RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES OF WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

THIS PUBLICATION REPRESENTS FOR THE MOST PART THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT ‘PROMOTING THE AGENDA FOR NEW SKILLS AND JOBS: STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATHWAYS BY DEVELOPING SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR WORKERS’.
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INTRODUCTION

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This publication represents the final result of the EU-project ‘Promoting the agenda for new skills and jobs: strengthening individual learning pathways by developing skills assessment tools for workers’ supported by European Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs to enable workers to bridge the skills mismatch and offer them individual learning pathways.

The project takes place in difficult social and economic times; almost 84 Million people in Europe are living in poverty or at the threat of falling into poverty, of which 65 million adults. 77 Million European aged 25–64 (close to 30%) still have at most lower secondary education, only 9.5% of this age group participated in education and training in 2008. Up to 2020 the European labour force with low-level qualifications is projected to contract by more than 17 million. Due to ageing of the population, the re-skilling and up-skilling of adults becomes more and more important, therefore despite of the financial constraints, there is a need to invest more in continuing improvement of skills, competences and knowledge of workers to increase their labour-market participation.

“*The same importance should be given to the proper assessment of skills, competences and knowledge of workers in order to enhance their adjustment to the labour-market needs and to develop further learning pathways.*”

To that end this projects seeks to develop concrete tools to strengthen the development of new opportunities and its specific objectives include:

1. Bring together the Trade Union Education Institutes, Workers’ Education Associations and Labour Research Institutes in order to exchange best practices and build further on existing examples that enable the upgrading and re-skilling of workers vulnerable to economic restructuring and blue collar workers through individual learning pathways.

2. Support the social partners in developing the taxonomy of skills, in particular ‘soft’ skills, enabling the recognition and validation of skills and competences gained through on-the-job training and prior learning, as well as to promote the development of an EU Skills Panorama, EU Skills Passport, European and National Qualification Frameworks and other EU Skills provisions.

3. Integrates learning and career guidance; lifelong learning pathways that facilitate the transition between phases of work and learning to ensure the re-skilling of workers vulnerable to economic restructuring and blue collar workers.

Special thanks go to Ellen Wild-Blom from „Tür an Tür Augsburg” and to Prof. Dr. Peter Dehnbostel from Berlin University for Professional Studies. They contributed very much with their know-how in accounting of competences and with their interpretation of the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and they helped us significantly with the implementation of the findings in the seminars and meetings.

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Let us contribute something to the social recognition of informal competences of our employees, so that they would achieve the same value which the formal competences is often given without questioning.

*Jens Martens, DGB Bildungswerk BUND*
VALIDATION OF INFORMALLY AND NON-FORMALLY ACQUIRED COMPETENCES: EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

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CURRENT SITUATION: RELEVANCE IN TERMS OF EDUCATION POLICY

The future of education and vocational education in the EU member states is essentially influenced by education measures and reforms agreed upon at a European level. As early as the 1970s, the European Council, UNESCO and OECD introduced the idea of lifelong learning and by the 1990s it had become the central idea of EU education policy. In the wake of the shift from an industry-based to a knowledge-based society, the vast variety of formal, informal and non-formal learning processes from all sorts of life and work backgrounds has become ever more important. In business especially, informally and non-formally acquired competences have become more important due to the implementation of new work and organisational systems. Pertinent studies confirm this increased importance. Moreover, they show that approximately two out of three workers increasingly tend to participate in informal further education measures (Dehnbostel, 2008, p. 20 f., p. 65 ff.)

In the framework of the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 a number of developments have been initiated in the European education area. The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and Europass are especially important in this context.

“Validation’ has been established for assessing informally and non-formally acquired learning outcomes and competences.”

The insights and experiences from 26 European countries have been summarised in the publication “European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning” (CEDEFOP, 2009) and can be regarded as a European validation concept that will be explored more closely later on in this document. Currently the European Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on the validation of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2012) is especially important. Among other things, the proposal calls for the introduction of a national validation system by 2015 so that competences acquired informally and non-formally would be recognised by a competent authority. Following a person’s application, knowledge, skills and competences not acquired through formal education and qualification pathways are to be validated within a three-month period. Chambers, social partners, associations, and education and training providers are to be involved in the process.

The upcoming Council recommendation will have a similarly strong influence on the education and qualification policy in European countries as the European Qualifications Framework (EFR) adopted in 2009. If it is adopted — and it is expected that it will be — the influence of this recommendation will be particularly felt in countries like the Federal Republic of Germany where the validation and recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences has hitherto played only a minor role. This assumption is supported further by the fact that the German Bundesrat issued a statement shortly after the publication of the recommendation (Bundesrat resolution, 2012). This resolution explicitly supports the stronger validation of non-formally and informally acquired learning pathways and outcomes. Contrary to the Commission’s explanatory statement on the introduction of national validation systems, which primarily targets the labour market and employment, the Bundesrat insists that the introduction was about teaching values and helping people to fully develop their own personality. The implementation of the recommendation would lead to a significant change in the learning, transfer and recognition culture.

WHAT IS INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING?

Informal learning is learning by experience in an organisational context in or through work activities. According to pertinent empirical data, 60 to 80 per cent of a skilled worker’s procedural knowledge is derived from informal learning pathways (see Overwien, 2005, Dehnbostel, 2010).

In order to capture it systematically and integrate it into operational personnel work it has to be integrated into a competence
According to this definition, measures which contain an element of assessment or are awarded with a certificate that does not represent a qualification of the education system are also forms of non-formal learning. These include the European Computer Driving Licence, language certificates, certificates of adult education centres, certificates awarded as part of manufacturers’ training courses or certificates that have to be renewed regularly (e.g. certificates held by welders, forklift operators or hazardous goods drivers).

VALIDATION PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES IN EUROPE

Europe’s interest in promoting national efforts to implement validation systems for informal and non-formal learning is mostly
politically and economically motivated. If the general benefit of validation is not limited to countries, regions or industries but effective on a European scale, it is extremely important that national systems are comparable and transparent at a European level. This strengthens the mobility of workers within Europe which is important for the personnel development of companies. Thus they have a larger pool of qualified workers from which to recruit.

The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (see CEDEFOP, 2009) put the individual at the centre of the validation process.

“Although validating learning should in general be voluntary, the guidelines recommend that individuals should be informed about the personal benefits of validation of their non-formal and informal learning and that their motivation to participate in the validation process should be promoted by ‘suitable communication strategies’.”

Moreover, their decision-making should also be supported by pertinent information, advice and guidance. The guidelines state that everybody should be entitled to equal access and fair and equal treatment. However, they do not elaborate on what this means when those seeking validation of informal or non-formal learning differ in their prerequisites (see CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 27 ff). Another principle stipulated is that the privacy and rights of the individual should be protected in the course of a validation process, with the individual being protected from the misuse of personal data on a European and national level by data protection regulations. Information collected in the course of a validation process must not be used for other purposes such as personnel reorganisation in companies or wage decisions without the consent of the person concerned.

The possible conflicts of interest (see CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 37 ff.) which can arise in validation processes organised by the private sector especially also have to be viewed in this context. Although the self-interest of companies regarding participation in the validation of their employees’ learning generally seems to be in line with the personal interest of their staff – through a maximum of process transparency and the participation of workers’ representatives – the risk that company-internal validation does not take the employees’ interest sufficiently into account is still present. Candidates may feel that they have no control over the validation of their own competences or that – other than with public validation processes – it is not possible to challenge the results. In general the commitment of companies with respect to the validation of their employees’ non-formal and informal learning will initially always depend on whether and to what extent this promises to be beneficial for the company. Normally it will depend on short- and mid-term personnel requirements and be carried out in the context of modernising work methods and of employee upskilling.

The validation of informal and non-formal learning is not feasible without an institutional and organisational framework. The European guidelines state that a certification agency at government level could offer official endorsement of validated informal and non-formal learning (see CEDEFOP 2009, p. 37 ff.). A central assessment and validation agency could also be used to generate broadly applicable processes. Generally, education and training bodies have a dominant position in validation as they contribute to the comparability of standards between informal and formal systems. However, it is possible that the dominance of the formal system could inhibit the development of assessment practices that do not depend on formal learning environments. It is likely that the responsiveness of the validation process to the needs of candidates is dependent on the different types of institution offering validation to individuals.

According to the guidelines, the institutions and processes must be defined and the respective functions need to be allocated in order to implement successful validation systems that build trust, transparency and quality. The majority of countries seemed to tailor validation systems to the needs of particular groups, notably immigrants, individuals with disabilities, the unemployed or the low-qualified. While there might be good reasons for choosing this approach, it also runs the risk of placing validation outside mainstream qualifications policies and creating “A class” and “B class” certificates, depending on the route to certification.
COMPETENCE-BASED VALIDATION MODEL

In European discussion, five process phases of identifying and assessing informally and formally acquired competences are increasingly gaining acceptance (see inter alia CEDEFOP 2009, BBT 2009). Ideally these phases are the following, which require at the least a competence model if validation is aimed at recognition and transfer:

1. Information, advice and guidance
2. Identification
3. Assessment
4. Validation
5. Certification

The following illustration organises these steps in chronological order: At the centre of the process are phases (2) to (4): identification, assessment and validation. The CEDEFOP glossary defines those phases as follows: Identification of non-formal and informal learning (2) is seen as a process which “… records and makes visible the individual’s learning outcomes. This does not result in a formal certificate or diploma, but it may provide the basis for such formal recognition” (CEDEFOP 2009, p. 15).
Assessment of learning outcomes (3) is defined as “... appraising knowledge, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria, specifying learning methods and expectations. Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.” There are two different types of assessment, i.e. formative assessment, which is “a two-way reflective process between a teacher/assessor and learner to promote learning”, and summative assessment, which is “the process of assessing (or evaluating) a learner’s achievement of specific knowledge, skills and competence at a particular time” (CEDEFOP 2009, glossary).

Validation (4) of non-formal and informal learning “… is based on the assessment of the individual’s learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma” (CEDEFOP 2009, p. 15). The term “validation of learning outcomes” is understood as “the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification” (CEDEFOP 2009, glossary).

The certification of learning outcomes (5) is the process “… of formally attesting that knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard. Certification results in the issue of a certificate, diploma or title” (CEDEFOP 2009, glossary).

