



Background Paper

A
QUALITY CODE
(COMMON PRINCIPLES and GUIDELINES)
FOR
RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING
IN
HIGHER EDUCATION
?

Bologna Seminar
11-12 December 2008, Amsterdam

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1 RPL Quality Code... an idea...

The main objectives of the Bologna Seminar on 11 and 12 December in Amsterdam are:

1. The role of a government in promoting RPL, in cooperation with other stakeholders like the employersq organisations, the (organisations of) Higher Education Institutions and other networks . and to make an inventory of the most relevant and effective instruments.
2. RPL and quality assurance, and the role of the stakeholders in Higher Education.
3. The way HEIs and other organisations in higher education are dealing with RPL and are implementing effective procedures.
4. Quality Codes (and principles) for RPL procedures, including the European context of RPL and QA.
5. RPL and costs and benefitsqfor all stakeholders.

One of the ideas for the seminar is to talk about a document for a RPL Quality Code (QC)qand the other objectives. Such a document can be used in the (near) future to communicate with each other about RPL, as governments, HEIs, RPL experts and representatives of organisations involved in RPL and QA . in an international context.

In 2004 the European Commission has published a document with Common Principles for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (looking at Vocational Education and Training)q Also a lot of countries are already using Quality Codes, with specific principles. We can use these publications for the discussions during the seminar on a possible common QC for Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education.

In 2007 and 2008 the European Commission and CEDEFOP came with new documents about the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, to be considered as updates of that publication from 2004. In this document new ideas about RPL, based on actual developments. That is why you will find some interesting parts of these documents in this paper for the seminar in Amsterdam . as input for the discussions.

2 Common Principles for RPL...

The European Commission published in March 2004 a final proposal for Common European Principles for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. In this document information can be found about the reason to produce such a document. Hereby some parts of this statement . but we replaced ~~Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning~~ by ~~RPL~~ et cetera .

(1) *Support of National policies...*

There is a need to develop a set of common principles regarding Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels

The development of common references and principles can usefully support national policies. Although such common references and principles do not create obligation for the countries, involved in the Bologna Process, they contribute to developing mutual trust between the key-players and encouraging reform

Developing a set of common principles for RPL is a way to bring added value to ongoing work at local, regional and national level. According to the Bologna Process the main motivation for developing such principles is to strengthen the comparability (and thus compability) of approaches at different levels and in different contexts. RPL methods and systems developed so far have to a large extent been designed and set up in isolation from each other and can not easily be linked and combined. We can to a certain extent speak of a process where ~~islands~~ of RPL have been established but where the ~~bridges~~ between these remain to be designed and built. Lack of comparability makes it difficult for individuals to realise lifelong learning by combining qualifications and competences acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries.

Generally speaking: common principles must make it possible for different systems to communicate with each other, be this across national, sector of institutional borders. The common principles of RPL have to support and extend the credit transfer system developed within formal higher education and training systems, ECTS.

(2) *A need for common principles...*

There is a need to ~~develop~~ a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels

This report states that ~~the~~ development of common references and principles can usefully support national policies. Although such common references and principles do not create obligation for all the countries, they contribute to developing mutual trust between the key-players and encouraging reform

Developing a set of common principles for RPL is a way to bring added value to ongoing work at local, regional and national level. According to the Bologna Process the main motivation for developing such principles is to strengthen the comparability (and thus compability) of approaches at different levels and in different contexts. RPL methods and systems developed so far have to a large extent been designed and set up in isolation from each other and can not easily be linked and combined. We can to a certain extent speak of a process where ~~islands~~ of validation have been established but where the ~~bridges~~ between these remain to be designed and built. Lack of comparability makes it difficult for individuals to realise lifelong learning by combining qualifications and competences acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries.

Generally speaking: common principles must make it possible for different systems to communicate with each other, be this across national, sector of institutional borders. The common principles of validation have to support and extend credit transfer systems developed within formal education and training systems (notably the existing European Credit Transfer System developed for higher education, ECTS) and the credit transfer system currently being considered for vocational education and training.

3 Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education – in a Quality Code?

A starting point... for: *Assessment and Accreditation / Quality Assurance / Implementation of Procedures*

Based on: *Common principles for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (2004- VET)*

COMMON PRINCIPLES IN A QUALITY CODE FOR RPL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A set of common principles for RPL will be organised according to six main themes; *purpose of RPL, individual entitlements, responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders, confidence and trust, impartiality and credibility and legitimacy.*

The principles should be used as a guide and common reference point for development and implementation of methods and systems for RPL.

The principles do not prescribe any particular methodological or institutional solutions as these must be tailored to local, regional, sectoral or national needs. The principles do, however, point to a set of basic requirements which it is of the utmost importance to achieve if confidence, impartiality and credibility are to be achieved and retained.

1 THE PURPOSE OF RPL

The overall aim of RPL is to make visible and value the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired. The purpose of RPL may be formative (supporting an ongoing learning process) as well as summative (aiming at certification).

- Recognition of learning outcomes, be they acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, aims at making visible the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual.
- Recognition of learning outcomes supports lifelong learning, employability and active citizenship. Recognition can facilitate progression in education and training, (re)integration in the labour market, geographical and occupational mobility as well as organisational and personal development.
- Recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired, can serve summative purposes. By summative is meant recognition resulting in formal recognition (for example through a certificate or diploma).
- Recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired, can serve formative purposes. By formative is meant the process of identifying learning outcomes without formal recognition (for personal and/or career development). Formative recognition may potentially provide the basis for formal recognition.

2 INDIVIDUAL ENTITLEMENTS

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning must first and foremost serve the needs of individual citizens. This means that individual entitlements have to be clearly stated, in particular in relation to issues like privacy, ownership of recognition results and right to appeal.

- Recognition is as a general principle voluntary and it is up to the individual to decide whether it should take place or not.
- In cases where recognition is part of a compulsory system arrangements should be put in place to ensure transparency, fairness and privacy.
- In private and public organisations where recognition is implemented this should be based on social dialogue.
- In the case of summative recognition, individuals enjoy the right to appeal a recognition result; this right should be presented in a transparent way at the start of the recognition process.
- Special provisions should be designed for individuals with special needs to ensure equal (and fair) access to recognition.

- The results of recognition must be the property of the individual. Where the results of recognition are kept by others the privacy of the individual must be ensured.
- In cases where recognition is part of human resource management in enterprises the privacy of the individual must be ensured.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF INSTITUTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Institutions and stakeholders (public organisations, private enterprises and voluntary organisations) face certain responsibilities when they initiate recognition, for example in terms of providing proper guidance and support. These obligations will differ according to the specific field of activity.

- Results of recognition must be presented in such a way that they can be understood at an international level. When possible, common international instruments and formats for transparency of qualifications and competences should be used.
- The privacy of the individual must be respected.
- Recognition should be supported by information, guidance and counseling services.
- Higher Education systems should provide a legal and practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated.
- Enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors should provide a practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated.
- Recognition should be an integral part of human resource development in enterprises and public organisations and should be based on social dialogue.
- Non-formal learning organisations, including NGOs, outside formal higher education should provide a support to enable individuals to have their learning validated.

4 CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

Confidence is a necessary pre-requisite for successful development and implementation of recognition of prior learning. Everybody involved must be able to make their own informed judgements of the approach in question. This requires well-defined standards; clear information on how assessments are conducted and on which basis conclusions are drawn; clear information about the purpose of recognition and how the results will be used; and, clear and accessible information on conditions for recognition, for example time and cost involved as well as support/guidance provided.

Transparency of procedures

- The recognition process must give confidence to all concerned that the named person/-candidate actually has acquired the knowledge and competences in question (validity must be ensured).
- Recognition schemes must be designed in such a way that potential users, be they individuals or institutions, are able to observe and judge the entire recognition process.
- The basis (methodologies) for recognition should be stated clearly (written exams, interviews, practical tests, self assessments, descriptive methodologies, involvement in a specific field of activity, others).
- Clear information on time and cost should be presented.

Transparency of criteria

- The requirements to be met by the individual must be clearly described so as to facilitate reliability (two recognition bodies acting independently must be expected to reach the same conclusions).
- The criteria used by assessors when weighting (marking) learning outcomes must be as clear as possible.

