessments are conducted and on what basis conclusions are drawn;
- clear and accessible information on conditions for validation, for example time and cost involved, as well as support and guidance provided.

6.3.2. Impartiality

Impartiality relates to the roles and responsibilities of the validation assessors. This requires separating responsibilities for training and for certification. Undue mixing of these roles

([98]) European Commission, Joint Council and Commission Interim Report, February 2004. See: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf.

should be avoided as this will create conflicts of interest and negatively affect overall confidence in validation results.

6.3.3. Credibility

The social and professional credibility of validation is based on the inclusion and the commitment of relevant stakeholders at the appropriate levels. Credibility is closely linked to confidence and impartiality; furthermore it can be strengthened by referring to existing national, European and international norms or principles (the EN 45013/ISO 17024 on general requirements for bodies operating certification of personnel) ([99]).

6.4. Validation in European lifelong learning policies

A successful approach to validation requires (as has been demonstrated in previous chapters) a diversity of methods, approaches and systems. The common European principles explicitly support this strategy of diversification and do not try to define one set of standards or impose one type of methodology ([100]). The common principles can thus be seen as a first step towards an agreed European strategy on validation. Such a strategy is only possible however, when the competences of Member States and other stakeholders are respected.

A growing number of stakeholders agree that all learning outcomes, irrespective of origin, should be valued in a fair and transparent way. This is also the message of the EU Education Council and the Commission in February 2004 where a new European qualifications framework (EQF) was requested (European Commission, Joint Council and Commission interim report, February 2004). The EQF should support transparency, transfer and recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired ([101]). This should be achieved by basing the framework on a set of neutral reference levels referring to

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([99]) National, European (EN 45013) and International (ISO 17024) norms exist and can be referred to. An interesting dimension concerns the participation of all relevant parties without any particular interest predominating. For consensus building, this last point would be quite relevant.

([100]) See: Section 5.4. on methodological issues.

([101]) The request for an EQF was repeated by the 32 Ministers meeting in Maastricht December 2004. It was agreed that priority should be given to developing an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust. The framework will provide a common reference to facilitate the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both VET and general (secondary and higher) education, based mainly on competences and learning outcomes. It will improve permeability within education and training systems, provide a reference for validating informally acquired competences and support the smooth and effective functioning of European, national and sectoral labour markets. The framework should be underpinned by a set of common reference levels. It should be supported by instruments agreed at European level, particularly quality assurance mechanisms to create the necessary mutual trust. The framework should facilitate voluntary development of competence based solutions at European level, enabling sectors to address the new education and training challenges caused by the internationalisation of trade and technology.

learning outcomes and competences rather than formal education and training structures (as is mostly the case today). The work on the EQF demonstrates that valuing learning has become a key issue in European policies on education, training and learning ([102]).

The need for initiatives and instruments reducing and removing barriers for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes is highlighted by several other European policy initiatives. The European credit transfer system (ECTS) for higher education and the new credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) ([103]) are both examples of this. The development of ECVET also illustrates that there is a need to establish stronger links between validation systems and credit transfer systems. The same can be said of the link between validation and guidance/counselling services. Finally, the Europass framework for transparency (January 2005) provides citizens with a practical instrument (portfolio) to support transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications and competences ([104]).

While voluntary European cooperation is important in supporting increased coherence, the extent to which validation actually supports lifelong learning depends on the willingness of key actors at different levels to provide sufficient resources. As already noted in the communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001), there is the question of whether public authorities, social partners and other stakeholders are willing to bear the costs (financial and otherwise) related to validation. There is another question as to whether the European Union can afford not to develop approaches and systems for validation or make the best possible use of existing qualifications and competences. This report has shown that an increasing number of stakeholders at different levels accept that learning acquired outside formal education and training institutions is a valuable resource which must be made increasingly visible and be valued in an appropriate way.

([102]) A formal decision on a European qualifications framework is planned for 2007, envisaging voluntary, gradual implementation by 2010.

([103]) The European credit transfer system developed for higher education and the credit transfer system are currently being considered for vocational education and training, following the Copenhagen Declaration.