The assessment process is divided into phases (3) to (5) up to the award of a certificate due to an analytical separation which is relevant for generating a validation process. In Germany at least, this separation has not been found in reality because to date assessment and certification have usually been carried out by the same institution.

The validation process can result in the acquisition of a qualification and thus the award of an official certificate, it can be applied to parts of an education programme or used to transfer learning outcomes. Depending on its purpose, the identification phase can either initially be aimed at a competence assessment that is oriented towards development and has no set result or at the identification of job-relevant knowledge, skills and competences that are needed for the job in question, a vocational field or an occupation and are thus need-oriented.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- En route to the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences, the following practical and conceptual recommendations become apparent.

**RECOGNITION VIA COMPETENCE-BASED VALIDATION**

At the core of the validation process of competences acquired in a variety of ways are identification, assessment and confirmation by a competent body, the actual validation. Competence-based validation offers the chance to obtain recognition of competences regardless of how they were acquired, i.e. also for non-formally or informally acquired competences. Job-relevant skills, capabilities and competences are not only acquired on the job but also in a social context and through private interests, youth social work schemes, voluntary work and time spent abroad.

Validation requires qualified advice beforehand and maybe also in the course of the process. The identification and documentation of competences should ideally be based on examples of good practice – e.g. portfolios, competence assessment procedures or learning journals – which can be developed further. The assessment should be based on quality criteria aligned to the manner of competence acquisition. In order to ensure the quality of validation – especially during identification and assessment – it is necessary to train staff especially for this task.

**INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

To implement validation processes and moreover the categorisation of competences into the DQR, institutional and organisational support is essential. Organisations and associations should make public their ideas and interests in this respect, especially as such plans have so far not been discussed by either experts or the general public. In Germany plans similar to those of CEDEFOP
and organisational models proposed or already in place in other countries are soon to be developed. Here the objective cannot be to establish new organisations but to use existing ones and extend their functions and offers.

The organisational structure of accreditation and of accredited education providers and organisations at universities and in parts of further training can serve as a role model. Analogous to the accreditation bodies, the competent agencies would be special institutions with the general or sector-based competence to authorise recognitions, categorisations into the DQR or certificates and certifying bodies. Among others these might be public authorities, chambers, professional organisations, companies or the intermediary organisations recently established in Germany in which the federal government, states and business are involved in equal parts. However, those institutions must not be education providers themselves and they must be officially authorised to define generally accepted standards for learning outcomes, qualifications and competence assessment procedures, to accredit providers and to categorise competences into the DQR with the providers’ consent.

**CATEGORISING NON-FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY ACQUIRED COMPETENCES INTO THE DQR AND EQF**

The DQR aims at building a bridge between formal, non-formal and informal learning and helping to make learning outcomes acquired by experience visible. To date, however, the DQR has concentrated on qualifications acquired formally through vocational or university education.

The right to have informally and non-formally acquired competences recognised and categorised into the DQR offers an opportunity to disadvantaged youths in particular as they often lack formal school and vocational certificates. Consolidating single competence bundles that are to be categorised in the DQR simplifies recognition and pathways to vocational training and work.

Categorisation must be based on a transparent and quality-assured procedure. As stated above, it should be carried out by the competent bodies with participation of the providers accredited for validation. In doing so the standards relevant for validati-

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**Editorial: European Qualification Framework**

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) provides a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels. It serves as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe, and thus promote lifelong and life-wide learning, and the mobility of European citizens whether for studying or working abroad.

In order to make the EQF work, European countries participating in „Education and Training 2020“ are invited to relate their national qualifications levels to the appropriate levels of the EQF and to indicate in all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents the relevant EQF level. The German Qualification Framework (DQR) has been developed to this end.

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**QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

The role that quality assurance and development have played so far in the context of DQR drafting has not been substantial enough, although these aspects are a major factor in the implementation of national qualification frameworks and the new steering and organisation concepts involved. It is an essential prerequisite for the acceptance of identification and validation of learning outcomes as well as the categorisation into the DQR. This is true for comprehensive procedures as well as for single phases, competence assessment, description of learning outcomes, assessment, an effective level categorisation, advice and the people and institutions involved. This means that standards have to be defined for the respective fields and an internal and external quality assurance system has to be established in order to guarantee compliance.
In Switzerland, the quality of the development process is ensured by the guidelines for the validation of educational outcomes which regulates procedure and competences. Moreover, there are additional documents for improved management, such as checklists for quality development and assurance, explanations for the development of qualification profiles and pass requirements as well as tips for the recognition of canton-based procedures and the approval of validation instruments. The quality of the process is assured by means of a qualification profile and the pass requirements for the job in question.

Ultimately, the federal government, which is in control of vocational training, is responsible for quality assurance. In this capacity the federal government has developed a strategy for training experts who are called upon to assess other qualification processes which deals with the possibilities and limits of previous test procedures and elaborates the methodical differences. The strategy provides for expert training for the other qualification processes which can be transferred as a prototype to other vocational fields.

MODEL PROJECTS FOR DEVELOPING AND APPLYING VALIDATION AND CATEGORISATION PROCEDURES

Germany is well positioned for an initial and model development of competence assessment, validation and categorisation procedures. Indeed, for decades, we have been using increasing experience, insights and scientific standards in the implementation of pilot projects in all fields of education which are now increasingly to be included into the DQR development process.

In recent years, large companies, education providers and vocational schools have carried out isolated pilot and model developments and trials concerning the DQR and EQF. Those efforts should be increased for the upcoming level categorisations of qualifications and education programmes, including with respect to evaluations to be carried out and revisions that are to be expected for previous categorisations.

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EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

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European Union’s education and training policies have gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU’s overarching programme focusing on growth and jobs. The strategy recognized that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU’s most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition and combating the current economic and social crisis.

In that same context the European Council emphasis that education and training have a fundamental role to play in achieving the ‘Europe 2020’ objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, notably by equipping citizens with the skills and competences which the European economy and European society need in order to remain competitive and innovative, but also by helping to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

Within the Europe 2020 Strategy one of the initiatives is entitled the ‘Agenda for new skills and jobs’ which highlights the need to upgrade skills and to boost employability. It pledges to make progress to improve the identification of training needs, increase the labour market relevance of education and training, facilitate individuals’ access to lifelong learning opportunities and guidance, and ensure smooth transitions between the worlds of education, training and employment. Achieving this, calls for closer collaboration and partnerships between public services, education and training providers and employers at national, regional and local level. The transition towards learning outcome-based qualification systems and greater validation of skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts are also of great importance in enhancing employability.

GLOSSARY

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES
The process of appraising knowledge, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria, specifying learning methods and expectations. Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.

CERTIFICATE
An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.

CERTIFICATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES
The process of formally attesting that knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard. Certification results in the issue of a certificate, diploma or title.

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2 Council conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy (2011/C 70/01)
3 Definitions originate from the CEDEFOP multilingual glossary, European Guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning, CEDEFOP, 2009
RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES OF WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

PART II

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EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

FORMAL LEARNING
Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT
A two-way reflective process between a teacher/assessor and learner to promote learning.

INFORMAL LEARNING
Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is mostly unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

KEY COMPETENCES
The sum of skills (basic skills and new basic skills) needed to develop in contemporary knowledge society. The European Commission sets out the eight key competences:
– communication in the mother tongue;
– communication in foreign languages;
– competences in maths, science and technology;
– digital competence;
– learning to learn;
– interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, and civic competence;
– entrepreneurship;
– cultural expression.

LEARNING
A process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process.

LIFELONG LEARNING
All learning activity undertaken throughout life, and which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

LIFE-WIDE LEARNING
Learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING
Learning which is embedded in planned activities not always explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.

QUALIFICATION
The term qualification covers different aspects:
– formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade (OECD);
– job requirements: the knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform the specific tasks attached to a particular work position (ILO);
– personal attributes: the sum of knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences acquired by an individual in formal, non-formal and/or informal settings.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK
An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.

QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM
A system which provides rules governing all aspects of education and training activities leading to recognition of learning outcomes at national or sectoral level, including:
– definition of qualification policy, training design and implemen-
tation, institutional arrangements, funding, quality assurance;
– assessment, validation and certification of learning outcomes;
– mechanisms that link education and training to the labour
market and civil society.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES
– formal recognition: the process of granting official status to
skills and competences:
  – through the award of qualifications (certificates, diploma
  or titles);
  – through the grant of equivalence, credit units or waivers,
  validation of gained skills and/or competences;
and/or
– social recognition: the acknowledgement of the value of skills
and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.

STANDARD (OR REFERENTIAL)
Expectation, obligation, requirement or norm expected. It is pos-
sible to distinguish between:
– educational standard refers to the statements of learning ob-
jectives, content of curricula, entry requirements as well as
resources required to meet the learning objectives;
– occupational standard refers to the statements of the activities
and tasks related to – or to the knowledge, skills and under-
standing needed for – a specific job;
– assessment standard refers to the statements of the learning
outcomes to be assessed, the level of performance to be achie-
ved by the individual assessed and the methodology used;
– validation standard refers to the statements of the learning
outcomes to be assessed, the assessment methodology used,
as well as the level of performance to be reached;
– certification standard refers to the statements of the rules ap-
licable for obtaining a certificate or diploma as well as the
rights conferred.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
The process of assessing (or evaluating) a learner’s achievement
of specific knowledge, skills and competence at a particular time.

VALIDATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES
The confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes
(knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individ-
ual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been as-
sessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the
requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads
to certification.
The EU is not directly responsible for the whole area of education. However, looking back, one could say that EU activities in the social policy field of education do have a long tradition. The axioms for vocational training as they are laid down in Article 166, have been worked out already in the beginning of the sixties. In 1969 some people proposed to discuss vocational training within the Economic and Social Committee and from 1970 on the idea to establish a centre for the co-operation in vocational education and further training was virulent. Finally, in February 1975, the council passed a regulation to establish the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Today, the Lisbon treaty provides some competences in this field.