Availability of, and access to, information

- The purpose, criteria and requirements for recognition (the references and standards) as well as the use of results must be presented in such a way that they are transparent to all involved, including the individual being validated.

5 IMPARTIALITY

Impartiality is a crucial feature of recognition and relates to the roles and responsibilities of the assessors involved in the recognition process. It is important to avoid undue mixing of roles as this will negatively affect overall confidence and credibility to recognition results. Impartiality can be strengthened through training and systematic networking, something that needs to be promoted by recognition providers.

- Assessors should, in particular in relation to summative recognition, operate according to a code of conduct and not combine incompatible roles in a way that compromises confidentiality and impartiality.
- Assessors must be professionally competent and have access to systematic initial and continuing training. Where possible local, regional and national networks of assessors should be set up to assure professional development and coherent practices.

6 CREDIBILITY AND LEGITIMACY

Credibility and legitimacy must be based on the inclusion of the relevant stakeholders at all appropriate levels. The social and professional credibility of recognition reflects the inclusion and commitment of relevant stakeholders. Credibility is also closely linked to the (above) issues of confidence and impartiality.

- The development, implementation and financing of a mechanism for recognition must involve all relevant stakeholders (for example, involving social partners in cases where work experience is being assessed or NGOs in cases where voluntary and civil society activities are being assessed).
- Recognition bodies need to be impartial and shall involve all stakeholders significantly concerned without any interest predominating. The system of recognition, at all levels of operation, should be organised to safeguard impartiality and enable participation from all parties involved.

The original principles for VET from 2004 can be found in Annex B

4 Dutch Quality Code for APL – since January 2007

APL Quality Code / Code Details of Implementation

1. *The goal of APL is to define, evaluate and accredit individual competencies. The accreditation of prior learning has a value in and of itself and contributes to employability. In many cases, APL can be a benefit to further career-related personal development.*
 - a. *A goal is explicitly linked to the APL procedure.*
 - b. *The APL-supplying organization and each individual reach consensus on the use of the results of APL.*
2. *Individual entitlements: the APL process answers to the need of the individual. Entitlements and arrangements with the APL-offering organizations are clearly defined.*
 - a. *The accessibility of the APL procedure for participants is documented.*
 - b. *Participation in the APL procedure is generally on a voluntary basis.*
 - c. *The APL-offering organization and the participants make arrangements on the optimal course of the APL procedure.*
 - d. *The participant decides whether he/she will participate in the APL procedure and will receive all relevant information needed to do so.*
 - e. *Time frame for the entire procedure is realistic, feasible and known in advance.*
 - f. *The privacy of the participant is guaranteed and the results of the APL procedure are the property of the participant unless agreed otherwise in advance.*
 - g. *The participant is entitled to appeal, and there is a system in place for this option.*
3. *Procedure and instruments are reliable and based on solid standards Trust is the key issue. Trust has to do with civil effect, properly defined standards, and clear information on the way in which assessments are conducted and the arguments on the basis of which conclusion are drawn.*
 - a. *Tasks and capacities of all parties involved in all phases of the procedure are known and are functioning.*
 - b. *A standard coordinated to the relevant working area and which leads to the civil effect is used.*
 - c. *The equivalence of the APL procedure with an initial vocational training programme must be demonstrated.*
 - d. *The reliability and validity of the assessment instruments and procedures used is guaranteed, even if procured externally.*
 - e. *The assessment instruments make use of any available evidence, no matter what the source.*
 - f. *The participant is entitled to a concluding meeting to be informed of the result. This result, including the civil value of the result, is set out in an APL report.*
4. *Assessors and supervisors are competent, independent and impartial. Independence and impartiality are crucial factors in the evaluation and are rooted in the roles and responsibilities of the assessors involved in the process. It is of major importance to avoid unnecessary confusion of roles. Impartiality can be reinforced by training and the use of networks.*
 - a. *The independence of the assessors is guaranteed.*
 - b. *The roles of supervisors and assessors are separate.*
 - c. *The supervisors have a proven track record of competence. They are able to present procedures and to interview, coach and give feedback to individuals; they are professionals in the fields in which their coaching specializes.*
 - d. *The assessors have a proven track record of competence. They are able to interview, give feedback to individuals and evaluate competencies; they are able to communicate assessment results; they are professionals in the fields in which they conduct assessments*
 - e. *Supervisors and assessors keep their professional skills up.*

5. *The quality of APL procedures is guaranteed and is being improved on an ongoing basis. The quality of the APL procedure and the set of instruments used is guaranteed.*
 - a. *The APL procedure is open. Evaluations are conducted regularly. The results are incorporated into improvement actions.*
 - b. *Targets, procedure, assessment framework, assessment instruments, quality of assessors and supervisors, and APL administration are all evaluated regularly.*
 - c. *Evaluation of the participants is a standing component of quality control.*
 - d. *The organization lives up to the quality standard of APL.*
 - e. *The evaluation and the APL procedure improvement policy that follows from the evaluation is embedded into the organization's existing quality control system.*

Annex to this Code:

The parties agree as follows:

1. *The parties endorse the principles and premises concerning the quality of APL as set out in the APL code.*
2. *This APL code is further developed into a review framework. On 1 January 2007, this framework is adopted by the parties. The evaluating organisations can use this review framework to produce an assessment of the quality of the APL procedures.*
3. *This APL code is a contributing factor to three objectives linked to the introduction of APL:*
 - *Increasing the accessibility of APL. Clarifying what APL is and how APL must be offered.*
 - *Providing transparency. Allowing better comparison of different APL procedures.*
 - *Guaranteeing civil effect.*
4. *All organizations that offer APL and opt to profile themselves with the APL code must be accredited providers. An organization is accredited as an APL provider by means of a report by an evaluating organization. An "accredited APL provider" is entered in the directory of the accredited APL providers.*
5. *The accreditation of APL providers:*
 - *Organizations offering programmes and/or examinations for MBO (senior secondary vocational education) and which are licensed by the Minister of Education, Culture & Science/Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality for those programmes can have themselves provisionally registered as accredited APL providers without first being evaluated by an evaluating organization.*
 - *Organizations offering programmes and examinations for the HBO (higher professional education) and which hold an NVAO declaration attesting to the accreditation of those programmes, can have themselves provisionally registered as accredited APL providers without first being evaluated by an evaluating organization. Any organization wishing to become provisionally accredited must submit a signed statement to the APL Knowledge Centre declaring that it meets the requirements for an accredited APL provider. Evaluation of these provisional accredited APL providers will be conducted retroactively, but at the latest by 1 January 2008, by the evaluating organization.*
 - *Other APL providers can also have themselves registered as "accredited APL providers." To do this, they must submit the evaluation report of the evaluating organization to the APL Knowledge Centre. On the basis of the report, the organization can be entered into the directory of accredited APL providers.*
6. *An APL procedure is a method of identifying the extent to which a person possesses certain competencies. These competencies may be rated in relation to a job standard, educational standard or professional standard. An APL procedure results in an APL report, which gives an overall comparison of the individual's competencies against the standard levels of those competencies. This APL report has an independent value to the individual, and can result in:*
 - a. *improvement or retention of the labour market position.*
 - b. *exemption from the requirement to follow elements of a training programme accredited by the sector, industry, SUWI chain partner or professional group.*
 - c. *obtaining a diploma, certification or partial certification accredited by the sector, industry, SUWI (social security etc) chain partner or professional group. In this case, a follow-up programme is not required.*