([104]) http://europass.cedefop.eu.int.

List of abbreviations

ACCAC	Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (Wales)
ACVC	Association for Certification of Vocational Competences (France)
AFPA	*Association Française pour la formation des Adultes*
AMU	Adult Vocational Training Service (Denmark)
ANEFA	National Agency for Adult Education and Training (Portugal)
APEL	accreditation of prior experiential learning
APL	accreditation of prior learning
AVAs	authorised validating agencies
AVU	general adult education (Denmark)
BELCERT	Belgian certification
Belgium–Fl	Belgium, Flanders
BIBB	*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (Germany)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEEP	European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest
COBRA	*Competentie en Beroepenrepertorium voor de Arbeidsmarkt* (Belgium-Fl)
COLO	*Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het Bedrijfsleven* (the Netherlands)
CPC	Standing Committee on Certification (Portugal)
CPC	*Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives* (Consultative Occupational Committees, France)
CTE	sector committees (Portugal)
CVT	continuing vocational training system
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (the United Kingdom)
DIVA	*Dienst Informatie Vorming en Afstemming* (Belgium-Fl)
EA	European cooperation for accreditation
ECABO	National Body for the Economic and Administrative Professions (the Netherlands)
ECDL	European computer driving licence
ECM	*Educazione continua in medicina* (Italy)
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	credit transfer system for vocational education and training
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
EN	European norm

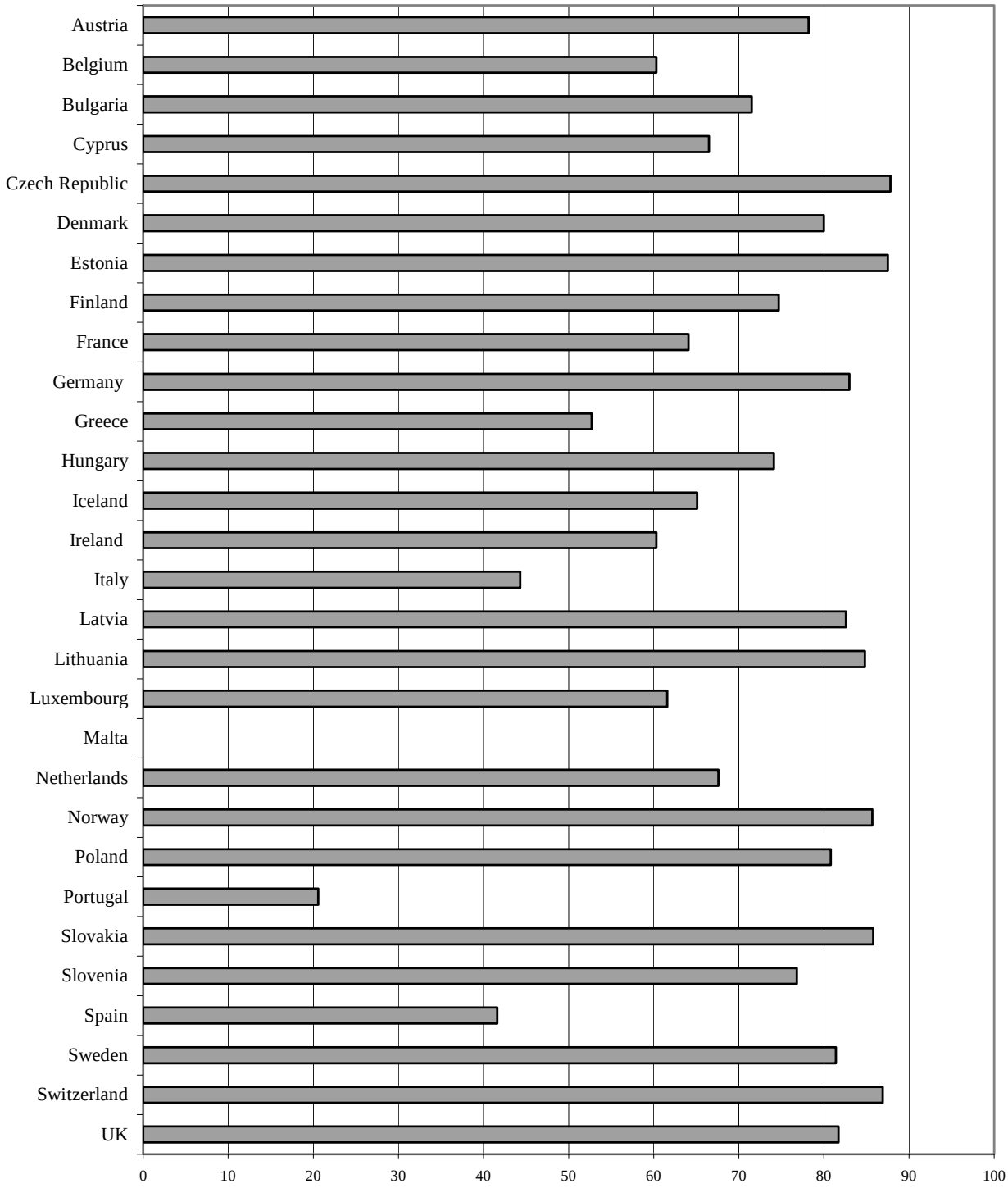
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EVC	*Erkenning Verworven Competenties* (Belgium-Fl and the Netherlands)
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council (Ireland)
GVU	basic adult education scheme (Denmark)
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council (Ireland)
HF	higher preparatory examination (Denmark)
ICA	individual competence assessment (Denmark)
IEFP	Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (Portugal)
IFTS	higher technical training and education (in Italy)
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
ISO/IEC	International Organisation for Standardisation / International Electrotechnical Commission
LSC	Learning and Skills Council (England)
NAP	national action plan for employment
NCFE	Northern Council for Further Education (the United Kingdom)
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualification (the United Kingdom)
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NOS	national occupational standards
NQA	National Qualification Authority (Ireland)
NTOs	national training organisations
NVQ	national vocational qualification (the United Kingdom)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSW	Off the streets and into work (the United Kingdom)
PTVI	Programme immigrants as a resource (Sweden)
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the United Kingdom)
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority (the United Kingdom)
ROC	regional training centre (*Regionaal Opleidings Centrum*) (the Netherlands)
ROME	*Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois* (France)
RVCC	national competency recognition, validation and certification system (Portugal)
SFEFC	Scottish Further Education Funding Council
START	situation tasks activities results transfer (the Netherlands)