In title XII, Education, Vocational Training, Youth and Sport, Article 165 (consolidated version of the Lisbon treaty) states:

1. The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Special attention is paid to vocational training. The wording of Article 166 is as follows:

1. The Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organization of vocational training.

2. Union action shall aim to:
   – facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining,
   – improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market,
   – facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people,
   – stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms,
   – develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member states.

Both articles expressly mention that it is not intended to harmonize the existing national systems, neither in education nor in the area of vocational education and training.

One can find references to vocational education and training also in other chapters of the treaty, namely chapter IX on Employment and chapter X on Social Policy. The first one describes VET as a dependent variable of the labour market. Again and again, in EU-documents you will find the phrase that workers have to adapt to change, meaning technological change and changes on the labour market. This is a problematic tendency, disregarding both the fact that Lifelong Learning should be established as an individual right and that the labour market is, like technological change, a process configurable by social considerations and aims not in a causality in itself.

Furthermore, Article 156 describes the means to support vocational education and further training: in particular initiatives aiming at the establishment of guidelines and indicators, the organization of exchange of best practice, and the preparation of the necessary elements for periodic monitoring and evaluation.

Unlike chapter XII this title does not mention that harmonization is not the aim of the community policies. Indeed, especially
with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and with the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) two tools have been developed that influence national development and the discussion on vocational education and training substantially. Additionally, with the Lifelong Learning Programme the practical adaptation and implementation of EQF and ECVET is financed with Billions of Euro (€ 7 billion for 2007 to 2013). Considering this, a factual process of harmonization can be diagnosed. Maybe, in the future, the main question will be to find a balance between technological harmonization (as a tendency of globalization and with the consequence of harmonization in the area of skills/competences/qualifications) and cultural diversity.

However, the EU-policy of lifelong learning includes some positive aims, such as support of co-operation and networking between VET-institutions from different member states, to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications, the recognition of different learning paths, and the mobility of workers and apprentices. The European Union has agreed on an employment rate target for women and men of 75% for the 20–64 years age group by 2020: an ambitious commitment to the sustainability of Europe’s social model, welfare systems, economic growth and public finances.

Bridging the gap to the target will be not an easy task. The crisis has brought the employment rate down to 69%, and the unemployment rate up to 10%; assuming the labour market stabilizes in 2010–2011, achieving an employment rate of 75% by 2020 will require an average employment growth slightly above 1% per annum. With declining fertility rates, the EU working age population (15–64) will start shrinking as early as 2012; even with continuing immigrant flows. A skilled workforce is an essential asset to develop a competitive, sustainable and innovative economy in line with Europe 2020 goals. In times of budgetary constraints and unprecedented global competitive pressures, EU employment and skills policies that help shape the transition to a green, smart and innovative economy must be a matter of priority.

The EU can meet all these challenges and raise employment rates substantially, particularly for women and young and older workers, and only with resolute action focusing on four key priorities:

- **First**, better functioning labour markets. Structural, chronically high unemployment rates represent an unacceptable loss of human capital: they discourage workers and lead to premature withdrawal from the labour market and to social exclusion. Flexicurity policies are the best instrument to modernize labour markets: they must be revisited and adapted to the post-crisis context, in order to accelerate the pace of reform, reduce labour market segmentation, support gender equality and make transitions pay.

- **Second**, a more skilled workforce, capable of contributing and adjusting to technological change with new patterns of work organization. This is a considerable challenge, given the rapidly-changing skills needed, and the persistent skills mismatches in EU labour market. Investment in education and training systems, anticipation of skills needs, matching and guidance services are the fundamentals to raise productivity, competitiveness, economic growth and ultimately employment. The EU is committed to improving education levels by reducing school drop-outs to 10% or less, and by increasing completion of tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% in 2020. The potential of intra-EU mobility and of third-country migrant inflows is not fully utilized and insufficiently targeted to meet labour market needs, despite the substantial contribution of migrants to employment and growth.

- **Third**, better job quality and working conditions. There is no trade-off between quality and quantity of employment: high levels of job quality in the EU are associated equally high labour productivity and employment participation. Working conditions and workers’ physical and mental health need to be taken into account to address the demands of today’s working careers, which are characterized by more transitions between more intense and demanding jobs and by new forms of work organization.

- **Fourth**, stronger policies to promote job creation and demand for labour. It is not enough to ensure that people remain active and acquire the right skills to get a job: the recovery must be based on job-creating growth.
The right conditions to create more jobs must be put in place, including in companies operating with high skills and R&D intensive business models. Selective reductions of non-wage labour costs, or well-targeted employment subsidies, can be an incentive for employers to recruit the long-term unemployed and other workers drifting from the labour market. Policies to exploit key sources of job creation and to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment are also essential to increase employment rates.

This ‘Agenda for new skills and jobs’ flagship initiative sets out 13 key actions with accompanying and preparatory measures that include (relevant for the project):

1. To produce an EU skills Panorama to improve transparency for jobseekers, workers, companies and/or public institutions. The Panorama will be available online and contain updated forecasting of skills supply and labour market needs up to 2020. It will provide:

   – up-to-date information on the top 25 growth occupations in the EU, and on the top five ‘in demand’ occupations per Member State;
   – an analysis of skills requirements based on the European Vacancy Monitor;
   – an analysis of skills mismatches and use of skills in the workplace, through surveys of employers, learners and graduates;
   – foresight analysis at sector level, based on the work of the European Sector Councils’ on Skills and Employment; and
   – CEDEFOP and Member States’ projections. Where relevant the Panorama will report on skills needs in particularly important areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

2. To propose a Council Recommendation on the identification, recording and validation of competences gained outside of formal education and training, including in particular a European Skills Passport to help individuals record and present the skills acquired throughout their life.

Editorial: Recognising skills on EU level

Education, training and employability were recognised by the European Council in Lisbon March 2000 as an integral part of the economic and social policies needed to attain the strategic goal of Europe becoming the world’s most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. In the aftermath of setting this objective, the following policy documents were developed, covering the principles of learning throughout life as well as the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Available policy toolbox:

– European education and training systems priorities (March 2001)

– Detailed work programme adopted by Council (14 June 2002) calling for the development of ways to officially validate non-formal learning experiences.


– The Council Resolution on Lifelong learning (27 June 2002) inviting Member States to encourage cooperation and effective measures to validate learning outcomes.


– The Copenhagen Declaration (30 November 2002) and the Council Resolution (19 December 2002) on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

– The Council and Commission Joint Interim Report (26 February 2004) to the Spring Council ‘Education and
Training 2010’: development of common European references and principles, including principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

- To support the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong learning (September 2006).

- Council resolution on the new skills for new jobs (15 November 2007) invites Member States and the Commission to work towards equipping people for new jobs within the knowledge society with a forward-looking set of skills and competences.

- As a part of Europe 2020 Strategy, the ‘Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’ (November 2010).

- The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011–2020 (7 December 2010).


- Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, (5 September 2012)

**RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Today’s learning opportunities are limitless, borderless and instantaneous. Individuals learn and acquire new skills and competences not only in the traditional setting of the classroom (formal learning) but more and more outside of it. Important learning takes place at work, through participation in civil society organisations or in the virtual space provided by the internet and mobile devices, individually or with peers. Increasingly often, companies offer their workers training opportunities to upgrade their skills through organised, but non-formal, learning. Informal learning is also becoming increasingly important in a global and interconnected world where technology allows individuals to learn in a plethora of different ways through for example open educational resources and at a distance.

Engaging and empowering all learners with learning experiences is essential in order to cope with rapid economic and technological changes, more frequent job transitions throughout an individuals’ lifetime and pushing individuals to acquire higher and more relevant skills to increase employability, productivity and economic growth. In today’s situation of rising unemployment – particularly acute among young people – and lack of economic growth, making use of new learning opportunities outside the formal system and of the skills acquired through these is urgent: Europe needs to develop the right mix of skills and achieve a better match between skills and jobs to help boost competitiveness and prosperity.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences in the EU Member States makes an essential contribution to EU’s ambition to achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth set by the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**Its impact can be significant in the labour market functioning:** validation mechanisms allow for more transparency on the skills available in the workforce and facilitate a better match between skills and labour demand, promote better transferability of skills between companies and sectors, and facilitate mobility on the European labour market.

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4 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning COM(2012) 485 final
Given the urgent need to increase mobility of labour reducing shortages of skilled workforce, as well as for a better valuing of skills and competences acquired outside formal systems, the Commission has, in the Europe 2020 flagship ‘An agenda for New skills and Jobs’ and its recent initiatives on the Single Market Act and the Employment Package, announced the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning as a contribution at EU level. The Recommendation includes the following measures (relevant for the project):

**a** To ensure that by 2018 national systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been established providing the opportunity to all citizens to have their knowledge, skills and competences validated, irrespective of the contexts where the learning took place.

**b** National systems of validation of non-formal and informal learning should focus on the following four aspects of validation: the identification of learning outcomes, their documentation, their assessment against agreed standards and finally their certification.

**c** Provide individuals with the opportunity to undergo an audit of their skills and competences within three months of an identified need such as the perspective of unemployment or insecure forms of employment. For this purpose the use of the current and future Europass tools to facilitate the identification and documentation of learning outcomes should be promoted. The links between validation arrangements and credit systems such as ECTS and ECVET should be strengthened.

**d** Involve social partners and other relevant stakeholders, namely employer organisations, trade unions, chambers of commerce, industry and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers as well as civil society organisations in the development of the validation mechanisms and in documenting the learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
PART III

NON-FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY ACQUIRED COMPETENCES IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

AUTHOR
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RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES OF WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

PART III

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The project, ‘Promoting the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: Strengthening Individual Learning Pathways by Developing Skills Assessment Tools for Workers’, was aimed at identifying and safeguarding the competences acquired informally, either through work or in the private domain. To this end, the experiences of the international project partners were utilised in order to follow a viable path which was not dictated by time-consuming assessment centres, but which would lead to tangible outcomes for workers, notwithstanding the limited time available to the workers involved.

In numerous meetings, the international composition of the project proved that this topic is still lacking clear definitions. Some of the catchphrases included informal and non-formal competence, informal learning, practical knowledge, prior learning, soft skills, informal learning outcomes and many others.