- d. *exemption from the requirement to follow elements of a training programme accredited by the Minister of Education, Culture & Science/Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality.*
- e. *obtaining a diploma, certification or partial certification accredited by the Minister of Education, Culture & Science / Agriculture Nature & Food Quality. In this case, a follow-up programme is not required.*
- 7. *APL can be the start of an individualized educational programme in pursuit of a diploma or certification. It cuts the programme fees borne by the employer and is a source of motivation to the employee or potential employee. APL may not be made a mandatory part of an educational programme, and it has an independent value to the individual.*
- 8. *The parties wish to promote the use of APL and the APL quality code amongst their members.*
- 9. *The APL Knowledge Centre will coordinate the implementation of the quality code. The APL Knowledge Centre will perform, minimally, the following tasks in this implementation:*
 - a. *Set up, publish and administer the directory of accredited providers.*
 - b. *Publish the texts of the APL code and administer the corresponding standards.*
 - c. *Develop sample APL reports, portfolios and supporting tools. Investigate whether this will require making arrangements linked to the APL code.*
 - d. *Produce a model methodology to evaluate the quality of supervisors and assessors. Investigate whether this will require making arrangements linked to the APL code.*
 - e. *Investigate the effects and the impact of the APL code measured against the objectives linked to the introduction of APL (accessibility, transparency and civil effect).*
 - f. *Investigate whether the designation of evaluating organizations and the corresponding accreditation of APL providers under the responsibility of social partners in industries or sectors, or of the SUWI partners in the SUWI chain or in professional organizations, is actually happening. Investigate how the evaluating organizations proposed by the social partners are applying the APL code and the standards. Have an initial impartial and independent evaluation performed of the quality model and the use of the APL code.*
 - g. *Before July 1st 2007, the Knowledge Centre APL will write a letter with recommendations to the parties based on the above mentioned subjects. The discussion of this evaluation by the parties will include the determination of who will take on those tasks of the APL Knowledge Centre relating to the APL code in 2008 and thereafter.*

In Annex A this code can be found in Dutch

5 UPDATE - GUIDELINES ON VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

In November 2007 Jens Bjornavold (European Commission) published a document which he had been prepared for the conference "Making Learning: European experiences in validating non-formal and informal learning", in Lisboa, 26 and 27 November 2007. From this document some interesting parts.

The role of Guidelines

The goals of the European Principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning were concerned with comparability, compatibility and transparency across national boundaries. These guidelines support these goals but their purpose is different since they have been requested by Member States and they respect the fact that as the national positions have become stronger in this field more exchange of practice and policy learning is now possible. The primary purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate these exchanges and policy learning for the benefit of national developments.

The proposal for European Guidelines has emerged from peer learning discussions amongst policy workers from Member States. The suggestion for European guidelines is seen as a way of pulling together the range of experience of validation processes from a policy perspective. For example the guidelines will focus on the points where policy positions are most critical and provide insights that will support decision making. In these ways the guidelines will meet national needs and support national and local developments.

There have been many projects at local, regional and national level in validation of non-formal and informal learning. The guidelines draw on the experience of these projects and suggest ways in which replication between projects can be avoided and ensure that known issues are avoided and new issues tested.

The expression of support for European guidelines indicates that there is a policy learning function for national teams within the process of developing the guidelines. The joint nature of the production process, involving the members of the peer learning cluster and their home networks is likely to contribute to enhanced mutual trust amongst people and teams from the countries involved.

There are two main reasons for developing the guidelines. The first is to support quality improvement in validation processes. The second reason is to enhance the compatibility and comparability of validation processes across institutional, regional and national borders. The guidelines are intended to support the different development process in countries, regions and sectors and respect the wide range of different models for validation. Essentially the European Guidelines are seen as an evaluative tool for local, regional and national projects. The insights in the guidelines have been structured in a way that facilitates their use as a checklist of elements of validation whilst showing the interactions between these different elements.

Finally in the years since the 2004 common principles were produced, they have been interpreted in many fora and it is now possible to review where these principles have led. It is hoped that the creation of new European level guidelines in this field will keep the four European principles in the forefront of discussions and developments.

The audience of the proposed guidelines document are people developing policy and managing validation projects at national and regional and institutional level. Whilst the guidelines extends the detail of the European principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning they do not extend to the point of offering recommended models of effective practice.

The guidelines aim to use all of the evidence that has become available since the 2004 principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning were published. Thus the guidelines will under-

line these principles and strengthen the validation process in its various settings. The evidence sources that have been used include:

- The discussions in the peer learning cluster on learning outcomes (23 countries involved);
- The peer learning activities in Brussels (Jan 2007) and Paris (July 2007);
- CEDEFOP study tours in Portugal (2007)
- The three European inventories of practice in the validation of non formal and informal learning
- The two CEDEFOP commissioned European inventories of national experience of the recognition of non formal and informal learning
- A wide range of Leonardo da Vinci projects that support the validation of non formal and informal learning
- Reviews of research literature in this field

and from December 2007, the points arising from the Portuguese presidency meeting (November, 2007).

The Guidelines are made up of a series of guideline statements separated into six sections. Following this first section on background to the validation process and the guidelines, the second section provides a summary of the current position on validation from a European level perspective with the aim of enhancing transparency and trust in validation processes operating across Europe. The third section focuses on the national level and provides a rationale for the strong policy interest in this area. It also includes a discussion of the main elements of national practices. The structure, roles and responsibilities of the various types of validation bodies are discussed in section 4. Section five covers the architecture of validation systems in some detail. In the sixth section the roles, skills and values of the people who carry out the validation process are discussed.

Guidelines

The complexity of the learning taking place outside formal education and training systems – which takes place on a life-wide as well as a lifelong learning basis – requires a validation process able to capture this complexity and provide opportunities to make visible the outcomes of this learning.

The critical importance of life wide and lifelong learning processes makes it necessary to develop policies that clarify the operation of validation processes and the role of stakeholders

The various stakeholders at national level should be in a position to appreciate the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in all the other levels of the validation system.

6 Update 2 – Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning (VET) – January 2008

In January 2008 Cedefop and the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training published a report, titled: *[Valid]ation of Nonformal and Informal Learning in Europe – a Snapshot 2007*. In this report actual information can be found about the way validation procedures are being used in a lot of European countries, in vocational education and training. Of course, the possibilities and situations in Higher Education differ from what is happening in VET, but a lot of experiences and outcomes of projects and surveys are interesting enough for the discussions on RPL and QA in HE.

Therefore here is this document some parts of the Cedefop document. The document itself can be found on the seminar website.

1 Executive summary

The publication gives a snapshot . end 2007 . of European developments in validation of non-formal and informal learning. While some countries are making substantial progress others have yet to put in place approaches for individuals to have their non- and informally acquired experiences identified, assessed and/or validated. European developments are therefore described as strongly differentiated. This report identifies factors which promote and prevent developments in this field. The following issues are covered.

National motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning

Several factors explain why countries give priority to validation. The wish to open up qualifications systems and frameworks to learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions is crucial. It is closely linked to efforts to realise lifelong and lifewide learning. Other factors can, however, be identified, notably economic, social, demographic and technological factors.

Validation in the European policy context

The report outlines how validation has gradually become part of the policy agenda at European level. It is increasingly clear that ongoing development of national qualifications frameworks in many European countries, mostly in response to the European qualifications framework (EQF), encourages developments in and mainstreaming of validation.

Characteristics of the validation process and its relation to qualifications systems

The report illustrates the different stages of the validation process. In particular it points to the distinct but interrelated formative (certification) and summative (support to learning and assessment) functions. The report outlines how individuals can make decisions at different stages of the process, sometimes aiming at certification, other times not. The complex validation process is illustrated by a systematic overview of the stakeholders involved at different levels. Here, the report also looks into the link between standards and validation methods. The portfolio methodology is given particular attention given its important role in many European validation systems.

Developments in Europe in validating non-formal and informal learning

Based on the European inventory on validation 2007, European countries are divided into three main groups. First, those countries where validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens. Second, those countries where validation is emerging as a practical reality and third, those countries where activity is low or non-existent. This overview illustrates the multi-speed character of developments. The emergence of national qualifications frameworks, combined with a shift towards learning outcomes, seems to act as a catalyst for further development of validation, not least in countries where activity has been limited until now.

Elements of a validation strategy for 2010 and beyond: key issues influencing further development of methods and systems of validation

Based on debates at the Portuguese Presidency conference on valuing learning (November 2007), 10 key points relevant to the future development of validation are listed and discussed.

Follow up to these points may be seen as the basis for a post 2010 European strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2 Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly seen as a key to realise lifelong and lifewide learning. A growing number of European countries emphasise the importance of making visible and giving appropriate value to learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, in leisure time activities and at home.

Moving from general policy objectives to practical solutions serving individuals is another matter. Some countries have been working on solutions since the late 1980s, achieving important results, others are still at an early stage of discussion and development. Yet others are reluctant to introduce validation and, in some cases, express fear that it may undermine or conflict with other education, training and learning measures.