SUM	*Strategisk Udvikling af Medarbejdere* (Strategic development of employees) (Denmark)
SVQ	Scottish vocational qualification
SWIT	Swedish information technology programme
TBL	Federation of Norwegian Manufacturing Industries
TCO	*Tjänstmännens Centralorganisation* (Sweden)
TEC	training and enterprise councils
TIEKE	Finnish Information Society Development Centre
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe
VAE	*Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (France)
VAP	*Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (France)
VDAB	Flemish Public Employment Service
VET	vocational education and training colleges (Denmark)
VEUD	*Voksenerhvervsuddannelsen* (Denmark)
VIZO	Department of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Belgium-Fl)

Annex 1: Population having attained at least upper secondary education

The indicator shows the percentage of the adult population (25-64 years old) that has completed upper secondary education. The indicator aims to measure the proportion of the population that is likely to have the minimum necessary qualifications to participate actively in social and economic life. It should be noted that completion of upper secondary education can be achieved in European countries after varying lengths of study, according to different national education systems (Eurostat).

Figure 3: Population aged 25-64 having attained at least upper secondary education in 2001 (percentage)



NB: Malta: not available; the United Kingdom: unreliable or uncertain data.

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey) – website: www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/.

Annex 2: Outcomes of validation policies and practices

The indicators proposed below (Table 5) summarise what Member States have indicated in their reports and complementary information; many other indicators can be imagined. It seems useful to present the information generally assembled by Member States so that exchange on practices can take place. This underlines the lack of information, especially on the results of programmes, actions and initiatives. Therefore, even though incomplete, Table 5 is expected to stimulate thinking as well as to prepare steps for further information to be collected.