Nevertheless, the project partners gained the following experiences with other target groups which can be regarded as intermediate results: Informal competences (potentials and resources) can neither be clearly identified nor measured correctly. It is not possible to develop a system which can objectively measure capabilities, skills, qualifications, knowledge and values by mathematical means. Basic competences described in the literature as personal, technical, methodical, and social and communicative abilities are, however, manageable. With this structure it is possible to analyse, document and provide evidence of these competences more easily in cooperation with those involved.

Although the European Council and Cedefop are pursuing the validation and assessment of informal competences within the formal system, our experiences indicate that an entirely differentiated course of action is required. We assume that the bodies which will later issue certifications at a national level must start their work at a level close to that of the workers’ practical knowledge. Moreover, it will not be possible to base certification solely on analysing deficiencies (“What is lacking that prevents you from entering this field of work?”). Often, these (purely) formal competences are less helpful for a job than in-
Criticism of the European Council recommendations

As the traditional school and vocational training system conveys formal competences of which only 30% are later used in the workplace, a return to the formal system appears to be the wrong approach. Informal competences can scarcely be validated by tests using different procedures, as the range of jobs and competences is far too diverse and varied.

Thus, the Council recommendations place far too much emphasis on the formal, school and vocational training system, a role it cannot fulfill due to the diversity of vocational activities in industry and trade. Consequently, mistakes made in the validation of formal competences within the framework of the EQF and the national QFs would be repeated.

However, for fairness sake it should be noted that the recommendations also acknowledge some approaches that would also make the necessary diversity a requirement for the validating bodies.

INFORMAL COMPETENCES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

As the traditional school and vocational training system conveys formal competences of which only 30% are later used in the workplace, a return to the formal system appears to be the wrong approach. Informal competences can scarcely be validated by tests using different procedures, as the range of jobs and competences is far too diverse and varied.

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INFORMAL COMPETENCES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

A short description of the fundamental idea and diversity of the working environment that the project, ‘Promoting the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: Strengthening Individual Learning Pathways by Developing Skills Assessment Tools for Workers’, was based on will serve to illustrate the scope of problems for validation. Promoting informal competences amongst workers with many years of work experience will become increasingly important in a European working environment which is set to face a foreseeable shortage of skilled workers in the future.

The problems might be minimised as far as possible if companies manage to retain their workforce and further develop it. This might even be the case in the world of work as unskilled workers in industry and trade acquire the necessary competences over the years, including as a result of informal learning-by-doing. It is to
be assumed at this juncture that the companies themselves will have a culture of recognition for informal competences in place. Things begin to get more difficult if informal competences are to be recognised and certified outside of the company.

The experiences gained through the project show that the target group of workers is extremely diverse and differentiated. Unskilled and low-skilled workers and first-times employees show similarities regarding informally and non-formally acquired competences. Those can be identified in standardised processes with interviews and a biographical approach. In this target group, this is also true for the competences acquired and enhanced in the private domain. Within this project, the Danish system described later in the text pursued this biographic approach in particular. (See also the description of the Danish system of recording competence with the biographic approach using different interview techniques.)

The speciality of the Danish system of competence identification is, however, its deliberate transfer into the formal vocational education system. It is used to identify the level of informal competences (a variety of competence areas which in other countries and circumstances can be seen as a single informal competence, attitude, soft skill or learning outcome) and is intended to facilitate the ‘integration’ into the formal vocational education system. To some extent, evidence of a deficit analysis is present which renders the transfer to the school and vocational training system logical.

In Europe, there are also many professions or professional occupations, i.e. jobs in industry, trade and administration. While low-skilled tasks are diverse, the vast range of jobs and occupations is far beyond any manageable dimension. However, even in this field more than 70 per cent of the necessary competences are the result of informal learning prior or during the job in question, or off-the-job.

We were unable to safeguard those informal competences for individual jobs or to comprehensively investigate informal competences that could be safeguarded in the interest of a single worker in any way possible and result in the documentation of informal competence suitable for Europass. This will be up to further projects, and will only be possible to realise via an internal company-specific competence-identification system for inter-company use. Larger companies, in particular, are interested in such a competence evaluation process as they try to provide an effective personnel development by comprehensively recording competences. The civil service is also interested in this option as they wish to strengthen personnel development with career advice. In Germany, the job centres also play a role in this area as they try to match jobseekers with available jobs through profiling.

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) in the Netherlands

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is the common name given to the process of the recognition of the competences an individual has gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning in various settings. This implies that competences acquired by learning on the job, in society or in voluntary work are in principle comparable to the competences acquired in formal education.

How does it work?

In general, a candidate wants to prove that he or she has the competences for a certain job. Therefore, an APL-procedure is focused on a certain qualification. The acquired competences, gained through informal and non-formal learning, are compared with the learning outcomes of a formal qualification.

A candidate has to collect the evidence that the acquired competences match the qualification. The candidate stores the evidence in a portfolio. Recognition means awarding certificates or diplomas of the proved competences against the learning outcomes of a qualification for vocational education or another standard relating to the labour market which employers and employees regard as relevant. External legitimacy is the key requirement for recognition.

As a result of the APL-procedure the candidate receives a certificate of proved experience. This certificate can be used for new job opportunities or accelerate formal learning programmes. But there is an important side-effect.
The APL-procedure itself leads to a reflection of strengths, weaknesses, talents and goals for the candidate. Therefore, competences not only include professional competences but social and personal competences as well, which can result in a career switch or a better understanding of the career path a candidate needs to follow.

However, as this was a limited project we were unable to scan a complete workforce for their potential in personnel development. It was feasible, though, to safeguard the informal competences of small groups with a known professional aim and to make an individual’s strengths visible.

The project partners operated on the scientific assumption that describing vocational competences is not so much about what an individual has learnt at school, university, university of applied sciences or during vocational training, i.e. during formal education, but about which competences an individual has acquired informally in his or her work life, social commitments, private life and even when starting a family. What is more, the skills that need substantiating in the form of non-formal learning in courses and training programmes could either not be certified as there was no evidence of their acquisition in the cases concerned, or they had been acquired through self-study or learning-by-doing. Most competence areas had to be analysed individually as it was not possible to apply a standardised procedure here.

Moreover, recording and demonstrating competences acquired externally as well as in the private domain (civil commitments, voluntary or political activities) is extremely difficult. This is why we concentrated on known competence areas, especially in union and special interest groups within companies.

POSSIBLE PROFILES OF REQUIREMENTS FOR RETIRED WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

In order to derive a manageable subset, the project had to concentrate on identifying the informal competences (or practical knowledge) of a small group of people. Therefore, we chose the subset of fulltime works council members for the pilot project (in Germany, those are about 100,000 individuals) which we assumed to be of interest for people active in politics and high-level union officials in European companies. Due to our experiences as the DGB Bildungswerk BUND we were able to get up close to the work of works council members and the necessary and acquired competences as well as their assumed career aspirations/fields of work and the possibilities and experiences available. Both areas area largely comparable so the specific competences can be recorded.

Another important reason was the fact that – derived from the competences and qualification requirements in the predefined areas of human resources management (HRM), health and safety management, public relations and education – it seemed feasible to compare the necessary and partly known competence requirements for a professional career change with the competences identified in the pilot project within a year.
"I AM CAPABLE OF MORE THAN MY CERTIFICATES INDICATE"

Other than knowledge, competences cannot be tested theoretically; they only become visible during practical application. This means that we can only access competences if the person concerned describes them based on experiences and we are able to document this. The goal is to document the outcomes so that the process can be repeated and will be generally accepted.

Our aim was not to achieve recognition as in a European credits system or classification in the formal system (10 per cent of the academic educational objectives completed) which would result in integration into a level of school or university training or another kind of formal further training which the person should then complete.

The political debate should give informal competences the same weight as formal competences. This objective is difficult to achieve, especially as it is contrary to the interests of education policy makers – European policy makers in particular. They still place the greatest emphasis on the integration of formal competences into the levels of school and university education, whether it is based on the credit system ECVET or the European Qualifications Framework, or whether the aim simply is to secure one’s own significance within the formal system.

We wanted to attain that goal for all workers, whether they are German workers employed in jobs totally different to those they originally trained for, university dropouts or migrants whose qualifications (even formal qualifications acquired in their home countries) were not recognised at all for a long time.

Also, given the extension of working life and the phenomenon of active retirement, the importance of informal competences and practical knowledge becomes increasingly obvious. The future prospects of members of works councils (the elected body representing the interests of a company’s staff) are, regardless of the reasons, rather limited, even more so when the person was a fulltime works council member. Regarding our method for safeguarding those informal competences, we asked ourselves: What job prospects do people have after the end of their five-year office term?

In our scenario, the imaginary works council members cannot or do not want to return to their original job. During their office term, in their unions, parties, private lives and families, the works council members informally and non-formally acquired competences that mean they are now much more suitable to a completely different job. They possess knowledge that can compete with the knowledge an expert might have acquired formally through studies. They have changed their social status, comparing themselves to other colleagues and striving to attain a different social status. Alternatively, they are forced to leave the company because they have fallen out of favour and have to seek a new direction in their lives.

Competence evaluation aims to:

1. Identify skills acquired informally and non-formally before the person became a works council member.
2. Identify, with our assistance competences/advantages/strengths acquired during the office term as a works council member.
3. Recording and documenting them.
4. 'Translating' them in order to align them to a notional field of work, e.g. HRM, disability management, labour lawyer etc., and make them comparable.
Tasks
The P&O adviser:
- is responsible for personnel and organisation policy (P&O)
- advises management on leading and developing employees
- gives advice and support when hiring and laying-off employees
- gives advice on employee meetings, performance reviews, continuous and further training and remuneration
- administers personnel data and information and compiles reports thereon

Internal cooperation: executive board, management, employees, payroll administration, finance department, labour law experts (in large organisations)

External cooperation: company doctor, external consultants, providers of continuous and further training, training supervisors, trainers, job centre.

Position within the organisation
The P&O often works in a supporting role as part of the staff function. In some companies P&Os are part of the line divisions.