When discussing the future potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe, it is important to try to understand better this strongly differentiated process; which factors explain, lack of progress, reluctance and (even) resistance to validation?

(6 .)

The extent to which validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens is closely related to the openness of the national qualifications system and whether learning outcomes acquired outside schools are accepted as a legitimate basis for a certificate or diploma. The rapid development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) across Europe in response to the European qualifications framework (EQF) has (in the period 2005-2007) led to a growing interest in validation and may now be seen as the single most important factor influencing developments in this field.

(6 .)

3 National motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning

Progress in terms of policy and practice varies across the 32 countries taking part in the Education and Training 2010 process. However, there has been a significant increase in activity in validation in the last few years. Several reasons explain these developments.

- **Education system factors:** *improving access to and efficiency in the formal education system.*

Providing direct ways to gain formal qualifications or door openers to education courses and so avoid repetition and inefficiencies in the education system is a key reason for validating informal and non-formal learning (Feutrie, 2005). The 2007 inventory shows that several countries have introduced validation to make mobility easier and provide individuals a second chance to reach their full learning potential. In higher education, although progress has generally been slow, several countries have made significant advances, in particular in using validation to facilitate entry to courses. These developments are closely linked to efforts to open up qualifications to a wider range of learning outcomes and learning settings, in many cases leading the development of national qualifications frameworks.

- **Economic factors:** *needs of the knowledge economy also reflected in enterprises.*

Labour markets have had to become more flexible and have innovation more important, with ensuing challenges for human capital development. Validation can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, such as skills shortages or compliance with regulations regarding professional qualifications. Increasingly, private sector stakeholders . social partners as well as individual companies . recognise the benefits of validation (Dyson and Keating, 2005). Today, validation is increasingly used for staff development and to ensure the most effective allocation of resources within the business.

- **Social factors:** *providing opportunities for disadvantaged or excluded people.*

Validation can help socially excluded people to reintegrate into the labour market and society. Validation is recognised in some countries as a tool to support disadvantaged groups, such as refugees, the unemployed and older workers (Kok, 2003; Council of the European Union, 2004b; European Commission, 2007a). In certain countries, priority target groups have been identified

and in some cases, (funding for) validation initiatives (has) have been restricted to these groups. Validation can also support promotion of equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups as it helps establish equality in the education and training system and labour market.

• **Demographic factors:** *ageing of the population and increasing migration.*

This is linked to disadvantaged groups. Demographic factors are accentuating the number of people at risk of exclusion who can benefit from validation. Validation can help these groups by improving access to and mobility within the labour market, thus helping combat unemployment linked to demographic change.

• **Technological factors:** *development of new technologies accentuates appreciation of technical skills gained through informal and non-formal means.*

There is a need to enable individuals to use new technologies in the workplace and recognise competences in professions where new technologies predominate. In sectors dependent on use of new technologies, formal education / training may not be well suited to keep up with technological changes and emerging needs for skills development.

Validation is developed in this context as an alternative option to ensure individuals can gain recognition for their technical competences and identify skills gaps and training needs in the workplace.

• **Increased awareness / acceptance of validation among stakeholders:**

Greater awareness has led to greater use and involvement of stakeholders. The 2007 European inventory identified many validation initiatives across 32 countries. Literature is emerging on how validation of non-formal and informal learning can improve education systems and policies. It appears that several private and third sector stakeholders have become involved in developing (public) validation initiatives, to ensure their voice is heard and their views and needs are considered. Increased awareness of the importance and value of validation has, to a certain degree, led to greater take-up of concrete validation practices.

The introduction to this publication suggested that the reasons countries pursue validation of informal and non-formal learning can, to a large extent, be integrated into one meta-reason namely the need to facilitate lifelong (and lifewide) learning. This is confirmed by the 2007 European inventory, where validation is often seen as an intrinsic part of national lifelong learning (LLL) strategies.

4 Validation in the European policy context

National motives for pursuing validation are to a large extent reflected in . and stimulated by . European policies. The European Commission communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2002b) points to valuing learning (including non-formal and informal) as a key to making lifelong and lifewide learning a practical reality. The emphasis on valuing learning was reaffirmed in resolutions by the EU education and employment ministers (in May and June 2002). Involvement of education and employment ministers signals that valuing learning is seen as highly relevant to both areas and, potentially, as a bridge between education, training, learning and work.

Concrete follow-up was adopted in December 2002 when education and training ministers passed a resolution on increased cooperation in vocational education and training (initiating the Copenhagen process in vocational education and training) (European Commission, 2002a). This resolution invited Member States to develop

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

Following extensive discussions involving representatives of Member States and European social partners, a set of common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning were adopted by the European Council in May 2004 (Council of the European Union, 2004a). Formulated at a high level of abstraction, these principles identify issues critical to developing and implementing methods and systems for validation. Since 2004, these principles have been used by many countries as a reference for national developments,

underlining their usefulness as a checklist for developing high quality, credible validation approaches.

European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning are based on the main agreements shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Common European principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning

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

While national authorities and stakeholders decide on policies and practices, it is increasingly clear that countries share many challenges. The establishment (in the context of the Education and training 2010 work programme) of the cluster on recognition of learning outcomes made it possible to pursue a systematic exchange of experience and to start the work on a follow up to the European principles. Building on the conclusions of the peer learning activities on effective practices in validation processes (Brussels, January 2007 and Paris, July 2007), a set of European Guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning is now being developed. Draft guidelines were presented at the Portuguese Presidency conference in November 2007 (European Commission . DG Education and Culture and Cedefop, 2007), and a final version is expected spring 2008. These guidelines will provide a reference point and checklist for developing validation methods and systems, making it possible to systematically take into account and build on experience across Europe. Each country and stakeholder will decide whether they want to use the guidelines. Their value and status will be entirely based on their ability to capture existing experience and communicate sound practice. The European principles, European guidelines and European inventory are interlinked elements in a European strategy to support . through systematic exchange of experience and mutual learning . development of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Member States.

7 Update 3 – European Guidelines for the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning (VET) – november 2008

Again, in November 2008 Cedefop and the European Commission (Education and Culture DG), published a report about the theme of our seminar in Amsterdam: European Guidelines for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning. This report can be seen as the final draft for a definitive document about this subject, as a result of a discussion in the last period on the European level.

There is an overlap with the report, published in January 2008 (see chapter 6), but we think that is very useful to publish here the most interesting parts of this actual document (the whole document can be found on the seminar website).

1.1 Why European Guidelines on validation?

The European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning were designed to strengthen the comparability and transparency of validation approaches and methods across national boundaries. The Guidelines support these goals and offer some detail on the structure and processes of validation. The Guidelines can be written because national positions have become stronger in this field and greater exchange of practice and policy learning is now possible.

The Guidelines are intended to support the different development process in countries, regions and sectors and respect the wide range of different models for validation. Essentially the European Guidelines should be seen as an evaluative tool those involved with validation at local, regional and national level.

These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the 2008 publication of the most extensive inventory to date of practice in the validation of non-formal and informal learning¹ (referred to as 2007 Inventory in this text). This 2007 inventory includes a summary practice in public, private and voluntary sectors in 32 countries together with six case studies that are presented in some detail. This inventory will be updated on a bi-annual basis and will thus, together with these Guidelines, provide countries with an instrument for improving practices in this field.

(6)

1.4 The importance of validation of non-formal and informal learning

Indications from the 2007 Inventory suggest that the validation of informal and non-formal learning is of increasing importance across Europe. Furthermore the commitment of large numbers of countries to the OECD activity in this field and participation in the European Commission's peer learning cluster indicate that validation is seen as an important element of national policies on education, training and learning.

Expansion and diversification of education and training policies towards a broader, lifelong learning perspective, widens the focus from the delivery of qualifications by formal education and training institutions to include other, more flexible routes to qualification. These are sensitive to different ways in which people have developed their knowledge and skills and the way they live their lives. To facilitate such flexible pathways, validation of non-formal and informal learning makes visible the learning that is gained outside learning institutions. Across a country this represents a vast untapped resource of invisible knowledge and skills and, notwithstanding the rights of the individual to have their learning recognised, its increased visibility could lead to significant economic and social benefits for individuals, communities and countries.

