PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY ‘VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING: WHERE INDIVIDUAL PATHS AND COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYMENT CROSS’

11-12 January 2016, Paris, France

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MAIN MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On 11 and 12 January 2016, a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was held in Paris, France, focusing on ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning: where individual paths and collective strategies for employment cross’. This topic has already been highlighted as important under the 2012 Recommendation on validation of informal and non-formal learning and considered by some Members States in their setting up of national validation arrangements;

This PLA was hosted by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, in cooperation with the European Commission and Cedefop. The event was attended by approximately 80 participants from various European countries.

This Peer Learning Activity brought various best practices together and discussed issues such as how validation is understood and used by enterprises, and its differences compared to the more ‘public’ forms of validation; transferability and portability of the results of competence assessment outside the company as part of wider career or lifelong learning strategies; cooperation between enterprises at sector level to agree on shared reference points and on the format of the documentation for skills and competencies, etc.

Key success factors identified along the best practices presented are:

- Identification of the right candidates (e.g. motivated, work experience)
- The validation process has to be rather quick to avoid de-motivation in order
- Good cooperation with partners
- Tailored support (guidance, counselling) based on individual needs
- Clear reference point (e.g. qualifications standards, professional standards, LO, competence matrix)
- Appropriate methods (fit-for-purpose for target group)
- Quality assured approach
- Using EQF and ECVET in an integrated way for validation purposes
- Competent assessors
- Sector-based approach (for example, sectors with recruitment needs)
- Provision of follow-up actions e.g. providing support finding jobs, monitoring labour market insertion of successful candidates

The PLA was concluded with following main messages and recommendations around the following topics:

1. Linking competence assessment approaches within enterprises to order to ensure portability of validation results for the individual, whom must be central in the entire process. This bridge can be facilitated by:

- Giving individuals the right to own the documentation of their validation results, and to take them with them.
- Developing learning outcomes-based standards with strong stakeholders’ involvement and synergies between occupational and educational standards.
- Having a more sectorial approach (e.g. sector skills councils) as an important intermediary.
- Getting enterprises more and actively involved. BUT one need to build trust and convince them about the value of validation / lifelong learning, e.g. through career counsellors. In many countries, it will be necessary to have a solid quality assured public validation system in place, before enterprises can be asked to get involved.

2. Costs/funding: How to best ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for validation?

Who pays for validation: the enterprise, the individual employee, the State? The topic of funding is a complex issue and often represents the bottleneck why validation has not been taken up sufficiently. There is no universal solution because the decision taken on a funding model depends on multiple factors as political decisions, context of companies, and purpose of validation.

Two main funding approaches were identified:
- **Cost sharing model**: those who initiate the process and benefit from it should pay. For example, when validation is based on occupational standards or when enterprises use validation to enhance their competitiveness, they should also cover the costs. In case employees are made redundant and validation is used to avoid unemployment, the State should step in. The individual should always be at the centre of these activities.
- **Integrated funding model**: In case validation is clearly embedded in national policies and systems (e.g. education, employment, social and health policies), funding for validation is integrated into different funding mechanisms. Thus, various types of sources and funding models can be used.

Two factors have to be carefully considered:
- **Effectiveness**: There are different approaches of calculating costs for validation procedures and many countries have not yet identified an appropriate model. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyse and provide evidence of cost effectiveness of validation.
- **Impact**: Different types of cost models have different impact. Thus, it is suggested mapping these different models and analysing their different forms of impact.

3. How to organise guidance and counselling to ensure coordination of validation?

Before guidance and counselling, there is a need for awareness raising and preliminary information that could be given to individuals through different channels, for example, national databases for qualifications, online platforms, HR services in the companies, etc.

Guidance and counselling should accompany all steps of the validation process, until the individual learner succeeds in finalising validation process.
• Guidance and counselling should be fit-for-purpose: according to the validation system chosen by the country and what is sought through validation, counselling can go from simple information to mentoring, which means a more “technical” service brought to the individual to help him gather the documentation and describe his knowledge and skills (especially in the case where validation leads to a whole qualification).
• General national guidelines for guidance/counselling are needed although these services are offered in different contexts (educational, occupational).
• Guidance and counselling should be part of the quality assurance system chosen and implemented by the country.
• One possibility would be to set up one-stop shops for lifelong learning, where learners find information on validation possibilities, learning/training opportunities, information on qualifications. Validation should be a tool for lifelong learning.
• Training of counsellors: A minimum knowledge and skills standard has to be set and specific training programmes for counsellors related to validation have to be developed

4. How can validation be organised so as to avoid fragmentation and to ensure a coordinated provision of validation services to individuals?
• Individual should always be the starting point/point of departure to ensure coordination and avoid fragmentation.
• There is a need for a kind of a lifelong portfolio (‘from cradle to grave’). Therefore European competency tools for individuals should be developed to describe one’s own personal capital. Such tools could use social media or existing technologies like Linked Open Data allowing portability/transferability.
• Individuals have to be encouraged to think about a lifelong portfolio from an early stage on and to develop a sense of ownership of one’s own portfolio. This should be learned, that people should be made aware of (e.g. Finland).
• Need for business-friendly tools developed for and with the private sector. Tools for documentation must enable transferability and portability of skills and experiences also across sectors.
• Provision of information should reach the individuals where they live and work through ‘structured networking’. How this can be realised depends on the different structures in countries/regions. For example, how can public employment services work together with education providers, businesses?
1 INTRODUCTION

On 11 and 12 January 2016, a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was held in Paris, France, focusing on ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning: where individual paths and collective strategies for employment cross’.