Three types of indicator are used, centred on:

1. Individual, giving information either on

   (a) access to programmes or certifications;

   (b) results in number of validations or certifications (with or without education and training).

   The majority of available information concerns individual access to validation and results of validation.

2. Organisation, concerning information on

   (a) education and training institutions;

   (b) enterprises;

   (c) other providers of validation.

   Some data on education and training institutions are provided and little information exists on enterprises or other providers of validation.

3. Costs

   In the Member States' replies to the questionnaires as in general, costs are rarely mentioned or even analysed (for more information, see: Wurzburg, 2002; OECD, 2001, 2003).

Table 5: Outcomes of validation policies and practices – tentative indications

	Information	**Types of indicators**
Denmark	VEUD (*Voksenerhvervsuddannelsen*) introduced in 1992 is an apprenticeship programme for adults. It introduced a systematic approach to validating non-formal learning. This scheme makes it possible for adults over 25 to be exempt from certain parts of formal initial training on the basis of prior educational or occupational experience. Since 1992, more than 10 000 adults have started training under the VEUD programme. Leading to the same formal certification as ordinary, initial vocational education and training, VEUD is an effort to address the specific training needs of adults. Validation is increasingly becoming a part of the Danish political agenda.	**1a** (access)
Finland	National certificate of language proficiency By 2002, over 16 000 people had acquired a national certificate of language proficiency.	**1b** (results)
	Competence based qualification For the competence-based examinations, in 1999, of the 12 815 candidates who passed the examinations only 434 did so without any educational preparation, based solely on their working experience.	**1a** (access)
	In 2000, some 18 000 people passed a competence-based examination. While possibilities exist at tertiary level (polytechnics and universities), this seems to be less used or less relevant.	**1a** (access)
	European computer driving licence test was created by TIEKE, the Finnish Information Society Development Centre.	
	By the end of 2001, 100 000 people had acquired an A certificate. In addition, several thousand people have taken part or parts of the test.	**1b** (results)
	The A certificate test can be taken at some 400 training organisations or companies all over Finland.	**2a**
	According to statistics, some 2 850 AB certificates have been granted.	**1b** (results)
	At this level, 149 training bodies in Finland arrange training and tests.	**2a**
France	Over a short decade, the competence check-up (not a validation act) has reached around 600 000 individuals (Dares, 2000, 2002).	**1b** (results)
	VAP -VAE After a decade of VAP (1992-2002), 19 558 certificates (or parts of certificates) were delivered following (or including) a VAP procedure (1992 Law) (Gagnon, 2000; *Ministère de l'éducation*, France, 2003a, 2003b). Since the 2002 law on the VAE, the first results show a steady increase with 6 760 certificates and/or parts of certificates for that first year of implementation. In 2003, the potential candidates (persons seeking information) for vocational diplomas or certificates rose to 14 374: 7 057 obtained a complete certificate (49.1 %) and 5 605 obtained a partial certificate (39 %). For higher education, the request for information rose to 3 919 demands: 2 780 individuals had a positive answer and out of whom, 827 individuals (29.7 %) achieved a complete diploma. (*Ministère de l'éducation*, France, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005).	**1b** (results)