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¹ ECOTEC research and consulting, 2007, European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, for European Commission, DG EAC, <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/publications/inventory/EuropeanInventory.pdf>

1.7 Summarising current experience with the validation of non-formal and informal learning

It is possible to summarise some of the factors that can make a validation process for non-formal and informal learning a success. Drawing on the 2007 Inventory it is clear that the following are important factors:

- Partnership-working and consultation
- Sufficient financial and human resources,
- Training and guidance for staff involved to support policy and legislation
- Use of clear reference points such as standards and qualification levels
- Developing methodologies which are learning-outcomes-based
- Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation to ensure fairness and build confidence
- Learning from others and sharing experiences

Similarly it is possible to identify common barriers to successful adoption of a validation system for non-formal and informal learning.

- The resources that are available are not sufficient to meet the demand for validation or sustain them
- Insufficient volume of training for staff responsible for validation
- Uncertainty in planning due to variation in the scope and quality of pilot projects
- Lack of collaboration between stakeholder groups
- Lack of buy-in to the validation process from companies
- High levels of trust in the traditions and culture of validation of formal learning
- Perceptions of lengthy and complex procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Poor access to information about validation procedures
- Low personal expectations from potential candidates for validation of non-formal and informal learning, especially low-skilled males.
- Employers' fear of greater contractual / salary demands
- Large variety of methodologies that can hinder reliable assessment and trust
- Consideration, by the private sector, that validation of non-formal and informal learning is a public sector responsibility
- The lack of a legal framework for validation processes
- Private sector unwillingness to share experiences/policies
- Hostility towards non traditional qualifications.

Fundamentally, success in this field requires that validation is broadly accepted as being relevant for reaching overarching political goals like lifelong learning, employability and social inclusion. Success will also require that validation is mainstreamed and becomes an integrated part of qualifications systems; politically, legally, administratively and financially.

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2.1 Effective practises in validation; The European perspective

Guidelines

The practice of validation of informal and non-formal learning should be compatible with the main elements in the 2004 European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the European principles for quality assurance of education and training and the Recommendation for a European quality assurance reference framework for VET². European cooperation in the field of validation should be further developed, in particular by regularly updating and improving these guidelines and the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

² European Commission Proposal for a Reference Framework for the Quality Assurance for vocational educational and training, COM(2008) 179 2008/0069 (COD)
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0179:FIN:EN:PDF>

The European level tools and frameworks (e.g. EQF, Europass, European credit systems) could be used to promote validation and to enhance comparability and transparency of the outcomes of validation processes and so build trust across national boundaries.

2.2 Quality assurance instruments

Quality assurance processes across Europe set benchmarks for procedures of validation. The European Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training³ can increase cross-national trust in these validation processes. The principles are as follows:

- quality assurance policies and procedures should cover all levels of education and training systems;
- quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions;
- quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies;
- external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
- quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes;
- quality assurance systems should include the following elements
 - clear and measurable objectives and standards,
 - guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement,
 - appropriate resources,
 - consistent evaluation methods including self-assessment and external review,
 - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement,
 - widely accessible evaluation results;
- quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis;
- quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community;
- quality assurance guidelines at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

These European Guidelines seek to show how the above quality assurance principles can establish consistency of application across the many national contexts for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Many factors can provide or undermine confidence in either the methods used in validation or the outcome achieved. The success of national and local validation processes depends on the level of confidence they inspire. Therefore, as far as possible, national validation processes should be compliant with the European quality assurance principles and the follow up to these⁴.

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9 Summary of principles and guidelines

The fundamental principles underpinning validation

- 1 Validation must be voluntary
- 2 The privacy of individuals should be respected
- 3 Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed

³ Annex 3, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (April 2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning 2008/C 111/01. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>

⁴ The general principles outlined in the European guidelines have been specified by frameworks covering sub-sectors of education and training, notably higher education and vocational education and training. The CQAF . the common quality assurance framework for VET, initiated in 2008, is an example of the latter.

- 4 Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- 5 Systems should contain mechanism for guidance and counselling of individuals
- 6 Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.
- 7 The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- 8 Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek a balanced participation.
- 9 The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- 10 The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

9.1 The Guidelines

Effective practises – The European perspective

The practice of validation of informal and non-formal learning should be compatible with the main elements in the 2004 European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the European principles for quality assurance of education and training and the Recommendation for a European quality assurance reference framework for VET⁵

European cooperation in the field of validation should be further developed, in particular by regularly updating and improving these guidelines and the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The European level tools and frameworks (e.g. EQF, Europass, European credit systems) could be used to promote validation and to enhance comparability and transparency of the outcomes of validation processes and so build trust across national boundaries.

Effective practises – the national perspective

The validation of non-formal and informal learning should be seen as an integral part of the national qualifications system

The formative approach to assessment is important as it draws attention to the 'identification' of knowledge, skills and wider competences, a crucial part lifelong learning

Summative validation needs to have a clearly defined and unambiguous link to the standards used in the national qualifications system (or framework)

The entitlement to validation could be considered in cases where non-formal and informal learning is seen as a normal route to a qualification – parallel to formal education and training

The development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks could be used as an opportunity to systematically integrate validation into qualifications systems

The introduction of validation as an integrated part of a national qualifications framework could be linked to the need to improve access to, progression within and transfer of qualifications

The sustainability and coherence of national systems of validation should be supported by regular cost benefit analysis

⁵ European Commission Proposal for a Reference Framework for the Quality Assurance for vocational educational and training, COM(2008) 179 2008/0069 (COD)
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0179:FIN:EN:PDF>

Effective practises – the organisational perspective

Formal education, enterprises, adult education providers and volunteering organisations are key stakeholders in providing opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning poses challenges to formal education in terms of the range of learning that can be validated and how this process can be integrated with the formal curriculum and its assessment.

There are major advantages for enterprises in setting up systems for the documentation of the knowledge, skills and competences of employees.

Enterprises need to balance their legitimate interests as employers with the likewise legitimate interests of individual employees.

The adult education sector is a major contributor to non-formal and informal learning and its further development should be supported by systematic development of formative as well as summative validation

The third (or voluntary) sector offers a wide range of personalised learning opportunities that are highly valued in other settings. Validation should be used to make visible and value the outcomes of this learning, as well as facilitate their transfer to other settings

The functions of the different bodies involved in validation requires coordination through an institutional framework.

The institutional route to validation and certification should not lead to certificates that are distinguishable as of different status on the basis of the route taken to achieve them.

Effective practises – the individual

The centre of the validation process is the individual. The activities of other agencies involved in validation should be considered in the light of their impact on the individual.

All people should have access to the validation process and the emphasis on motivation to engage in the process is particularly important.

The multi stage process of validation offers individuals many opportunities for deciding about the future direction of their validation process. This decision making should be supported by information, advice and guidance.

Effective practises – the structure of validation processes

The three processes of orientation, assessment and external audit can be used to evaluate existing validation procedures and support the development of new validation procedures.

Effective practises – the methods

The methods used for validation of non-formal and informal learning are essentially the same tools that are used in the assessment of formal learning

When used for validation, tools have to be combined and applied in a way which reflects the individual specificity and non-standardised character of non-formal and informal learning, Tools for assessment of learning need to be fit-for-purpose

Effective practises – the validation practitioners

Effective operation of validation processes depends in a fundamental way on the professional activity of counsellors, assessors and validation process administrators.

The preparation and ongoing training of these people is therefore critically important.

Networking that enable the sharing experiences and the full functioning of a community of practice should be a part of a development programme for practitioners.

Interaction between practitioners in a single validation process is likely to lead to more efficient and effective practices that support the individuals seeking validation.

8 Ireland – 2006 - Principles for RPL - Further and Higher Education and Training

The principles for RPL are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of RPL and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies.

General

- The recognition of prior learning will give value to all learning, no matter how that learning is achieved.
- Participation in recognition is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- The recognition of prior learning will be part of an inclusive approach to learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training and for the achievement of an award.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for learners to participate on an active basis in society in general and within a workplace context.

Quality

- Recognition of prior learning should be fully embedded within the quality assurance procedures of providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- Processes for the recognition of prior learning should be credible to all stakeholders.
- The outcomes-based approach of the National Framework of Qualifications supports the attainment of awards through diverse routes, including the recognition of prior learning, and such recognition of prior learning will maintain and support the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

Communication/documentation

- A clear statement of the policies, processes and practices of the education and training providers and awarding bodies for the recognition of prior learning should be available to all users.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be clearly documented.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be communicated openly and clearly to all (applicants, education and training staff and assessors).