This PLA was hosted by the French Directorate General of Higher Education and Employability (Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research), in cooperation with the Directorate General of School Education, the French Ministry of Labour and the National Commission of Vocational Qualifications, the European Commission and Cedefop. The event was attended by approximately 80 participants from various European countries.

PLA objectives

The main objectives of the PLA were to allow delegates to:

- gain insight on the role different stakeholders play in the validation process with regard to employment. Although the individual is always at the centre of the validation process, validation can be integrated in the policies of main stakeholders such as local authorities, sectors and enterprises which can initiate and facilitate the validation process for targeted groups of persons.

- identify and describe through several cases the different levels of involvement of enterprises in the validation process in different countries (identification, documentation, assessment, certification), the employee groups targeted and the way results are documented and used.

- identify and describe at the level of regions and/or specific sectors how validation can be used for managing skills and competences in order to respond better to the economic needs, facilitate mobility of the persons and increase fluidity of the labour market.

The main target group of this PLA were national representatives from the field of education or employment involved in the development or implementation of validation policies, and practitioners who are involved in writing, assessing and documenting learning outcomes in VET, higher education, and the labour market.

Purpose of this report

This report summarises the discussions that took place during the PLA. This report should be used to support the work of the Commission and participants in the PLA in disseminating the results of the activities of the PLA to countries’ stakeholders and other social partners.

The report is structured according to the objectives of the PLA and draws on a range of presentations, country cases and workshop discussions that formed the PLA. The agenda for the PLA is included in Annex A.
2 PLA STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Day 1
Day 1 began with a welcoming address by Marie-Hélène Granier Fauquet, Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research, who emphasised the importance of lifelong learning for people of all ages and stressed its close link to the aspects of validation and recognition. For several reasons: school drop-out, economic competitiveness, obsolescence of certain jobs. Individuals cannot expect working in the same sector during their entire professional career. Sectors and skills may suffer from obsolescence. The impact of technological developments, research and progress must be taken into account.

After reminding the pioneer role Higher Education took in the field of validation, she also referred to the French VAE validation procedure (‘Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience’) which is integrated in the last two laws on employment, guidance and lifelong learning of the employees (2009 and 2014), VAE represents an important system to allow individuals to use their professional experience and personal learning experience in their quest for a qualification/diploma. French regions have increasingly become important actors in validation in recent years, being in charge of information, guidance and counselling. Still, the VAE system could benefit from the implementation of national strategic orientations which are being taken today in order to improve coherence and complementarity of the qualifications and reinforce the bridges between these latter. Redesigning qualifications in “skill blocks”, one of the objectives of the 2014 law, will allow more flexibility

Lieve Van den Brande (European Commission – DG Employment) in her welcoming address highlighted the objectives set by the 2012 Council Recommendation¹ on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which asks Member States to have validation arrangements in place by 2018 – including the respective tools, mechanisms, governance and funding structures. She also underlined the key purpose of peer learning activities, as providing a platform of exchange for countries. It allows countries to learn about how other countries and peers deal with a certain topic or challenge, and to reflect on which ideas, suggestions presented might serve as an inspiration to their national approach.

Jens Bjørnávold (Cedefop) provided an insight into how the private sector uses validation of non-formal and informal learning. He presented key outcomes of a Cedefop study, published in 2014, which studied 400 enterprises in ten European countries on how they use validation for human

resource and career development purposes. The study in particular aimed to explore how validation is understood and used by enterprises, and its differences compared to the more ‘public’ forms of validation. The outcomes of the study have made it clear that the results of competence assessment (validation is not a term generally used by companies) can only to a limited extent be used by individual employees outside the company as part of wider career or lifelong learning strategies. The transferability and portability of the results of competence assessment is indeed a key challenge. Nevertheless, cooperation between enterprises at sector level is possible, to agree on shared reference points and on the format of the documentation for skills and competencies.

Lieve Van den Brande continued by providing a EU-level perspective to the topic of validation. In particular, she highlighted two EU-level initiatives, which are related to the topic of validation. First, she invited countries to participate in the recently launched Erasmus+ call on ‘policy experimentations’, in which validation of non-formal and informal learning represents one of the stipulated priority topics. Second, the Commission plans to launch a renewed Skills Agenda in May 2016. The Agenda itself will be broader in scope, but can be expected to include several key topics which are related to validation in several respects.

The Round Table discussion took a closer look at the French VAE validation procedure and included eight experts, each one representing a different stakeholder to the VAE. They first explained the role which their institution plays in the implementation of VAE, and then discussed how cooperation between all relevant stakeholders can be organised and implemented. The resulting discussion not only provided the audience with a very detailed account on how VAE is implemented and how coordination between different actors is ensured, but also highlighted the different expectations and motivations that stakeholders hold towards this procedure.