Competences
- Integrity
- Sensitivity
- Organisational awareness
- Advising (including motivating and convincing)
- Analytical approach
- Handling diversity

Tasks
Trainers for in-house training organise training programmes for groups, employees and leaders. Training sessions are often carried out in times of organisational change. Trainers help the personnel to deal with them. Apart from that, there also are organisations in which training programmes are a set part of corporate culture. Many training programmes aim at improving skills and knowledge that are not tied to a certain job. Topics for these internal training sessions include personal effectiveness, conflict resolution, team building, management and leadership. Sometimes, clients seek advice on which training programmes they need.

Roles of trainers:
- Speaker – providing theoretical knowledge
- Leadership
- Organiser, Coach
- Adviser
- Salesperson
- Developer

Position within the organisation
Large training providers have specific departments. The most important task is to carry out training sessions, but often there are individual departments for product development and innovation and a department that focuses on commercial activities.

Competences
- Didactical and communication skills
- Teaching theoretical knowledge in a structured and well-arranged way
- Listening, be alert
- Enthusiasm, charisma
- Analytical thinking
COMPETENCES AND OPTIONS OF A LONG-TERM WORKS COUNCIL MEMBER

1. **Organisation management:**
   Establishing organisational structures inside and outside the company, e.g. in quality management, temporary company activities, gathering staff proposals for improvements in the company, internal accident prevention, monitoring internal structural measures.

2. **Event management:**
   Developing, planning, organising and conducting conferences, qualifications, trade fairs, staff events etc., putting together teams for and hosting events, documentation, evaluation, public and media relations.

3. **Knowledge/qualifications management**
   Recording qualification and further training requirements, organising further training and qualification programmes, carrying out the internal process for proposing improvements, developing internal instructional programmes, co-developing and coordinating internal and external networks.

4. **Disability management**
   Supporting and organising those directly involved in internal integration management, developing and supporting internal health and safety management, adviser in the area of health promotion and prevention, maintaining the ties to professional and trade organisations and health insurance companies, employer’s representatives on administrative boards of health insurance companies, internal counselling on addictions, internal social work, conflict counselling, mediation.

The experiences with our competence assessment procedure indicate that the starting point of any validation of informal knowledge has to be the individual’s specific practical knowledge about a task; moreover, it has to take into account the competences of the prospective job or occupation.
This can only be accomplished by those bodies that work in close cooperation with the prospective fields of work and are able to assess which informal competences the individual might have acquired; a formal education system that lacks practical experience and focuses on testing theoretical knowledge is not capable of fulfilling this task.

**Assumed informal competences of a full-time works council member or shop steward**

- Basic leadership competences
- Inclusive style of leadership
- Leading the works council without the right to give instructions
- Cognitive abilities, ability to handle conflicts, communication skills
- Chairing works council meetings
- External representation of the works council, first point-of-contact for everyone who wants to contact the council
- Accepts responsibility for external representation
- Good general knowledge about the company
- Contact for the staff
- Excellent knowledge on production procedures, necessary qualifications/competences
- Co-management skills
- Able to work in a team
- Integration of members
- Able to delegate tasks
- Analytical thinking
- Able to acquaint oneself with new topics
- Legal/social knowledge
- Able to work to tight deadlines
- Able to reflect upon themselves and the team (ability to handle criticism)
- Able to motivate other works council members
- Able to organise the work of the works council, plan internal workflows, delegate, accept responsibility for completing upcoming tasks reliably
- Able to build the works council team, conflict resolution skills
- Information and communication (works council, other institutions of the German Works Council Constitution Act, staff, general management, unions)

- Rhetorical skills
- Reliable negotiation skills
- Information and communications skills
- Able to chair and host works council meetings and lead discussions during those meetings
- Able to conduct negotiations
- Change management
- Self-confident manner in discussions/negotiations with the employer in public forums (e.g. presentation of the annual report at the works meeting)
- Redundancy programmes, co-determination regarding job organisation/personnel
- Securing jobs, work hours and terminations, ability to understand the facts and knowledge in conducting negotiations

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PART IV

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NATIONAL EXAMPLES: SWEDEN, DENMARK, THE NETHERLANDS

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The Netherlands: based on the CEDEFOP Report developed by Ruud Duvekot
ABF’S PROJECT ‘VALIDATION OF INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN ORGANIZATIONS OF THE DISABLED’

In 2007 ABF started the project ‘Validation of informal and non-formal learning in organizations of the disabled’. The aim of the project was to find methods and tools to validate the skills of association members who had various types of assignments in the voluntary sector, more specifically, elected officials within the disability movement.

The start of the groups was similar to the start of a study circle, where participants begin to establish themselves and describe their expectations for their participation. It could be to document their commitment in the organization, get an idea of what you’ve been through, but also to show that there is expertise within the disability movement. The fact that this was a pilot project was known and those who decided to take part in it were aware that it was new and they would be involved in the development of the method.

The next step was to talk about what learning could be. The starting point was the participants’ own knowledge and experience of the subject and the goal of these talks and the displayed data was to get the participants curious and start exploring their own learning and to become more aware of how it can come about and thus able to begin their validation process. One participant expressed that she had had a Eureka moment when they talked about how and where we learn different things. She had always been curious, and now it became clearer to her. During this session, we also dealt with the concepts of knowledge, skills and lifelong learning as such, in order to have a mutual understanding and a common vision of them. Regarding the concept of compe-

GENERAL BACKGROUND

People are constantly active in various events and situations in everyday life that gives the opportunity for learning. Sometimes we are focused on learning and sometimes we are learning without being particularly aware of it. In non-formal and informal learning it is assumed that people carry with them knowledge and experience to various activities, such as in the voluntary sector and study contexts. The ‘study circle’ is a pedagogical form for non-formal and informal learning and in each study circle the participants’ experience and knowledge is the starting point for further learning.

Participating in non-formal and informal learning people use their experience and become aware of their skills and thus grasp the opportunities for continued learning and development.

Validation is a way for people to visualize for themselves and the world what he/she has learnt and how his/her knowledge has unfolded.

One of the most important non-formal and informal learning purposes is to exploit human capital and allow people to develop so that they can form their own opinion and by that affect their lives and the society they live in. The overall aim for non-formal and informal learning of today, in the perspective of ABF, is that it should be ‘free and voluntary’.

Non-formal and informal learning should be free from control of content, free from public authorities’ control or from commercial providers. This approach promotes the individual’s ability to seek knowledge from its own experience, without being limited by requirements for performance that can lead to exclusion.
tence, which we would deal with much in the future, there was a pretty clear understanding that it was about how one could to carry out tasks, simply knowing what you do.

The assignment of ABF was to investigate whether it could develop methods and tools to implement validation in the disability movement. Pretty soon after the start of the groups was the Swedish Validation Agency’s report ‘Concepts for the Validation of general competencies in liberal adult education and informal learning’ published. ABF decided to include the findings in the report into the project, which meant that it changed track somewhat from being a very open project to be concentrating more on the content of the report. It was a good decision, given the consensus that existed among the liberal education representatives at the seminar after the report was presented.

WORKING METHODS IN THE GROUPS

ABF started three groups of participants who were elected officials in their organizations. Participants had two roles in the project, as well as team member in order to validate their elected official experience and as participants in the project’s progress and documentation. Through their efforts to solve problems, share their lives and their willingness to talk about the issues that came up during the work the participants made a very important contribution to the project.

ABF as process leader had prepared for a similar introduction in the respective groups. They began talking about their own learning experiences, what it consisted of, how it was expressed and where you learned. The participants thought it was interesting to talk about learning and that it opened their minds both about what and where they learn things.

The participants of the groups met roughly every two weeks, 3–4 hours each time. Dialogue was the main methodological tool in the discussion about the materials that participants brought with them. Because between sessions participants had homework which usually was about to search for evidence of their learning experiences and write various texts. During the validation process the participants were supposed to write a lot. The process leaders were uncertain for how the task would be perceived and whether it eventually could scare off participants.

ABF was also aware of that there could be participants with reading- and writing problems in the groups. That was also the case but the process leaders decided that they should try it out themselves and with much support from the process leaders the participant managed to pursue the project. From the very start it was understood that the participants were supposed to write their own texts and share them and read others’ texts. ABF thought it was important to be clear about that part of the work. The participants produced very different amounts of text and during the group sessions ABF realized how important the writing process was and what it also meant to the participants. The writing process is not just text on paper, but it is a process that includes many different parts and can be both difficult and laborious. One participant argued that writing is a phase in her development and she also describes how hard it was to write the word I, which we also found out that many participants were having great problems with.

ABF began the validation process talking about learning and how you learn. Then they went ahead and let the participants identify what they’ve done over the years as elected officials. What people had done was the basis for further work into the content to study the knowledge and skills developed. The starting point in the search for competence was the report ‘Concepts for the Validation of general competencies in liberal adult education and informal learning’. ABF selected key words for the different competence areas, which formed the basis for the exploration work that the participant did when they examined their activities and assignments. The key words were not presented for the participants to measure whether they have met them, or how much they have fulfilled them.

ABF did not intend to compare the participants’ different content in text, and see who had the most or the best, but each participant’s description was unique. The goal of this process was that the participant should be able to realize what he/she had done, and how it happened in order to describe their own skills. A task or assignment must not contain a certain amount of knowledge to be accepted but our attitude at all times is to seriously relate to the actual knowledge that the participant describes and that is what is important. Of course the different participants’ knowledge varies. The main goal is that participants detect it and put words to their development, get their papers straight, and be aware that learning can take place in as non-
formal and informal learning. ABF did not restrict the participant by telling what kind of knowledge was looking for. One must bear in mind that by developing a number of keywords you risk to control the participant’s search for their knowledge. ABF’s focus is the participants and their free and voluntary search for knowledge / change.

In its work was ABF mainly focused on using the generic skills areas outlined in the report 'Concepts for the Validation of general competencies in liberal adult education and informal learning'. The areas were as such given, even if ABF could develop the content of their respective sectors. To make space for the skills the participant has developed in connection with voluntary organization he/she was involved in, ABF added a new area-specific skills. It may include specific knowledge and experience from a disability-, trade union-, political-, environmental-, or immigrant organization. The specific skills can of course be renamed in compliance with the contents.