Assessment

- Assessment criteria for the recognition of prior learning should be published, made explicit to applicants, and applied consistently and fairly.
- Assessment criteria should be based on learning outcomes of awards or standards of knowledge, skill and competence set out in the National Framework of Qualifications and by the relevant awarding bodies.
- Assessment and verification mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning should be appropriate and fit for purpose.

Process

- Guidance and support should be available for applicants and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.
- An appropriate appeals mechanism should be in place.
- Recognition of prior learning processes should be easy to understand, fair and transparent, and be conducted in a reasonable time frame.
- The recognition of prior learning processes should be organised in such a way that they do not create barriers for the applicant.
- Appropriate resources to support the processes for the recognition of prior learning should be in place.

9 Principles – QAA – UK - Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning - 2004

Policies and procedures

Principle 1:

Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

- Where accreditation of prior learning is being sought for the award of academic credit (*), an HE provider will wish to assure itself that the learning derived from experience and/or prior certificated study is equivalent to that of the learning that might otherwise have been achieved by following the HE provider's validated programme of study. In reaching a decision about the equivalence of learning, an HE provider will wish to consider the combination of skills and learning outcomes, and level and relevance of the subject knowledge and understanding to be evidenced by an applicant.
- As with other methods used to assess student's learning and achievement, HE providers will want to ensure that the decision-making process used to assess a claim for the accreditation of prior learning, and the outcomes of this process, are transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

(*) HE providers may wish to develop policies and practices for the accreditation of prior learning within the context of a credit framework. The approach employed by an institution will typically reflect the mechanisms it uses to record the learning that results from a programme. While the use of a credit framework may simplify the process of recognition, and make the process more easily understood by others using a similar framework, it is not essential for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 2:

Where limits are imposed on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicitly stated. The implications for progression, the award of any interim qualification and the classification or grading of a final qualification should be clear and transparent.

- In developing its approach to the accreditation of prior learning, an HE provider will find it useful to describe and explain the reasons for its decisions, policies and the procedures adopted for imposing limits, if any, on the volume of learning that can be achieved through the accreditation process. Limits may be applied to the smallest amount of learning that can be accredited, for example, a module or cluster of learning outcomes, and/or a maximum amount of learning that any individual applicant may claim for accreditation.
- When articulating its policies on whether limits are imposed on the proportion of a qualification that may be achieved through the accreditation of prior experiential or certificated learning, an HE provider may also wish to consider the appropriateness of the 'use and reuse of credit' / 'double counting of learning achievement'. An HE provider is encouraged to make clear its policies regarding the recognition of learning that has previously been accredited in the award of a qualification, credit, or other form of certification, and is subsequently being presented for recognition in a second qualification, or part thereof.
- An HE provider may also wish to include in its discussions consideration of whether learning derived from experience which is successfully accredited should be graded and, if so, how. Similarly, useful consideration may also be given to whether grades awarded by another education provider can be accepted, when a claim for the recognition of prior certificated learning has been successful.
- Applicants will need to be made aware of any limitations to progression, obtaining an interim award, and/or the range of qualification grades or classifications that are normally available in a programme of study, which may apply if their application is successful.

Principle 3:

Prior experiential and/or certificated learning that has been accredited by an HE provider should be clearly identified on students' transcripts.

- As transcripts of learning become more widely used and understood, an HE provider will want to consider how the accreditation of prior learning can be appropriately identified on students' transcripts of learning. Any decision is likely to be influenced by the HE provider's use (or not) of credit, and how its accreditation of prior learning procedures and policies link to its policies and regulations on admission and entry to a programme, the granting of advanced standing and criteria for progression. HE providers' approaches to identifying accredited learning on students' transcripts are also likely to be influenced by the data set recommended for inclusion on students' transcripts outlined in the *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* and/or the data fields specified in the *Diploma Supplement*.

Information

Principle 4:

Higher education providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning.

- Higher education providers will develop their own policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning, reflecting their individual organisational structures and missions.
- The information that an HE provider makes available to applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders will typically include an explanation of what will, and will not, be accredited (i.e. demonstrable learning and not experience alone); when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning can be made; and the nature of any support and advice available to applicants.
- Applicants particularly will appreciate clear information and guidance on how claims for accreditation should be presented and submitted, including the scope and nature of the evidence that will be required to support the claim, and any time limits applied to the currency of evidence supplied. The assessment procedures and methods, including how a successful claim for accreditation will be presented on a transcript of learning, need to be clear and transparent to all staff, applicants, examiners and stakeholders.
- Details of how a candidate's standing on a programme, including, if appropriate, the award of credit and how accredited learning will affect the availability of any potential awards or qualification classifications and any available interim qualifications or stopping off points, will need to be considered by HE providers when devising their policies and providing guidance to staff, applicants, examiners and stakeholders.
- HE providers will also want to ensure that their policies on the requirements of professional and regulatory bodies; the possible outcomes of a claim, such as partial accreditation and/or opportunities for the re-submission of an unsuccessful claim; the fees charged for the consideration of claims and for subsequent planned learning; and the circumstances, if any, in which an appeal against a decision on the accreditation of prior learning would be considered, and the procedures to be followed, are clear and readily accessible.
- An HE provider may also want to consider whether a single, institution-wide policy and set of procedures should apply to all claims, or whether diversity in policy and practice is acceptable, perhaps to permit programme/subject/ profession-specific issues to be addressed. The nature and extent of any divergence in policy and practice will need to be made clear and transparent.

Principle 5:

The terminology, scope and boundaries used by an HE provider in its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.

- Higher education providers are encouraged to set out clearly and unambiguously definitions of the terms they have adopted in the documentation setting out their policies, procedures and approaches to the accreditation of prior learning.
- Clear descriptions of the scope and boundaries of the policies, procedures and practices adopted for the accreditation of prior learning may assist an HE provider with their

implementation. Applicants, academic staff, stakeholders, assessors and examiners will find it beneficial to have clear and transparent information about where policies and procedures for accreditation of prior experiential learning are the same as, and where they differ from, those used to consider claims for accreditation based on previously certificated learning.

Principle 6:

Information and guidance materials outlining the process(es) for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or previously certificated learning should be clear, accurate and easily accessible.

- Each of the stages in the processes for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or prior certificated learning should be carefully identified. Clear and readily available documentation making explicit how each of these stages are managed, and the roles and responsibilities of staff, internal and external assessors, verifiers and examiners, and applicants themselves, at each of the stages, can assist the smooth implementation of the HE provider's policies and procedures.

Principle 7:

Higher education providers should consider the range and form(s) of assessment appropriate to consider claims for the recognition of learning.

- Higher education providers may wish to consider the range of assessment tools they will permit (and encourage) to be used in assessing claims for the recognition of learning and the appropriateness of these tools.
- Assessment tools often used in the accreditation of experiential learning include a portfolio of evidence; a focused interview or viva; and completion of a piece of work and a reflective account/diary of the learning achieved, or completion of the usual assessment used to demonstrate learning in the module/course/programme for which equivalence is being claimed.
- The assessment of portfolios is widely used by HE providers. Guidance on portfolio preparation can helpfully address such factors as the nature and volume of the evidence to be included, requirements as to its currency and any necessity for independent verification of evidence. An HE provider may also wish to include guidance on the language in which evidence should be presented, together with guidance on any translation requirements and responsibilities.

Principle 8:

The criteria to be used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be made explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders and assessors and examiners.

- The assessment of learning derived from experience should, in general, be determined by the same institutional internal and external quality assurance procedures as the assessment of learning through more traditional routes.
- Any decision on the accreditation of prior learning will be an academic judgement about the equivalence of the learning derived from experience and the learning that might otherwise have been assessed during the course or programme, or evidenced by a qualification or other form of certificated learning recognised in the institution's entry requirements.
- Decisions about the equivalence of learning should be informed by reference to explicit criteria such as those contained within programme specifications and statements of learning outcomes (for example, the combination of skills and learning outcomes, level, subject knowledge and understanding). Statements of professional competency (for example, where required by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies) may also be relevant and should be applied as appropriate. Higher education providers will also need to consider whether decisions about equivalence require evidence of an exact and complete match to the learning and achievement that would otherwise need to be demonstrated when studying the validated programme and undertaking its assessment requirements.