Afterwards, Régis Roussel, (Centre INFFO) facilitator of the PLA, explained the programme for the afternoon workshop sessions. For the two workshop sessions, participants were divided into two working groups. Each session included five to six presentations of (national, regional or corporate) case studies, followed by a brief discussion. Workshop session 1 discussed the topic of ‘VNFIL and the management of regions and sectors skills needs’. Session 2 discussed the topic of ‘VNFIL and the enterprise’.

Day 2

Day 2 began with a synthesis of the main outcomes of the workshop sessions from the previous day, presented by Karin Luomi-Messerer and Monika Auzinger (both 3s). They summarised the presentations from the two workshop sessions and presented observations, recommendations and further issues pointed out.
The PLA was concluded with so-called ‘Learning Café’ session, i.e. an interactive session, where participants were asked to move between four different tables, at fixed intervals, to discuss different aspects of validation. The four questions referred to the following aspects: (i) the costs/funding of validation; (ii) guidance and counselling; (iii) the portability of outcomes of enterprise validation; and (iv) securing a coordinated (i.e. non-fragmented) provision of validation services.

The main key messages from this PLA can be summarised as follows:

**Purposes and objectives of validation**
- Validation can be used on a large scale by public authorities or sectors to improve employment and by enterprises to better manage their human resources;
- The individual must be considered as key in the entire process. Individuals have different reasons for entering into validation – this must be acknowledged.
- Validation comprises four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification; though the individual is free to stop the process at any stage.
- Validation is not only about professional recognition: social recognition is also a very important aspect. Validation enhances personal development and strengthens self-esteem, trust/confidence in oneself.
- The purposes and benefits of validation must be clearly and efficiently communicated (to individuals, employers and other relevant stakeholders).
- The issue of integrating a high number of refugees into the society and the labour market is a burning issue in many countries. Validation processes could support this but many countries do not have appropriate procedures and methods established.

**Implementation of validation processes**
- Coordination between stakeholders and policy domains (including articulation between ministries) is important in order to avoid fragmentation of validation arrangements.
- The clarification of roles and responsibilities in validation processes (‘who does what’) is of utmost importance.
- Sustainable funding has to be ensured which is considered as challenging in times of economic crisis. It could be further explored to what extent learning from good practices across countries is possible.
- Transferability and portability of the outcomes of in-company competence assessment are a key challenge. More cooperation would be needed – both
between enterprises and between enterprises and public authorities – to agree on shared reference points (standards) and documentation formats.

- Guidance and counselling should accompany all steps of the validation process, until the individual learner succeeds in finalising his or her validation process.

- Provision of information: How can we best provide and coordinate information provided on validation? Validation has to reach people where they live, where they work. Idea of ‘one-stop-shops for lifelong learning’.

- Tools: There is a need for a kind of a lifelong portfolio, accompanying individuals throughout their trajectories (‘from cradle to grave’).
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLA

Mapping of the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) for employment

Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop) presented key outcomes of a Cedefop study, published in 2014, on how enterprises use validation for human resource and career development purposes. The study aimed to study how validation is understood and used by enterprises, and its differences compared to the more ‘public’ forms of validation.

Jens started his presentation by recalling the four distinct phases of validation – identification, documentation, assessment and certification – emphasising that validation is not always about certification. Validation may very often be only about identification and documentation, without intending to lead to certification. At its core, validation is about making visible and value the diverse and rich learning of individuals taking place at home, during leisure time and at work – outside the realm of formal education and training. While the term ‘competence assessment’ is recognised and used by most enterprises, the term ‘validation’ is not a term generally used in this context.

The Cedefop study on validation by enterprises was carried out in 2012-2013; it included a survey of 400 enterprises in 10 countries and 20 detailed case studies, with a focus on middle-sized (50-250) and large (250+) companies. The surveyed companies stated the five main reasons for undertaking competence assessments: (i) recruitment of new staff; (ii) identification of training needs and development of employees’ skills; (iii) as a basis for promotions and succession planning; (iv) as an integrated part of quality assurance systems (e.g. ISO certifications); (v) underpinning restructuring and redundancies. Such competence assessments frequently address executives and highly qualified technicians and engineers, but much less so other groups of employees. Low-skilled and blue collar workers, for instance, are among the groups of employees the least addressed by competence assessment measures.

As for the standards and benchmarks used as a reference point for competence assessment, the study highlights that while pre-defined standards are becoming more common, 60% of predefined standards are entirely firm specific and internal. Purely internal standards however lead to problems with portability and comparability.

Social and personal (transversal) skills are especially important, and seem to be increasing in importance in companies’ competence assessment. The

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question of which method of competence assessment to use is often linked to the question of costs. Methods such as assessment centres or 360-degree assessment are being increasingly used but can be very expensive.

Based on the outcomes of the study, the following five success factors for competence assessment can be identified: avoiding subjectivity, partiality and inconsistency; the competence and training of assessors; the involvement of more than one assessor; careful development and articulation of job requirements; and the careful development of and agreement on standards and benchmarks.

The transferability and portability of the outcomes of competence assessment is, however, a key challenge, as the outcomes of competence can only to a very limited extent be used by an individual employee outside his or her employer as part of a wider career or lifelong learning strategy. More cooperation would be needed – both between enterprises and between enterprises and public authorities – to agree on shared reference points (standards) and documentation formats.