A VALIDATION MODEL – STEP BY STEP

STEP 1 / IDENTIFICATION OF EVENTS

In the first part of the validation process you create an overview map. The participants begin by searching for information about what they have been doing in the associations and then compiled into one association list of merits, kind of a CV. Writing a CV is an important step in the validation process. The list brings clarity and constitutes a concise picture of the participant’s assignments and activities, where they have been carried out and during what time periods. It is a document that is changing as new assignments are added and the document can effectively stand-alone and used as a presentation of the ‘participants life’ in the organizations. The information in the list of merits – CV – is to be used later in the validation process.

COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS

In the beginning it is about remembering what you have been doing and sometimes also traces activities that happened way back in time. The participants are now beginning the process of gathering information and evidence to prepare the list of merits. The first step is to locate the various documents that show what the participant was assigned to and what kind of activities the participant executed. There may be certificates, diplomas and awards from various courses, study circles and assignments from their activities.

STEP 2 / DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS AND TASKS

In the next step of the validation process the participants will work through the association list of merits using it to identify various organizational activities in their context and describe the role the participant played or assignments the participant had. It is a hands-on work where the participant analyzes each item on the list of merits, reflects, describes in words and then submitting it the group to view and discuss these materials. The significant stages reflecting, describing and the feedback from the group gives the participant additional impulses to further analyze and formulate a basis for a validation certificate.
RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES OF WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

PART IV

CONSIDER

The participants shall now go through each event that is described in the list of merits. The first step is to think about whom the activity is intended for, what it was all about and where it took place. In other words, give the task a context. When the task is contextualized the next step is to think through the task again, but now with a focus the role the participant had in just the given context. The participant shall, among other things think about what he did, what that it led to and how it was expressed. This step is based on documents at hand, the memory and how participants themselves understand their different efforts. During these steps, it is important to take notes, write down words of support, or using e.g. a mind map.

DESCRIBE

Each item on the list of merits is described in a summary form of writing, like a note or a text for an annual activity report. Participants tell in their own words and try to include as much as possible of the important facts concerning the events and tasks. At this stage the aim is to make visible what had happened, how it happened and participants’ involvement. One way to highlight this is to write it down. These texts are not complete, but should be regarded as a draft, or ‘working text’ which is designed to provide participants and group process leaders the opportunity to talk about the content.

It is important to include the group in these talks who are then able to provide feedback on the content including asking questions. The talks in the group, when participants report back to each other, give all the opportunity to get more ideas about what they’ve done and participated in. This is an important element and part of the validation process that could lead to a certificate.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

When the participants begin their work to explore their experiences in the voluntary sector it is partly based on documents describing what he/she participated in or was assigned to. But for the most part, however, the participant’s own opinion of what he/she did that can be described as learning governs the content of the texts. In this context, it means that the participant makes an assessment of what he/she experiences and knows what he/she can do. In connection with this step of the work, participants also need to assess the experience and knowledge that is important to explore. At this stage it is talks in the group and with the process leaders of great help and support to make important information visible.

Self-assessments becomes a tool all through the entire process, both to discover what is important and interesting information in the context and how the participants want and can describe their learning and their skills. We don’t see self-assessment as an individual tool that the participant can utilize, for example in the form of scales or forms in which the participant answers a few questions. In our work we start with the experience that the participant presents and the notion that he understands that.

Since we are not comparing participant’s knowledge and experience to scores, a job description or given criteria for a special assignment as e.g. for an elected representative we must rely on the participant’s view and what we can display during the entire validation process. Naturally we want the quality of the participants’ information states should be as close to reality as possible, no more no less. The method we utilized is group dialogue to get as accurate a picture as possible. It is also the process leader’s role to highlight participants who you can imagine underestimates their skills, but also to pay attention to when participants are not focused on their real knowledge and how it is expressed.

STEP 3 / ANALYSIS: SELF-ASSESSMENT – KNOWLEDGE

In the next part of the validation process participants begin to analyse their material/texts which they wrote previously. It is by examining the texts, using the tools presented here, talk to the group process leaders and the participants in a structured way they can highlight their skills and competencies.

The participant has to relate to different ways of scrutinizing their knowledge from the general knowledge that one develops through participation in association activities and a more specific knowledge depending on the type of association you belong to and what one chooses to participate in. To give visibility to the general knowledge we worked on the basis of the content of
the report ‘Concepts for the Validation of general competencies in liberal adult education and informal learning’ which presented seven key competences to describe the overall skill.

SELF-ESTIMATE

The basis for next steps are texts from the previous section and in particular the texts dealing with the participant’s role and mandate in the way the participant has understood and presented them. In this analytic work the participant together with the process leader and the group works with what he has written and penetrates deeper into the content. It is through conversation, asking questions and an observant process leader that the contents are processed and sometimes challenged. It is also the process leader’s role to read between the lines and discover the knowledge that both is concealed and descriptions that are more about how things should be, than how they really are. It’s about to have a starting point in the present, but also taking advantage of what the participant already knows from the past.

ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE

The outcome of this step is a description of different types of knowledge that each one can develop by having assignments and tasks in the voluntary sector and associations. ABF call it in this context acquired knowledge.

By working with words and concepts and carefully ‘weighing, measuring and evaluating’ them the meaning of what you have done and are doing in the voluntary sector becomes clearer. What does it mean when you say...? What are the implications? When a participant is looking into what he precisely meant when he used the word planning it is also an analysis of what he just did and how it happened. In our work of validation we do not test the participants, but that doesn’t mean we take a short cut and are content with superficial descriptions. This enables the participant to really explore and describe his development. The point is not to know if you are right in the eyes of others, but what you been through and how you are able to express your experiences.

The finalisation of this step consists of the participant beginning to write on a draft of a certificate. The starting point is the titles, key competences, chosen by the participant to focus on in terms of generic- and specific knowledge. Under each heading the participant has arranged words and concepts which will now be used to start a new text that will describe the participant’s knowledge and competence in the areas such as democratic skills and knowledge on rights laws. Now it becomes important to offer a manifold description as possible of the participant’s skills in order for the recipient to get an accurate picture of the information. There will be a challenging job especially for the participant, but also for the process leaders to help with this step. The group’s response is equally important because they have been part of the process to recognize the descriptions that emerge.

STEP 4 / VALIDATION CERTIFICATES

In the final step of the validation process the final text of the validation certificate is formulated, which is then signed by the participant and the process leader. It is important that the participant considers how the certificate should be expressed so that he/she can take responsibility for the certificate. The participants’ benefits with writing their own certificate are that they must explore their knowledge, be aware of their skills and have a language for them.

It is a laborious process in which the group and the process leader will provide important support functions. It is always a participant who ‘owns’ the certificate and that ultimately determine what texts it should contain. With his signature the participant guarantees that the given information is accurate and is also responsible for the content.

In liberal adult education we assume that all participants possess the experience and knowledge and that the participants are responsible for their own learning process and by that we mean that the learning process cannot be steered by others or curriculums. It is equally important that the validation doesn’t have a ‘hidden curriculum’ that takes over from the participant, but allows the participant to provide with the text content of the certificate from his/her perspectives. Process leaders, however, are responsible for implementing the process and that the participant gets the support that is needed to fulfil their when working with their recognition of prior learning. The participant is also responsible for its participation in the group, while the process leader is in charge of facilitating the group’s operations.
RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES OF WORKERS’ REPRESENTATIVES

PART IV

WRITING THE CERTIFICATE

Everyone formulates their own certificate based on all steps in the model which is carried out in a group learning process under the facilitation of process leaders. All participants will present their draft to the group and get feedback on the textual contents. Still though the certificate is content focused and it is all about to come up with a content which as far as possible describe the participant’s knowledge, competences and skills in the most comprehensive manner possible. It’s about to describe not only what and when, but how and what the association work has resulted on the participant’s behalf. In what way knowledge is expressed. Did the participant find out a way to work with association activities based on that he knows why he is doing it or just that it happens to be so. Can the participant describe the development that has occurred is connected to the participant being active throughout the validation process?

The certificates don’t objectively show what a participant is able to do or knows, but it rests on the idea that the participant does a so-called self-assessment and the collaborative learning process that takes place in the group. What we do in the self-assessment process is to thoroughly explore and see what it contains and how it can be presented in a proper manner. We do not control the participant through e.g. tests, but it is through the talks/dialogue in the group including the process leader along with analysis and text processing the certificate’s contents is shaped.

SIGNS

The participant signs the certificate and by the signature verifies the contents. The process leader signs the certificate and confirms that the validation process has been carried out in accordance with the validation model.

In the validation process the participant and the process leaders equally share the responsibility all the way through. This sharing of responsibility also applies to all participants in the group. They are equal adults but with different experiences, roles, assignment and in the group.

The question will others regards the fact that the participant themselves signs their certificates as something you can rely on or not. If others can see the certificate as result of a process that the participant has participated in for a long time and where the written certificate is the visible part of the participant’s self-awareness process and he himself can explain it in a conversation. Then it will be appreciated. But if others expect that the certificate is some kind of proof or equivalent with grades of what the participant knows it will probably not be appreciated.

DENMARK

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYSTEM FOR RECOGNITION OF VOCATIONAL (PROFESSIONAL) QUALIFICATION ACQUIRED ABROAD

When a foreign worker wants to pursue a regulated profession he or she must obtain authorization from the competent Danish authority, i.e. the emigrants must have their qualifications recognized by the authority responsible for the profession before they can start work.

However, if they only intend to work on a temporary and occasional basis in Denmark and come from an EU/EEA country, a different and usually faster procedure applies. The emigrant- or foreign worker is covered by the EU rules if they can meet the following two conditions:

1. Is a citizen of an EU country, Iceland, Norway or Liechtenstein and
2. Is fully qualified in one of the above-mentioned countries to practice the same profession as the emigrant now wish to practice in Denmark.

If they apply for authorization under EU rules, they are entitled to receive a decision from the competent authority within three
months of submitting all of the required documentation. In some cases, this deadline may be extended by one month. If they only want to work in Denmark on a temporary and occasional basis (as a service provider), the EU rules stipulate that they do not have to apply for authorization from the competent authority. In many cases, however, they will need to send a written declaration to the authority before starting work. In certain professions, they must also wait for approval from the authority.

If the profession is not regulated, they are free to seek employment. When applying for a job etc., it may be useful to get an assessment of their qualification from the Danish Agency for International Education.

COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT

Competences, the emigrant- or foreign worker has gained from work experience; non-formal and informal learning can be assessed and recognized. This may also be helpful if they are unable to provide documentation of their qualifications.

If they have competences that are not documented they may be able to have it assessed and recognized, in particular within the Danish Adult Education System. A number of education programmes offer the possibility of an individual competence assessment. The emigrant workers can have their prior learning experiences validated in relation to adult education and continuing training.

Depending on their competences, they may be able to get access to an education programme, exemption from parts of the programme itself or even a competence certificate or diploma to recognize either a completed programme or completed modules of the programme. The individual competence assessment is offered in the context of:

- Diploma programmes (continuing professional education at bachelor level)
- Higher education programmes for adults (VVU)
- Basic Adult Education (GVU), i.e. vocational education and training
- General adult education (AVU) and general upper secondary education subjects.

CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING AN ASSESSMENT FROM THE DANISH AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The Danish Agency for International Education can only assess a foreign qualification when certain conditions are fulfilled:

- The qualification must be completed.
- The qualification must belong to the formal education system of a country other than Denmark.
- The qualification must be issued by a publicly recognized educational institution or authority. This means, among other things, that the Agency cannot assess short courses or qualifications not corresponding to a level within the formal education system.
- Furthermore, the applicant must meet the Agency’s requirements for application form, documentation and translation.

LEVEL IN THE DANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

The assessment indicates the level to which the foreign qualification corresponds in the Danish education system, for example:

- Higher education: Academy Profession degree – short-cycle professional higher education), Professional bachelor’s degree (medium-cycle professional higher education), Bachelor’s, Candidates (Master’s) or PhD degree (long-cycle higher education). If the level of the foreign qualification does not correspond fully to a particular level in the Danish education system, the assessment may express the level in terms of a certain number of years of a Danish programme of education.

FIELD OF EDUCATION

As far as possible, the assessment also indicates the field of education to which the qualification assessed belongs in the Danish education system. In some cases, the qualification is compared to a specific Danish qualification. If no corresponding
Danish qualification exists, the assessment normally mentions a broader field of study such as the field of social science.

**WHAT IS THE ASSESSMENT BASED ON?**

The basis for the assessment includes, in particular, the entry requirements, nominal length, aims, subject combination and structure of the programme as well as the relationship between theory and practice in the programme. The Danish Agency for International Education may take into consideration any previous assessment of the qualification or assessments of similar qualifications by other countries. The assessment only assess qualifications gained through education and training. It does not assess competencies acquired through professional experience, short courses, non-formal education, life experience etc. The qualifications to which the assessment applies are listed in the assessment letter.

**HOW TO USE THE ASSESSMENT LETTER**

The assessment letter can be used when applying for a job, for admission to a study programme or for membership of an unemployment fund. It can also help clarify education and job opportunities in Denmark.

**ADMISSION TO FURTHER STUDY OR TRAINING**

The individual educational institution decides on the admission of applicants to its programmes. However, the level of education indicated by the Danish Agency for International Education is binding on the educational institution when it decides whether the applicant satisfies the general entry requirements. This means that the application for admission must be treated on an equal footing with applications from Danish qualification holders at the same level of education as that stated in the assessment. In addition, specific admission requirements may apply to the study programme in question, e.g. requirements concerning marks (grades). Such requirements apply to applicants with Danish and foreign qualifications alike.

**CREDIT TRANSFER**

If the applicant have already studied a subject abroad, they can apply for credit transfer to replace parts of a Danish programme, provided that they have applied for admission, been admitted to or are enrolled on that programme. The educational institution decides whether they are entitled to credit transfer. An assessment by the Danish Agency for International Education can only be used as guidance. An applicant disagreeing with the decision on credit transfer concerning foreign qualifications or study periods may file a complaint with the 'Qualifications Board'.
Admission to GVU requires that the applicant is at least 25 years old, has a minimum of 2 years of relevant work experience and hold a qualification in relevant subjects at least equivalent to a Danish lower-secondary school-leaving examination.

GVU offers an initial assessment of competences, typically including practical exercises, and on this basis, a personal plan for supplementary education and training is drawn up. Registration takes place by contacting a school offering the programme in question.

FINANCIAL

Low skilled and skilled participants are entitled to a fixed allowance financed by the state, the State Grant System for Adult Training (VEU-godtgørelse) corresponding to the level of maximum unemployment benefit rate. Companies paying regular wages to employees participating in adult vocational training programmes are entitled to receiving the grant instead. Expenditures for the allowances are covered by employer’s en bloc (AER arbejdsgiverenes Elevrefusion). Expenditures for participation by unemployed after their first term of unemployment are covered by the job centers/local authorities (payment commitment).

ALTERNATIVE ROADS INTO VET

If the applicants have work experience, they may want to get an assessment and take supplementary courses through the Basic Adult Education (Grundlæggende Voksenuddannelse, GVU). Admission to GVU requires that the applicant is at least 25 years old, has a minimum of 2 years of relevant work experience and hold a qualification in relevant subjects at least equivalent to a Danish lower-secondary school-leaving examination.

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PART IV
4 /

THE NETHERLANDS

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK, SYSTEM OR POLICY ON VALIDATION

With the publication of De Fles is Half Vol! (‘The glass is half full!’) in 2000, a first step towards lifelong learning using the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL; EVC or Erkenning van Verworven Competenties in Dutch) was taken in the Netherlands. A national working group on EVC formulated a broad vision on EVC and the implementation process. EVC had to bridge the gap between the education supply and the demand on the labour market side. The challenge was to connect these two worlds via the learner, on the one hand by converting learning experiences into certificates or diplomas, and on the other by allowing for the development of competences in a career context (Werkgroep EVC 2000).

To support this application of EVC and to learn from the existing practice, the government established the Kenniscentrum EVC (Knowledge Centre on Accreditation of Prior Learning) in 2001. The goal of this Kenniscentrum is to, on the basis of collecting practical examples, promote the use of EVC in the labour market and take EVC to a higher qualitative level. It became clear that there were many situations in which EVC could be used, but did not automatically lead to the desired effects (Duvekot, 2002; Verhaar, 2002; Van den Dungen, et al., 2003). Factors and circumstances that could have a negative impact include more restrictive legislation or regulations, fear of change, system failures, general conservatism or a too short-sighted view of the return on investment. On the other hand, the positive effects of EVC were seen mainly at the sector level.

Over the years 2005–2010, the Dutch government invested nearly € 100 million in lifelong learning including EVC at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels, in developing a regional infrastructure for learning and working and in promoting EVC (Ervaringscertificaat). This policy was put forward in the working plan for 2005–2007, Strengthening Learning and Working. The ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Agriculture and Nature Management, and of Economic Affairs, were all involved.

In the implementation strategy, management and practice come together. At management level educational institutions were encouraged to implement EVC institution-wide. They signed agreements with the government to carry out a certain number of EVC procedures within one or two years and to guarantee a minimum quality standard of these procedures. Practices already in use for some years were disseminated and the quality-issue of the procedures was addressed by developing a national quality-code on EVC.

NATIONAL SYSTEM

A national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Dutch society was until 2006 focused on strengthening bottom-up usage of EVC. Government and social partners focused on creating favorable circumstances for developing and implementing EVC in as many contexts as possible: in work, in voluntary work, in reintegration and job seeking, in education and training. This approach of ‘role modeling by offering good practices’ was managed by the Kenniscentrum EVC and focused on the change of the learning culture in general. (Duvekot 2005). From 2006 this approach changed into a focus on quality-assurance to increase the accessibility, transparency and to guarantee the summative effects by means of certification or qualification.

The Kenniscentrum EVC in the Netherlands consists of two specific instruments:

1. The ‘Ervaringscertificaat’. This is the formal procedure in which a candidate can get accreditation of his/her learning outcomes. It is a summative approach; a portfolio is referred to a specific national qualification standard and the accreditation consists of a number of credits that can be cashed in at a qualifying institute or school. The portfolio therefore is a dossier-portfolio or a showcase of the relevant learning outcomes to be referred to at least one specific standard. This form can be called Accreditation of Prior Learning (EVC).
The diversity of the application and implementation of EVC in practice in partnerships between organizations/companies and training or educational institutions (VET/HE) is directly linked to the tasks and responsibilities of individual users.

There are a number of basic principles underlying EVC:

- EVC recognizes the fact that learning on the job or via other non-formal learning situations (learning through practical experience) can in principle deliver the same (professional) competencies as learning within formal (classroom-based) situations.
- Recognition means awarding certificates or diplomas on the basis of a generally recognized standard, such as the qualification structure for professional education. Obviously there are also other standards relating to the labour market which employers and employees regard as relevant. External legitimacy is the key requirement for recognition.
- Recognition also means valuing competences acquired outside the working environment and/or used in other environments (such as voluntary work, private life).
- EVC is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within and between companies. It is an important means for realizing permanent Labour market suitability, deployment potential and can also lead to horizontal, vertical, inter-sector and intra-sector mobility or for developing a regional APL-infrastructure (regional one-stop-offices).
- Rational investment in training by companies and by society as a whole assumes an understanding of existing skills and qualifications, or the stock of skills and qualifications in the company, respectively. EVC procedures enable identifying existing skills and qualifications in order to be able to come to determine the investments needed in training creating more awareness for learning possibilities in informal and non-formal situations and a more work-based learning culture.

2. The ‘Ervaringsprofiel’. This procedure sets up a generic, personal portfolio. It was developed in the context of the economic crisis. It is formative approach aimed at validation of all the generic competences of a candidate. It advises on the possible opportunities for accreditation or personal development steps. It also points out what to do when a specific qualification or diploma is at stake. This form can be called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL or in Dutch the informal HVC or Herkennen van Verworven Competenties).

NATIONAL POLICY

With the change of focus to the quality-assurance of EVC in 2006, the Dutch government started to stimulate and subsidize the development of a national infrastructure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For this reason the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working (PLW) was set up. The aim is (still) to boost adult learning in combination with work, without focusing specifically on one or more key skills, but rather on programmes combining work and study that lead to a qualification and better opportunities in the job market. The Ervaringscertificaat is used to assess and recognize prior learning competences.