- In common with good practice in assessment generally, processes and procedures for the assessment of learning derived from experience and/or prior certificated learning should demonstrate objectivity, be clear and consistently applied.

Principle 9:

Applicants should be fully informed of the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for the accreditation of prior learning.

- The nature of experiential learning may require that a variety of instruments be used to evidence learning (egg portfolios, interviews, artefacts, projects etc). In determining the nature and range of evidence appropriate to support a claim for the accreditation of prior learning, HE providers may wish to consider the following criteria:
 - Acceptability - is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?
 - Sufficiency - is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?
 - Authenticity - is the evidence clearly related to the applicants' own efforts and achievements?
 - Currency - does the evidence relate to current learning? Where HE providers and/or professional, statutory or regulatory bodies have specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification, or demonstration of learning, these should be made clear and transparent.

Principle 10:

The assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures.

- The assessment of learning derived from experience should, in general, be subject to the same institutional internal and external quality assurance procedures as assessment of learning through more traditional routes. Assessment methods must be appropriate to the evidence provided, and the criteria by which it will be assessed must be clear.

Roles and responsibilities

Principle 11:

The locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly specified.

- An HE provider will want to outline clearly where the authority lies for making the decision to accredit learning derived from experience and/or prior certificated study, and the procedures to be followed.
- An HE provider will want to consider whether HE arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning should be managed centrally or devolved among its departments/schools/faculties. Similarly, an HE provider will want to discuss with its partner organisations where the locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning are located.
- The respective roles and responsibilities of individual assessors, assessment panels/boards and external examiners will need to be addressed and defined in the accreditation procedures. HE providers will need to ensure that all involved with the process are competent to undertake their roles, and have the time and resources to do so.

Principle 12:

All staff associated with the accreditation of prior learning should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined. Full details of all roles and responsibilities should be available to all associated staff and applicants.

- Staff, including those of partner organisations and external examiners, need to be informed about the HE provider's approach to the accreditation of prior learning and the opportunities available to applicants to seek such accreditation. Staff will need to be aware of the

circumstances in which they might contribute to the accreditation of prior learning process(es).

- Applicants will also need to be informed about their own responsibilities within the process(es), for example, their responsibilities towards the integrity of the process to assess their learning and any time limits within which they must submit their claim.
- Applicants should be informed, at the outset of the process, about any fees that are payable to an HE provider for the consideration of claims for the accreditation of prior learning. The language in which claims and evidence should be presented, together with any responsibilities for translation should also be made clear.

Principle 13:

Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.

- Higher education providers should ensure that all staff, including those of partner organisations and external examiners, involved in the process(es) of accreditation of prior learning are adequately informed, appropriately trained and supported to undertake their role(s).
- The roles of those who advise and support applicants with the preparation of evidence to support their claim, and the role of assessing claims, should be clearly delineated.

Support

Principle 14:

Clear guidance should be given to applicants about when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.

- When developing and refining its policies for the accreditation of prior learning, an HE provider may find it advisable to consider claims:
 - only prior to the start of the programme;
 - within a designated time from the start of the programme (in order to provide a candidate/applicant with an opportunity to consider, once they have started their studies, the relevance of their prior learning);
 - from applicants at any time during of the programme (perhaps in order to allow part-time applicants to demonstrate learning from any employment or other activity being undertaken in parallel to their HE course). Under such circumstances an HE provider will also want to consider the number of claims, in total, that will be permitted.
- In determining its approach to the timing of the submission of claims, an HE provider may wish to consider its mission and objectives in relation to widening participation and improved access to its awards, and how these may be best served by its approach to the accreditation of prior learning. Whether the approach adopted will promote or compromise equality of opportunity and how, for example, part-time students may be affected, might also be usefully discussed.
- An HE provider may wish to consider whether curriculum design should explicitly facilitate claims for the accreditation of prior learning and if so, the potential effects on the coherence of the HE learning experience and the potential influence on applicants' motivation to take up opportunities to submit a claim.

Principle 15:

Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for the accreditation of prior learning and to provide feedback on decisions.

- Support available to applicants will vary according to the HE provider's approach to the accreditation of prior learning and the nature and number of claims it receives.
- Applicants will find it useful to receive information and advice about the assessment procedures and an explanation of the learning that would need to be evidenced and the nature of the evidence to be provided.

- Active support for applicants making a claim may be provided during the process in the form of a short course or module to prepare applicants to reflect upon their experiences and describe and analyse their learning, or via tools to assist applicants to reflect upon their experiences and identify and evidence the learning gained from those experiences.
- Reflective learning can be a difficult concept, but is fundamental to the accreditation of learning from experience. Support to applicants preparing to evidence their learning may be connected to an institution's approach to the introduction of progress files for higher education and, in particular, personal development planning or with other initiatives to promote reflective learning.
- Applicants should also be supported by effective, timely and appropriate feedback and HE providers may wish to consider when and how feedback is provided and how such feedback promotes future learning and progression.

Monitoring and review

Principle 16:

Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.

- Regular review of policies and practices will assist an HE provider in assuring itself, applicants, partner organisations and stakeholders of the quality of its approach towards the accreditation of prior learning and the maintenance of academic standards.
- The assurance of quality and standards may be included in an institution's general procedures. An HE provider may, however, also wish to consider in particular how judgements about claims are verified and whether decisions are shared in ways that promote consistency and equity. Feedback from external examiners involved in the process(es) can also be a useful source of information, and ways in which this information might be taken into account and acted upon should be considered.
- The opportunities for collecting, considering and acting upon feedback from applicants who have made a claim for the accreditation of prior learning, and mechanisms for tracking and monitoring the progress and performance of applicants who have made a successful claim for the accreditation of prior learning, including in relation to other applicants who have not made similar claims for accreditation, might also be considered.

Annex A

Dutch Quality Code for RPL (EVC)

Code	Uitwerking
1. Het doel van EVC is het zichtbaar maken, waarderen en erkennen van individuele competenties. Het erkennen van verworven competenties heeft een waarde in zichzelf en draagt bij aan employability. EVC leidt in veel gevallen tot verdere loopbaangerelateerde persoonlijke ontwikkeling.	1.1 Aan de EVC-procedure is expliciet een doel verbonden. 1.2 De EVC biedende organisatie en elk individu hebben overeenstemming bereikt over het gebruik van de resultaten van EVC.
2. Bevoegdheden van deelnemers EVC beantwoordt aan de behoefte van het individu. Rechten en afspraken met de EVC biedende organisatie zijn duidelijk verwoord.	2.1 De toegankelijkheid van de EVC-procedure voor deelnemers is vastgelegd. 2.2 Deelname aan de EVC-procedure vindt in principe plaats op basis van vrijwilligheid. 2.3 De EVC biedende organisatie en de deelnemer hebben afspraken gemaakt over het optimaal doorlopen van de EVC-procedure. 2.4 De deelnemer beslist of hij/zij deelneemt aan de EVC-procedure en ontvangt daartoe alle relevante informatie. 2.5 Het tijdpad voor de gehele procedure is realistisch, haalbaar en vooraf bekend. 2.6 De privacy van de deelnemer is gewaarborgd en de resultaten van de EVC-procedure zijn eigendom van de deelnemer, tenzij anders vooraf overeengekomen. 2.7 De deelnemer heeft het recht om in beroep te gaan en de mogelijkheid hiertoe is geregeld.
3. Procedure en instrumenten zijn betrouwbaar en gebaseerd op goede standaarden Vertrouwen is het sleutelbegrip. Vertrouwen heeft te maken met civiel effect, goed gedefinieerde standaarden, duidelijke informatie over de manier waarop assessments worden uitgevoerd en op basis van welke argumenten conclusies zijn getrokken.	3.1 Taken en bevoegdheden van alle betrokkenen in alle fasen van de procedure zijn bekend en functioneren. 3.2 Er wordt gebruik gemaakt van een standaard die is afgestemd op het relevante werkveld en die leidt tot civiel effect. 3.3 De gelijkwaardigheid van de EVC-procedure met een initieel traject moet worden aangetoond. 3.4 De betrouwbaarheid en validiteit van de gehanteerde assessment-instrumenten en procedures is gegarandeerd, ook als die extern worden ingekocht. 3.5 Het beoordelingsinstrumentarium maakt gebruik van bewijsmateriaal dat waar dan ook is behaald. 3.6 De deelnemer heeft recht op een afsluitend gesprek, wordt geïnformeerd over de uitslag. Deze uitslag, inclusief de civiele waarde van de uitslag wordt vastgelegd in een EVC-rapportage.