Jens concluded his presentation by suggesting that the proposal for a ‘Europass Experience’ could be taken forward in this regard, and by briefly introducing the topic of skills audits.

**Challenges and perspectives for VNFIL on a European level**

*Lieve Van den Brande* (European Commission – DG Employment E2) provided a EU-level perspective to the topic of validation. In particular, she highlighted two EU-level initiatives, which are related to the topic of validation: the Erasmus + key Activity 3 Call for ‘policy experimentations’ and the upcoming EU Skills Agenda.

The recently launched call for proposals on ‘policy experimentations’ (Erasmus+ KA3) has a list of specific priority themes, one of them being directly related to assessment of validation of non-formal and informal learning. European policy experimentations must be led and guided by high-level public authorities. They undertake large-scale pilot projects in real-life situations, accompanied by rigorous evaluation methodologies. The application process is divided into two phases, with a pre-proposal and a full proposal due at a later stage.

Lieve warmly invited countries to signal their interest in preparing a proposal, and to form project partnerships as soon as possible, in particular as the deadline for the pre-proposal is approaching rapidly (14 April 2016).

The European Commission plans to launch a renewed Skills Agenda in May 2016. The Agenda itself will be broad in scope, but can be expected to include several key topics which are related to validation in several respects. The specific contents of the Skills Agenda will be discussed at a specific meeting with EQF AG members.
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: THE STATE OF PLAY IN FRANCE

Régis Roussel (Centre INNFO), moderator of the Round Table discussion, highlighted the main ideas of the VAE procedure (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience) in France:

VAE allows an individual to validate all learning outcomes relevant for a diploma/certificate/qualification. Individuals have the right to undergo the VAE procedure. This applies to employees, unemployed people and also to volunteers. The VAE procedure includes the completion of a file (dossier) by individuals supported by a counsellor and an interview with by an examination board for establishing whether all or some learning outcomes can be validated. In the event that some learning outcomes are missing, training or more work experience will be recommended. Funding is an important issue and comes in different forms and from different stakeholders. Various stakeholders are involved, including the State, Regions, social partners and educational institution. The latest law on Employment, vocational guidance and lifelong learning of the employees (March 2014) which is also related to VAE enhances decentralization (and therefore strengthens the role of regions). The Regions, which had already been given the responsibility of information and advice on VAE, have different choices in supporting VAE, depending on their specific local situation and needs.

Following this brief introduction of VAE, each representative of the Round Table discussion was invited to refer to the following questions:

1. Which institution do you represent and what is your role in VAE?
2. How do you develop and use VAE for sustaining employment? How do you work together and how can cooperation with all stakeholders be organised?

Michel Ferreira, Ministry of Labour, General Directorate of employment and vocational continuing training

Ad 1) The main role of the Ministry of Labour in relation to VAE is to coordinate the legal framework for CVET (which includes VAE) and employment. The legal framework is based on broad stakeholder consultation. The Ministry also has a role in funding. In 2014, a law on VET was passed (employers’ organisations and unions were involved). It includes a broader role for the regions in France.

Ad 2) All players have to come to a consensus based on negotiation at national level (on measures, funding) which supports a strong policy on VAE. But it is important to involve the local/regional level as well. Cooperation also means sharing responsibility (e.g. with unions as well as regions).
George Asseraf, President of the National Commission of Vocational Qualifications

Ad 1) The Commission was established in 2002 to implement the RNCP and to provide a link between VAE and the Directorate. The law of 2014 further enforces the work of the Commission. Its role includes checking all VET qualifications (diplomas, certificatess, professional qualifications) for ensuring that they are accessible via VAE and that VAE (which is a right) becomes effective. They therefore analyse all dossiers of qualifications that are submitted to be registered in the National Repertory of Vocational Qualifications (RNCP). In France, they have moved away from a knowledge-based approach to skills and vocational skills/competences. VAE is used as a methodological basis for the skills-based approach. It causes changes in the design of qualifications and also in approaches of teaching and learning.

Ad 2) It was stressed that a partnership across the 16 ministries in France and all stakeholders is very important. They follow a collective approach for implementing VAE.

Yves Beauvois, Ministry of National Education, Directorate General of School Education, Unit of vocational continuing training

Ad 1) This Directorate - together with the Directorate responsible for higher education – is very much concerned by VAE. The diplomas they cover represent 57% of all diplomas available via VAE. They are concerned by all regulations related to schools.

Ad 2) This Directorate also facilitates the work done by the 30 “Académies” (regional School Authorities) which comprises each one a VAE service. For example, the directorate supports the information platforms for users which are designed and some very ambitious projects which are carried out, such as supporting individuals based on their individuals needs.

The Law of 2014 on Employment, vocational guidance and training of the employees focuses on ‘skills sets/blocks’ as structuring elements of qualifications. Qualifications will be designed taking into account different skills sets. This development should boost the use of VAE because through VAE, individuals should get access to skills sets. However, it still needs to be discussed what value the recognition of individual skills blocks could have.

Marella Lewandowski, Conference of further education service managers (universities), Manager of the VAE working group.