The key element of the PLW approach is the development of regional partnerships (local government, educational institutions and the business community) to build a sustainable infrastructure for lifelong learning in the region. The parties to these partnerships recognize that it is in their own interests to work together to ensure that at a regional level the working population and job seekers develop competences to meet the needs of the labour market. There are currently 47 such partnerships. On a sectoral level there are seven partnerships. There is also one national initiative called ‘In Bedrijf’ (‘In Company’) which is run by the Public Employment Service (UWV WERKbedrijf), 121 municipalities and the 55 reintegration firms (‘In bedrijf’).

ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The main process-steps of EVC (especially in the Ervaringscertificaat) and the different tasks and responsibilities are described and reviewed in the following sections of this report. The diversity of the application and implementation of EVC in practice in partnerships between organizations/companies and training or educational institutions (VET/HE) is directly linked to the tasks and responsibilities of individual users.
For people already in employment, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, EVC acts as a reliable yardstick for determining which skills and qualifications the individual employee already has. Based on this inventory, a tailor-made training or development path can be formulated.

APL is related to formal standards by the use of the same required learning outcomes. Hence, the beneficiary is not obliged to continue his/her development in a formal learning programme. The beneficiary can stop after receiving the Certificate of Experience.

APL procedures enable the visualization of the profitability of training by expressing the results of training efforts in terms of a general standard. As when calculating the value of other economic production factors, the identification of the value of skills and qualifications assumes a common and reliable standard in which this value is expressed.

The provision of flexible or customized training courses assumes that we can gauge a person’s existing skills level. EVC can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.

The EVC assessment is designed to assess professional and/or societal activities. The assessment results provide valuable feedback on the content and methods of the formal learning paths. The training courses are given direct information about the degree to which they succeed in adequately preparing their students for professional practice. This effect is strengthened by the fact that a distinction is made between training and assessment.

The actual EVC procedure in the Netherlands always contains the same five steps:

1. Information and advice for the candidate, the employer or other organization, etc.;
2. Intake of the individual and making individual arrangements. The candidate makes the decision to start the EVC procedure or not;
3. Recognition of competences: portfolio (supported by the coach);
4. Validation of competences: assessment (by the assessors);
5. EVC report (Ervaringscertificaat): Description of results and accreditation (by the assessor).

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EVC procedure

**QUICKSCAN AND ADVICE**  
**APPLICATION, ARRANGEMENTS**  
**EVC TOOL: RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCES**  
**ASSESSMENT**  
**EVC REPORT: ERVARINGS-CERTIFICAAT**  
**OPTION: SHORTENED TRAINING**

**START**  
**4 weeks**  
**7 weeks**  
**9–10 weeks**

Source infographic: [www.evc-centrum-nederland.nl](http://www.evc-centrum-nederland.nl)
INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

AWARENESS-RAISING AND RECRUITMENT

Raising awareness of the necessity and opportunities of lifelong learning for individuals in any given context is at the heart of the process of Valuing Learning. Without this, learning will remain school- or company-led and cannot effectively be based on individuals’ motivations and ambitions.

The project unit Learning and Working has subsidized regional partnerships to promote the use of APL. As part of these regional partnerships regional learning and working offices were set up. The aim is that any individual can enter these regional learning and working desks to obtain guidance on their own development process. Companies are offered tailor-made solutions to human resource issues and all regional partners play a part in the implementation of the offices.

It is a big step forward that all local partners in education and the labour market are working together more and attuning their procedures.

The project unit Learning and Working has also invested in a campaign to promote the Ervaringscertificaat among individuals and employers.

Social partners play an important role in the awareness-raising of employers and employees through Collective Labour Agreements and Training and Development Funds.

PROVISION OF GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

After learning targets have been set, the portfolio is designed and filled in; its content is assessed and advice is added on possible qualification and career opportunities; it is subsequently enriched by made-to-measure learning and finally the starting point of a new process in which new learning targets can be formulated. The portfolio is on the one hand both the starting as well as the end point of the individual learning process. On the other hand any end point is again the starting point of a new learning process. This is called the ‘portfolio-loop’.

Guidance of candidates for an EVC-procedure is essential to EVC as a process. In Phase III especially, self-assessment is the crucial element because without this a person can only partially become co-designer of his/her personal development. Guidance in this phase is offered in many ways: through personal advice, digital self-scans or guided training in which people are guided through their life experiences and therewith their learning outcomes or prior learning achievements.

There are different instruments available in the Netherlands for this kind of guided self assessment, for instance the Swiss CH-Q instrument. (CH-Q = Schweizer Qualifikationsbuch; Schuur, et al, 2003). It is an integral system for Validation of Prior Learning. It consists of a broad package of services: portfolio, (self-) assessment, career planning, action-planning, quality-control and accompanying training programmes. Most instruments available are based on this method in which the self-management of competences is the cornerstone of the process.

In general these tools for guidance in relation to self-assessment aim at personal development or career-planning and/or creating flexibility and mobility of the individual learner to and on the labour-market. They create added value by revitalizing individual responsibility or co-authorship by:

- providing the basis for goal-oriented development and career-planning,
- the stimulation of personal development,
- the support of self managed learning and acting,
- stimulating young people and adults to document continuously their professional- and personal development.

For further support in the process the roles of the guidance counselor and of the assessor are vital for starting up personal development in any kind of form. Guidance is a responsibility of any EVC-provider in helping candidates to fill in their portfolio once a specific standard has been chosen. These guides get training in order to be able to guide candidates in a professional way through the procedure and give them advice on their opportunities.
Apart from this guidance, reliable assessment is the key to matching a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In any given model for validating learning an assessment policy has three functions:

1. raising levels of achievement,
2. measuring this achievement reliably and
g. organizing the assessment cost-effectively.

It can also be the basis for advice and guidance on development.

**EVIDENCE OF BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS**

In the context of learning and working, an EVC procedure can be used to assess and recognize the competences (both vocational and general) of a candidate in relation to the standards (finishing levels) of an MBO (VET qualification), HBO (HE qualification in universities of applied science and the Open University) qualification. This assessment results in an *Ervaringscertificaat*, Certificate of Experience (CoE).

This CoE can be used as an independent document that proves the value of the experiences measured in terms of a qualification. Candidates are free to choose what they want to do with their CoE and cannot be obliged to follow any education afterwards.

It can be used:

- as the basis for further informal or non-formal development of the individual
- in the labour market for further career building
- for a qualification through a diploma when the individual has met all the required learning outcomes that were defined for this qualification
- as a document to get exemptions in education, if not all required learning outcomes were met and the individual does not wish to attend formal education and training again.

While the majority of providers (especially in HE) conduct in practice only a summative APL, a formative assessment (which some would not consider to be EVC, strictly speaking) can also be used in the context of career development with the aim of identifying training needs and adjusting training programmes accordingly.

The benefits of EVC are considered high, especially when the EVC-process not only covers summative but also formative effects. This stage however has not yet been reached. State of the art research shows that especially the summative aims and (potential) benefits at this moment are at the forefront of both organizations as well as individuals (Cofora 2010, Raai 2010, Sijstermans 2010), while further research on this theme by Profit wise was (at the time of writing) due to be published in late 2010.
### Personal information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo:</th>
<th>Joe Bloggs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First name(s)/Surname(s)</td>
<td>Joe Bloggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>40476 Düsseldorf, Kennedydamm 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone(s)</td>
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<td>E-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>01.08.1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>German</td>
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### Job applied for / Position / Preferred job / Studies applied for

**Human resources management**

From march 2012 independent workcouncil; representative workcouncil in a specialist orthopaedic hospital

- **2012–2006**: independent workcouncil
- **2006–1996**: male nurse in an geriatric re-habilitation clinic
- **1996–1982**: independent staffcouncil
- **1994–1986**: chairman of the staffcouncil – medical center
- **1982–1978**: male nurse

**Occupation or position held**

**Nursing**

**Employer – name/city name/country**

- **St. Marien Hospital Düsseldorf**

**Extra employer's details**

**Main activities and responsibilities**

**Education and training**

- **1978–1975**: Nursingschool
- **1975–1973**: Civil service (Serving the Community) in nursing
- **1973–1971**: Apprenticeship as a pianobuilder
- **1970–1966**: Apprenticeship as a pattern maker
**Personal skills**

- capability of expression; learning aptitude; loyalty; engagement for the interests of others, capability to advise; networker, humor

**Mother tongue(s)**

- German

**Other language(s)**

- English

**Self-assessment (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)*

- B1: Independent user

**Understanding / Speaking / Writing**

- Informal competence

- Active trade unionist; confidential mediator, voluntary ‘lead back representative’ of the union

**Communication skills**

- good communication skills gained through experience as work council, chairman of the staffcouncil; chairperson of the local union; youth and apprentice representative council; labour judge

**Social skills**

- constructive handling of issues of conflict and problems; conveying knowledge to individuals and teams; chairing of meetings and teams; negotiation with medical centre management on issues as staffplanning and staffdevelopment; internal reorganisations, representation of interests of the medical centre in meetings and in negotiation with politicians

**Job-related skills**

- Expertise and know-how relating to health, safety and labour issues; Expertise in collective negotiations, knowledge of relevant literature; Supervising structural and operational sequences; Teaming and moderation; Mediation

**Technical skills**

- Building, maintenance and renovation of houses; maintenance of cars

**Other skills**

- Beekeeper, Gardener, Piano Tuner

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For more information on Europass go to: [www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu)

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logical reasoning; clarity; transparency; attainment; knowledge transfer

ability to offer constructive criticism; ability to take criticism

presentation

vision on work and labour issues

expertise in business management

expertise in management

new tools, new solutions

capacity to advise

pragmatic skills

commercial attitudes

expertise in handling conflicts

commit oneself to the interests of workers and employees

resilience

interaction in a group

take the lead in a group

ability to delegate

self learning capacity

managing external networks

general knowledge

handling in a constructive way

recognising of interests

experience in bargaining

handling of workflow; necessary qualifications; labour organisation

cross-cultural competence

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### Protocol of the Competences of the Works Council

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Competences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professional competence</td>
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Validation:
- weak
- rather weak
- rather strong
- strong
NOTE
This publication represents for the most part the results of the project ‘Promoting the agenda for new skills and jobs: strengthening individual learning pathways by developing skills assessment tools for workers’.

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Düsseldorf, December 2012

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