Code	Uitwerking
<p>4. Assessoren en begeleiders zijn competent, onafhankelijk en onpartijdig</p> <p>Onafhankelijkheid en onpartijdigheid zijn cruciale factoren binnen de beoordeling en zijn ingebed in de rollen en verantwoordelijkheden van de betrokken assessoren. Het is van groot belang om onnodige vermenigving van rollen te voorkomen. Onpartijdigheid kan versterkt worden door training en het gebruik van netwerken.</p>	4.1 De onafhankelijkheid van de assessoren is gewaarborgd.
	4.2 De rol van begeleiders en assessoren is gescheiden.
	4.3 De begeleiders zijn aantoonbaar competent. Zij zijn in staat om procedures te presenteren, individuen te interviewen, te begeleiden en feedback te geven, ze zijn vakbekwaam in het beroep waarin ze begeleiden.
	4.4 De assessoren zijn aantoonbaar competent. Zij zijn in staat om individuen te interviewen, feedback te geven en te beoordelen, zij zijn in staat om te assessmentresultaten te communiceren, ze zijn vakbekwaam in het beroep waarvoor ze het assessment uitvoeren.
	4.5 Begeleiders en assessoren onderhouden hun bekwaamheid.
<p>5. De kwaliteit van EVC procedures is geborgd en wordt continu verbeterd</p> <p>De kwaliteit van de EVC procedure en het bij de procedure gehanteerde instrumentarium zijn geborgd. Er vinden regelmatig evaluaties plaats. De resultaten worden verwerkt in verbeteracties.</p>	5.1 De EVC-procedure is openbaar.
	5.2 Evaluatie van doelstellingen, procedure, beoordelingskader, beoordelingsinstrumenten, kwaliteit van assessoren en begeleiders, EVC beheer vindt regelmatig plaats.
	5.3 Evaluatie bij de deelnemers vormt een vast onderdeel van de kwaliteitsborging.
	5.4 De organisatie verantwoordt zich over de kwaliteit van de EVC.
	5.5 De evaluatie en het daarop gebaseerde verbeterbeleid van de EVC procedure is ingebed in bestaande kwaliteitssystemen van de organisatie.

Annex B

COMMON EUROPEAN PRINCIPLES for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

For VET . 2004

A set of common European principles for validation will be organised according to six main themes; *purpose of validation, individual entitlements, responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders, confidence and trust, impartiality and credibility and legitimacy.*

The European principles should be used as a guide and common reference point for development and implementation of methods and systems for validation.

The European principles do not prescribe any particular methodological or institutional solutions as these must be tailored to local, regional, sectoral or national needs. The principles do, however, point to a set of basic requirements which it is of the utmost importance to achieve if confidence, impartiality and credibility are to be achieved and retained.

1 THE PURPOSE OF VALIDATION

The overall aim of validation is to make visible and value the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired. The purpose of this validation may be formative (supporting an ongoing learning process) as well as summative (aiming at certification).

- Validation of learning outcomes, be they acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, aims at making visible the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual.
- Validation of learning outcomes supports lifelong learning, employability and active citizenship. Validation can facilitate progression in education and training, (re)integration in the labour market, geographical and occupational mobility as well as organisational and personal development.
- Validation of learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired, can serve summative purposes. By summative is meant validation resulting in formal recognition (for example through a certificate or diploma).
- Validation of learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired, can serve formative purposes. By formative is meant the process of identifying learning outcomes without formal recognition (for personal and/or career development). Formative validation may potentially provide the basis for formal recognition.

2 INDIVIDUAL ENTITLEMENTS

Validation of non-formal and informal learning must first and foremost serve the needs of individual citizens. This means that individual entitlements have to be clearly stated, in particular in relation to issues like privacy, ownership of validation results and right to appeal.

- Validation is as a general principle voluntary and it is up to the individual to decide whether it should take place or not.
- In cases where validation is part of a compulsory system arrangements should be put in place to ensure transparency, fairness and privacy.
- In private and public organisations where validation is implemented this should be based on social dialogue.
- In the case of summative validation, individuals enjoy the right to appeal a validation result; this right should be presented in a transparent way at the start of the validation process.
- Special provisions should be designed for individuals with special needs to ensure equal (and fair) access to validation.
- The results of validation must be the property of the individual. Where the results of validation are kept by others the privacy of the individual must be ensured.
- In cases where validation is part of human resource management in enterprises the privacy of the individual must be ensured.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF INSTITUTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Institutions and stakeholders (public organisations, private enterprises and voluntary organisations) face certain responsibilities when they initiate validation, for example in terms of providing proper guidance and support. These obligations will differ according to the specific field of activity.

- Results of validation must be presented in such a way that they can be understood at European and international level. When possible, common European instruments and formats like those contained by the Europass framework for transparency of qualifications and competences should be used.
- The privacy of the individual must be respected.
- Validation should be supported by information, guidance and counseling services.
- Education and training systems should provide a legal and practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated.
- Enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors should provide a practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated.
- Validation should be an integral part of human resource development in enterprises and public organisations and should be based on social dialogue.
- Non-formal learning organisations, including NGOs, outside formal education and training systems should provide a support to enable individuals to have their learning validated.

4 CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

Confidence is a necessary pre-requisite for successful development and implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Everybody involved must be able to make their own informed judgements of the approach in question. This requires well-defined standards; clear information on how assessments are conducted and on which basis conclusions are drawn; clear information about the purpose of validation and how the results will be used; and, clear and accessible information on conditions for validation, for example time and cost involved as well as support/guidance provided.

Transparency of procedures

- The validation process must give confidence to all concerned that the named person/-candidate actually has acquired the knowledge and competences in question (validity must be ensured).
- Validation schemes must be designed in such a way that potential users, be they individuals or institutions, are able to observe and judge the entire validation process.
- The basis (methodologies) for validation should be stated clearly (written exams, interviews, practical tests, self assessments, descriptive methodologies, involvement in a specific field of activity, others).
- Clear information on time and cost should be presented.

Transparency of criteria

- The requirements to be met by the individual must be clearly described so as to facilitate reliability (two validation bodies acting independently must be expected to reach the same conclusions).
- The criteria used by assessors when weighting (marking) learning outcomes must be as clear as possible.

Availability of, and access to, information

- The purpose, criteria and requirements for validation (the references and standards) as well as the use of results must be presented in such a way that they are transparent to all involved, including the individual being validated.

5 IMPARTIALITY

Impartiality is a crucial feature of validation and relates to the roles and responsibilities of the assessors involved in the validation process. It is important to avoid undue mixing of roles as this

will negatively affect overall confidence and credibility to validation results. Impartiality can be strengthened through training and systematic networking, something that needs to be promoted by validation providers.

- Assessors should, in particular in relation to summative validation, operate according to a code of conduct and not combine incompatible roles in a way that compromises confidentiality and impartiality.
- Assessors must be professionally competent and have access to systematic initial and continuing training. Where possible local, regional and national networks of assessors should be set up to assure professional development and coherent practices.

6 CREDIBILITY AND LEGITIMACY

Credibility and legitimacy must be based on the inclusion of the relevant stakeholders at all appropriate levels. The social and professional credibility of validation reflects the inclusion and commitment of relevant stakeholders. Credibility is also closely linked to the (above) issues of confidence and impartiality.

- The development, implementation and financing of a mechanism for validation must involve all relevant stakeholders (for example, involving social partners in cases where work experience is being assessed or NGOs in cases where voluntary and civil society activities are being assessed).
 - Validation bodies need to be impartial and shall involve all stakeholders significantly concerned without any interest predominating. The system of validation, at all levels of operation, should be organised to safeguard impartiality and enable participation from all parties involved.
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