Ad 1) Qualifications offered at higher education institutions are nationally recognised and also specific to the individual institution because each university is autonomous. The Conference works on exchanging information.
and dialogue among institutions for developing a common VAE approach. They offer trainings in relation to VAE and are also involved in coordination.

Ad 2) Their experience with VAE shows that although VAE is seen as an individual right it is now increasingly considered as collective approach also involving regions. Furthermore, current developments in France lead to a closer link of VAE to regional employment policies.

*Maurice Pinkus, Union of industries and professions of metallurgy*

Ad 1) The Union represents employers in the metal industries (with 40,000 companies in France) and therefore has a sectoral focus. They are certifiers as well and develop sector-based standards for qualifications. Maurice is responsible for the relationship with authorities, is a member of the RNCP and is also involved in other bodies and in developing diploma.

Ad 2) Maurice emphasised that despite the developments in France, they are ‘not in an ideal world in relation to VAE’. For example, there are fears that individuals that have gained a diploma via VAE have a lower level of skills and competences. There is also a need to further work on professionalisation of certifying offices. Training organisations are not always in favor of VAE because they want to see the training they offer valued (this is also linked to financial issues). Furthermore, since VAE is only implemented for diplomas in the RNCP at the moment, there is a need to improve the process of VAE and broaden the use of this tool.

*Christian Jouvenot, Democratic French Confederation of Labour (CFDT)*

Ad 1) The CFDT is one of the five unions in France representing employees. They represent employees in all sectors and are very much in favor of VAE because it makes it possible to develop skills and careers as well as to secure careers. In France, a high number of employees does not have a diploma/qualification. Obtaining diplomas is a way of protecting oneself; it provides 25% higher chances of being employed. CVET in France is characterized by a rather weak focus on awarding qualifications. 12% of interns are at training leading to certification. Validating experience should be directly related to certification. 25% of VocBac were issued based on VAE.

Surveys have been carried out in the sector that is very much involved in VAE, the health sector: Survey results show that it is not the salary that individuals are most interested in. What they most value is the recognition for them as an individual (personal/social recognition), second comes the professional recognition and third higher salary. The importance of social recognition is also highlighted in other studies.

Ad 2) There is a need to establish skills management system in companies to facilitate VAE. Cooperation initiatives can support this approach. For
example, in some regions groups of companies work together with other organizations

*Francis Pétel, General Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises*

Ad 1) The Confederation represents employers. Francis is also the Vice President of a Commission on Education, Training and Employment. The Confederation supports VAE from the very beginning. VAE supports the work of companies. For example, the description of diplomas in terms of learning outcomes is interesting for companies because it makes an employee’s capabilities visible. Also companies without an HR departments or tools to analyse profiles of their employees might find VAE useful, e.g. in the recruitment process.

Ad 2) The Confederation provides information and support to companies across the country, cooperate with different stakeholders also has strong relationships to the European level (UEAPME).

*Anne-Marie Toutain, VAE Representative, Région Ile-de-France*

Ad 1) This region provides information and advice on VAE: a) Information: They have created a structure where everyone over 18 years can get information and an interview on the qualifications offered. They do not force VAE upon people but support them in developing their career and identifying the right choice. On 11,000 interviewees who have been counseled, for 30% the choice is further training, for 7% VAE. The main question is: what serves best my project? Is VAE relevant for my project? b) Advice: They support individuals in developing a file (generally from 10 to 20 hours, a maximum of 30-40 hours of support is offered to people with higher demand of support). Individuals should have the possibility to use their skills. The idea of VAE boosting employment is linked to the introspective approach of an individual. Social recognition is seen as an important result of VAE.

Ad 2) The State governs employment policies, whereas it is the role of regions to address individuals, helping them getting back into work. Regarding the issue of concern that VAE-based qualifications are of lower value it could be argued that the process of VAE, including introspection, reflection, expressing skills gained in writing is actually a kind of training. This requires partnerships as well as advices (people need to be accompanied in this process). VAE is a powerful tool but requires a collaborative approach.
WORKSHOP SESSION 1: VNFIL AND THE MANAGEMENT OF REGIONS AND SECTORS SKILLS NEEDS

For the two workshop sessions of the day, participants were divided into two working groups. Session 1 included six presentations.

At the beginning of this session, Yolande Fermon (FR) introduced the topic of the workshop and emphasised that in most of the EU countries policies for employment/LLL are managed at local level and that partnership of relevant stakeholders is necessary for implementing validation. She also pointed to the following objectives of validation in this context that were to be illustrated by the cases presented:

1. Validation as support for social and professional promotion of individuals – e.g. case 1.
2. Validation as a tool to secure professional paths (careers) for unemployed or low qualified people – e.g. case 2, case 5, case 6.
3. Validation as a way for restructuring one sector of the economy: before restructuring: VNFIL as integrated part for management of competencies and jobs; during restructuring: VNFIL for securing professional paths - e.g. case 2.
4. Validation as a tool to response to the needs of sectors in tension – e.g. case 3.
5. Validation as a tool to anticipate economic changes and fill gap between future supply and demand – e.g. case 4.