	Information	Types of indicators
Germany	In general terms, validation of learning acquired outside the formal system has been given limited attention. This does not mean that learning outside formal education and training, at work or elsewhere, is low. According to a 2000 survey of participation in continuing education and training (*Berichtssystem Weiterbildung*), 67 % of the population took part in informal vocational continuing education and training. In 1994, it was 54 % and, in 1997, it was 72 %. The survey conducted *Infratest Sozialforschung* on the behalf of Ministry of Education and Research (2000) targets the group 19-64 year olds.	**1a** (access)
	The *Externenprüfung* is the possibility for experienced workers to sit a journeyman's exam without having attended regular training. Approximately 5 % of all examinations within the German system are based on the *Externenprüfung* annually.	**1b** (results)
	Additional qualifications (*Zusatzqualifikationen*) developed by the public education and training system are provided free of charge, units developed by the chambers will normally require a fee (EUR 50 to 500). Additional qualifications cover a wide range of systematic training, ranging from 20 hours to 200 hours.	**3** **2**
	The project *Bildungspass-Qualifizierungspass* (1974) included formal education and training, documentation of experience and practice. It gave a complete picture of skills and competences of the person. From 1974 to 1993, 340 000 portfolios were requested.	**1a** (access)
	In 1996, 1 % of employees hold such a portfolio (Colardyn, 1996). The *Bildungspass* never became a success and was eventually abandoned.	**1b** (results)
	In 2002-03, a total of 65 different qualification and competence passport or portfolios were identified (in *Rahmenkonzept Projekt Bildungspass*, 2003).	**2a**
Ireland	In the construction sector, certification is provided by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC): learners receive the same certification as individuals in further education with access, transfer and progression opportunities. By early 2002, 3 056 registration cards had been issued.	**1b** (results) **1a** (access)
	The Electricity Supply Board and The National Training Body provide another example. Certification is provided by FETAC. Learners receive the same certification as in further education with access, transfer and progression opportunities. By early 2002, 300-400 linespersons had been involved and 60 had achieved certification.	**1b** (results)
	Half of the Skillnets networks are working in partnership with FETAC and will receive the same certification as is available in formal education with access, transfer and progression opportunities. Other Skillnets will access certification through third level institutions.	**2a**
	It is still difficult to say exactly how many certificates have been acquired so far; there are 58 networks nationally with 10 686 trainees altogether.	**1a** (access)

	Information	Types of indicators
Netherlands	The Recognition of Acquired Competences In 2001, 10 EVC-procedures were executed by ECABO in several sectors, mainly in secretarial work and company administration.	**1a** (access)
	For 2002, the EVC monitor showed that around 6 000 individuals from 500 enterprises took part in a validation procedure (Hövels and Romijn, 2003).	**1b** and **2b**
Norway	1952 Act on vocational training The 1952 Act on vocational training authorised individuals to take the crafts examination based on practical work experience. Interest in this flexible arrangement soared from the mid-1990s and onwards. At its peak in 1997-99, close to 14 000 candidates annually made use of this opportunity. In a country where an average age group comprises approximately 60 000, these are very high figures.	**1a** (access)

Results of the competence reform

	Number of candidates	Number of enterprises	Number of projects	
Upper secondary *including access to universities (6 000), 2001/02*	15 000		14	**1a** and **1b**
Working life	6 000	150	9	**2b** and **1a**
Voluntary sector			7	**2c**
Total	21 000	150	30	

	Upper secondary education and training 15 000 individuals passed through the various schemes during the project period, providing a strong basis on which a more permanent system could be built. The high number of individuals (not only in a Norwegian context but also compared to experiences in other countries) is largely due to the decision of the Parliament to grant all adults (born before 1998) a legal right to upper secondary education.	**1a** (access)
	The 2000 Law on Universities and University Colleges More than 6 000 individuals asked to be validated during 2001/02 (the first year of the scheme). More than 2 000 of these were accepted by universities or university colleges.	**1b** (results)
	In working life Nine projects were started covering 150 enterprises. More than 6 000 employees went through a process of competence documentation.	**2b** **1a** (access)
	In the voluntary sector Seven projects were launched involving adult and distance learning organisations, folk high school, and youth organisations are covered.	**2c**