Workshop 1: VNFIL and the Management of Regions and Sector Skills Needs
Session chaired by Yolande Fermon, Catherine Claude-Morel, and Lieve Van den Brande

1) France
Mathilde Lecuyer (CREAI of Burgundy, FR)

VNFIL for disabled persons
CREAI works with vulnerable people and aims at improving the quality of their training and qualifications. These people either work in ESATs (services giving work to disabled people with limited working capacities that offer professional work in supported environments; 80% of employees in ESATs and adapted companies have mental problems/psychological disabilities) or in ‘adapted companies’ (traditional companies with 80% disabled employees). According to a decree of 2009, ESATs have to implement measures that allow their workers to have their competences validated.

Candidates receive different types of support during the
validation procedure (from key workers within the ESAT, experts with experience with handicapped people for preparing their file, and from certifiers). For the validation procedure, the standards/references from the RNCP are used, i.e. the same expectations as for traditional employees. The composition of the jury is also exactly the same but there can be slight adaptations. During the last years, the procedure was completely funded with 5,000€ for each candidate from different sources.

Since 2008, 78 candidates in the region have taken part in the validation procedure. Out of these, 59 were presented to the jury and out of these, 51 got full accreditation and 8 partial accreditation. Only 6 people withdrew. The focus was on the following sectors: park maintenance (mainly males), industrial production, cleaning (mainly females). Most of the candidates were ESAT workers. Adapted companies do not have the same commitment and support structures. Most candidates would recommend the scheme to others because they feel more confident, have improved their competences and are proud of their success. Candidates also developed professionally but only two of them got a job in the mainstream labour market. However, it was highlighted that integrating disabled workers into the mainstream labour market is not the main objective of VAE. Getting a diploma is the most important issue for them. Thus, the focus should be on social cohesion.

High level of involvement of candidates and of stakeholders is considered as important success factor of validation in this context. Sustainable funds are also important.

2) Spain
Lejarzegi Gonzalez Roberto (Departamento de Desarrollo Económico y Competitividad Ekonomiaren, Basque Country, ES)

Ikanos project for Digital Competences

Ikanos is an initiative to collaborate, share and provide information on what digital competences are and how digital competences may be acquired. It was developed by the Basque Government within the Digital Agenda for the Basque Country 2015. The main objectives of IKANOS are to promote the adoption of the DIGCOMP framework in Basque Country and Implement new ICT certifications. Ikanos self-assessment test which results in a personal competency level report. The test is also possible for schools or companies resulting in organisational competency level reports. It supports people to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and to develop training plans. The Ikanos test is used by citizens, schools
for teachers, VET schools, telecentres networks Basque language schools for teachers and more. Occupational digital profiles are also available which present the requirements for carrying out the most important tasks in specific jobs (job requirements). The certificates are very much valued in public job offers but not so much in private companies.

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<th>3) France</th>
<th>Collective project based on sectors’ skills needs</th>
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| Nadine Desplebin (Regional Directorate for Enterprises, Competition, Consumption, Labour and Employment of Ile-de-France, FR) | In Yvelines, a district of the Ile-de-France Region in France, a so called ‘collective project/approach’ that involves all relevant regional stakeholders in the sector of health support and social services support (‘services to people sector’) was initiated in 2015.

Based on regional analysis, a great need for qualifications in this sector and problems to recruit people with the right qualifications (meeting minimum requirements for the level of qualifications in this sector) had been identified. Candidates for the validation procedure were identified and selected in cooperation with the Employment Service. The selection criteria included a high level of motivation and at least three years of work experience in the field. The entire validation process (including individual coaching and training) lasted for two and a half months only. This limited duration of time was seen as important for candidates in order not to lose their motivation. At the end of the process, in December 2015, a public event was held for awarding the diplomas. Companies were also present at this event and ‘job dating’ opportunities were organised. 124 job offers had been identified and during the ‘job dating’, 107 job interviews were carried out. About 25 potential contracts were signed. Experience shows that this approach (linking validation initiatives closely to labour market needs in a sector) seems to be successful: in a similar validation initiative in 2014, 75% of candidates received a job after 3-6 months following the end of the validation process.

The success factors include: rather short procedure, identification of the right candidates, a lot of work with partners, tailored support is offered, targeting a specific sector with recruitment needs, implementing follow up actions/activities. |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4) Portugal</th>
<th>Regional and sectoral interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maria-Joao</td>
<td>In Portugal, validation is integrated in the national</td>
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</table>
**Alves**  
*(National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training, ANQEP, PT)*

Qualifications system. The main goals are to promote the access to qualification paths, to increase quality and relevance of qualifications, and to foster VNIL (RVCC processes). The structures and instruments used include: ANQEP as national agency, Sector Councils, Centres for qualification and VET (CQEP), NQF (same structure as EQF), National Catalogue of Qualifications (for each qualification there is the training standards and the RVCC standard). RVCC procedures are available for people at the age of 18+ without upper secondary qualification who already have work experience.

RVCC is provided by CQEP: They provide information and guidance to candidates and develop RVCC processes. There are two types of centres which are either:

1) based in schools – they develop academic RVCC processes (related to school education); or

2) are more closely connected to sectors/labour market.

ANQEP works at regional and sectoral levels, with enterprises and individuals. Municipalities, sectors and enterprises are involved in developing qualification needs and procedures that can result in RVCC or training.

A new project ‘validation of competences in enterprises’ has been initiated to mobilise enterprises towards more direct intervention in the NQS by promoting RVCC among their employees, raise the qualifications level of HR, and enhance talent management in enterprises.

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<tr>
<th>5) Belgium</th>
<th>Validation in the Flanders region / Certificate of Work Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Rudy Van Sweefelt</em></td>
<td>(VDAB (PES), BE-VL)</td>
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In Belgium-Flanders, the validation procedure is designed as a ‘3-track approach’: It involves the citizen him/herself, who develops the CV/portfolio, a third party (e.g. previous employer who provides evidence of competences achieved), an accredited organisation which validates and certifies. In general, it is a self-steering process. Since 2013, a new wizard for registration has been available, including e-portfolio, CV in different formats. Since 2004, a ‘Certificate of Work Experience’ has been available. It is a practical test of a maximum duration of 8 hours. Only the core competences at the highest level are tested (based on a competence matrix). The certificate demonstrates that one has acquired the skills needed to perform an occupation. The tests focus as much as possible at the application level (e.g. at the work place or in
simulated work environments) because mainly low skilled people are involved who might have problems with writing. The costs for such kinds of tests are usually higher than those for written tests. Since a lack of coordination between policy domains was identified actions were taken and a Decree on integrated policy of VNFIL is expected for 2017.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>6) Germany</th>
<th>Validation for supporting labour market integration of refugees</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dirk Buchwald (PES, DE)</td>
<td>The department for migration and refugees of the German PES currently faces the challenge to support the integration of the high number of refugees into the labour market. Since labour shortages and demographic change have been identified in Germany new labour force is needed. However, a large proportion of refugees do not have formal qualifications or cannot present certificates and there is a need to find ways of identifying their competences. The current focus in Germany is on formal education but there is a rather new law for the recognition of migrants’ qualifications. They have a right to have their qualification evaluated within three months. German qualifications are used as reference standards. Equivalence will be ascertained if there are no material differences between professional or vocational qualification gained abroad and the relevant German standard. In case of only partial equivalence the responsible authority will suggest specific measures such as further training to compensate the differences. Several methods for recognising competences have been or are currently being tested by the German Federal Employment Agency:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- IT-based competence screening as 1st level evaluation of skills and competences: It will replace instruments, based on self assessment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Video-based assessing of existing competences of people without relevant German language skills.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decisive factors for suitability of certain instruments is their scalability on to large amounts of persons and their connectivity within the whole process of labour market integration by different institutions and players. The results of evaluation of competences will lead into individually suitable pathways of integration.</td>
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Key points from the discussion:

- **Collective action/strategy**: This approach requires a high level of commitment and involvement of stakeholders. How to ensure this and how to best coordinate their involvement remains to be challenging. It also requires an analysis and a diagnosis of the local situation to target the skills and jobs needed.

- **Coordination between policy domains** (including articulation between ministries) is important in order to avoid fragmentation of validation arrangements.

- **Sustainable funding** has to be ensured which is considered as challenging in times of economic crisis. Countries have implemented different funding measures (for example ‘personal training accounts’ in France) and use various sources. It could be further explored to what extent learning from good practices across countries is possible.

- It was emphasised that validation can also be used for making **transversal competences** visible (e.g. digital competences). However, some questions remain open: How to ensure that these certificates are valued at the labour market? How to link these approaches to the validation of full qualifications? To what extent can these be included in NQFs?

- Validation is not only about professional recognition: **social recognition** is also a very important aspect. Validation enhances personal development and strengthens self-esteem, trust/confidence in oneself. Nevertheless, for some target groups validation and even getting a diploma do not necessarily lead to a job at the 'first' labour market (e.g. for disabled people). Still, the personal and social impact for individuals should be valued. It needs to be discussed how the different types of recognition purposes can be balanced in national/regional strategies in view of social cohesion.

- The issue of integrating a high number of **refugees** into the society and the labour market is a burning issue in many countries. Validation processes could support this but many countries do not have appropriate procedures and methods established. It was discussed whether initiatives at EU level could support countries in this approach (recognising competences of refugees) and whether this would be more effective than ‘re-inventing the wheel’ in each country. However, since there is quite some time pressure for implementing such measures, it is feared that the agreement on a coordinated approach at EU level could take too much time. Furthermore, the very diverse education and training systems in the EU Member States have to be taken into account. It was suggested organising a Peer Learning Activity on this topic (possibly as a first step).
6 WORKSHOP SESSION 2: VNFIL AND THE ENTERPRISE

Workshop session 2 included five case presentations. The core topic of this workshop was why and how enterprises use validation for managing their human resources. The term ‘enterprise’ in this context is to be understood in a broad sense, as two of the cases presented focused on validation used by the army/defence forces.