	Information	Types of indicators
Portugal	ANEFA Creation of centres In 2000, starting with the formation of six centres for recognition, validation and certification (RVCC-centres), 22 centres were launched in 2001, 14 in 2002 and the aim is a total of 84 centres by 2006. Registration By late 2002, close to 20 000 candidates had registered in RVCC-centres, at different stages of the recognition, validation and certification process. Certification In 2002, 1 449 individuals had actually finished certification.	**2a** **1a** (access) **1b** (results)
Sweden	Adult education initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) Validation According to a survey, almost 8 000 individuals (300 with foreign background) were 'validated' in 2000 (Ministry of Education, Sweden, 2003). Time The total time spent in validation process is estimated to match around 70 000 weeks of study corresponding to roughly nine weeks per head, on average. The Swedish information technology programme (SWIT**)** The Swedish IT programme (SWIT) has a high number of applicants, more than 80 000, emphasised the need for a high capacity assessment and selection methodology.	**1b** (results) **2a** **1a** (access)
United Kingdom	NVQs from 1987 to September 2000 Just under 3.2 million NVQs/SVQs had been awarded up to the end of September 2000. The majority of these at the level 2 (59 %), with about 19 % at level 1 and 22 % at level 3 or above (DfEE, Statistics of Education, May 2001). By mid-2001, it is considered that 3.3 million NVQs/SVQs were awarded. 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. Difficulties in capturing results of validation policies are underlined. Higher Education The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the Access to higher education recognition scheme provides a national framework for entry to higher education for adults who do not have the traditional requirements. Access: currently, about 15 000 adults per year progress to higher education from Access to higher education courses.	**1b** (results) **1a** (access)

	Information	Types of indicators
	Many more progress to higher education outside the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service framework (e.g. to sub-degree courses or to part-time provision). This constitutes about 30 % of certificated adult full-time entrants to higher education per annum.	**1b** (results)

Source: Compiled by Danielle Colardyn.

Websites consulted

Belgium	Information on DIVA: http://diva.vlaanderen.be/home.aspx
France	Legislation: www.legifrance.gouv.fr
	Direction de l'évaluation et de la prospective – Note d'information: www.education.gouv.fr/stateval
	ROME, 1995. *Répertoire Opérationel des Métiers et des Emplois*, Agence nationale pour l'emploi, Paris. www.anpe.fr
	ACCP (Association for certification of vocational competences): http://formation-emploi.cci.fr/dossiers/rh_competences/ certification_competences.aspx
	CIBC: Network of Centres for check-up of competences: www.cibc.net
Germany	BIBB: training profiles: www.bibb.de/de
Ireland	Department of education: http://www.education.ie
	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI): www.nqai.ie/overview.pdf
Norway	Federation of Norwegian Manufacturing Industries (TBL): www.tbl.no/index.php?lang=en
United Kingdom	Department for education and employment: www.dfes.gov.uk
	Qualifications and curriculum authority (QCA): www.qca.org.uk
	www.isda.org.uk
	www.ucas.co.uk/higher/candq/apl
	www.ncfe.org.uk
	www.foyer.net
	www.osw.org.uk

Canada	Canadian information centre for international credentials: www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr2029e.htm
ISO	www.iso.ch
NCVER	http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr2029e.htm

European institutions

Cedefop	www.trainingvillage.gr
ECDL	European computer driving licence – TIEKE: www.tieke.fi
ETUC	www.etuc.org
Europass	http://europass.cedefop.eu.int

European accreditation of certification (EAC)	www.european-accreditation.org
European Commission	www.europa.eu.int
	Consultation process on the lifelong learning Memorandum: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html
Eurostat	www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/
European training foundation (ETF)	www.etf.eu.int

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Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

The learning continuity:
European inventory on validating non-formal and informal learning
National policies and practices in validating
non-formal and informal learning

Danielle Colardyn
Jens Bjßrn¬vold

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This report represents the first effort to establish a European inventory of approaches to validating non formal and informal learning. Validation policies, practices and methods are core issues in any strategy aimed at lifelong and life-wide learning.

These policies are examined in detail for 14 Member States of the EU; more limited information is presented for eight new Member States and two candidate countries. The report defines basic concepts; analyses similarities and differences between national strategies and points to some main trends in validation.

The report addresses several issues influencing the quality and credibility of validation approaches: the definition of standards, the development of modularised and flexible pathways for learning and the involvement and commitment of stakeholders. Particular emphasis is given to assessment methods where five main categories are identified. The most recent European initiatives relevant to validation are discussed; in particular the common European principles for validation (2004), the Europass portfolio supporting transparency and transfer of qualifications and competences at national and European level (2005) and the first steps of the continuing work to develop and implement a European qualifications framework (2005).

All these initiatives reflect developments at national level but aim at increased cooperation and coherency between countries.

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