While the cases presented differed quite considerably in their starting point and their way of using validation, there was one aspect in particular which played a central role in all of them: the benefits of and motivations for using validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**Workshop 2: VNFIL and the enterprise**

Session chaired by Brigitte Bouquet

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<tr>
<th>1a) Netherlands</th>
<th>Lifelong learning efficient and effective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Marijke Dashorst (NL)</td>
<td>The Netherlands have a long history of validation; but for a long time, it had not worked very well. Also, for a long time, lifelong learning had not been a major issue in the Netherlands. It has become evident that lifelong jobs do not correspond to professional reality any more, making lifelong learning a necessity for individuals. A large number of layoffs in the healthcare sector somehow acted as trigger in this respect. The presented pilot project (actually several pilot projects) is an attempt to connect the instruments of NLQF, ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning in an integrated way, all based on the learning outcomes approach. There are three steps: (1) design the ECVET unit on basis of descriptors of the NLQF; (2) design the procedure for validation; (3) design tailor-made programme. The lessons learned from the project(s) were as follows: 1. Demand and feedback from the employers/sector is essential. 2. ‘Chain approach’: all parties (employers, validation provider, education provider, exam committee) must be involved from the outset. 3. There is a need for ‘rewarded certified units’. 4. By connecting the three instruments, employers and employees can better see the benefits of the tools (e.g. becoming aware of the amount of time saved by opting for a validation procedure).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1b) Netherlands</td>
<td>Labour mobility in the Dutch Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Veringa</td>
<td>When members of the Army reach a certain age, they will leave the armed forces. The Dutch Armed Forces follow the policy that they shall leave with a higher level of education than upon their entry. In cooperation with seven VET colleges, exam committees and further stakeholders, the Dutch Army developed a validation project which allows their members to obtain a formal qualification, recognised by the labour market, through validation. To this end, Army qualifications were divided into ‘ECVET units’ and compared to the closest formal qualification available, to identify areas of knowledge, skills and competence where additional training for individuals might be required. Remedial courses are offered for individuals to obtain the required language and numeracy skills.</td>
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<td>(Dutch Army, NL)</td>
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<tr>
<th>2) Ireland</th>
<th>Ongoing pilot project between Donegal ETB and the Defence Forces to explore accreditation of personnel with low or no formal qualifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Martina Needham</td>
<td>County Donegal is located in the northern part of Ireland. Mobility is very important in this area; most of the border is shared with Northern Ireland. Donegal ETB and the Defence Forces are collaborating in an ongoing pilot project to explore the accreditation of personnel with low or no formal qualifications, with a view to broad implementation. There are about 10% army recruits without any formal qualification. Participants in the validation procedure will achieve certification at the appropriate level of the NFQ. In a first step, for each participant, a skills audit was carried out, for which individuals worked closely with experienced tutors, in small groups, using Europass CV for documentation. The skills level gained through training, work and life experience was generally not supported by documentation held by the individual, but Defence Force is highly structured, organised and has strong internal documentation on training and development at system level. They agreed to provide access to these records without any problem. The validation procedure is still work-in-progress. Participation in the procedure is/will be voluntary. Guidance/mentoring will be provided to individuals. Europass CV will be used to document the formal, non-formal and informal learning.</td>
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<td>(Donegal Education and Training Board ETB, IE)</td>
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3) Orange  
**Bernard Ivars** (Orange, FR)

Orange – VAE validation programmes in the Technical and Information System Department (TISD)

This case illustrated how French IT systems provider Orange systematically uses the VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience) procedure, leading to a 'win-win' situation for both the company and its employees. For Orange, validation is used for internal staff development; it is also used as a measure to retain staff, to keep the workforce motivated and improve corporate climate (e.g. in times of restructuring).

The total cost of the programme is borne by the HRD Technical Direction at Orange. The law grants individuals a 24-hour leave for their VAE procedure; Orange will grant an additional 24-hour leave for those who enter the process. In addition, participants receive guidance throughout the entire process.

For the implementation of the VAE procedure, Orange works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment and the National Association for Adult Vocational Training. Orange is no longer directly involved in the coaching and the certification. Support services provided include workshops (e.g. writing workshops, preparation for the presentation in front of the jury) and personalised coaching.

In total, 460 employees have so far successfully completed the VAE procedure; 72 employees are currently involved in the initiative. Successful completion of the VAE procedure does not automatically lead to a higher position within the company or a raise - this is clearly communicated to participants from the outset.

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4) SONAE  
**Elisabete Robalo** (SONAE, PT)

SONAE – pilot project with a validation centre

SONAE is a large retail company, which is represented in 67 countries around the world and with more than 40,000 employees. In Portugal, it is the largest private employer. More than half of the employees work in food retail; employees are predominantly female, aged 18 to 34.

SONAE is implementing a pilot project, in close cooperation with a validation centre (CEFOSAP) and under the coordination of the Portuguese national agency for qualification. The procedure shall allow participants to have their competences validated, and to obtain a qualification.

The 'Validation of Skills in Companies' project is a validation model that aims to position companies more directly in the
validation process. The responsibilities between the three main institutions involved in the project (SONAE, CEFOSAP validation centre and ANQEP national agency of qualification) are clearly defined. ANQEP is responsible for the framework of the project, but both CEFOSAP and SONAE actively participate in the project design. SONAE is in charge of identifying candidates for the validation procedure and its implementation, with support from CEFOSAP. The latter also provides guidelines for the company. Europass is used as a documentation tool.

5) UK-Scotland

Julie Cavanagh (SQCF Partnership, UK-SC)

VNFIL and Scottish Employers

There is no 'one' system for VNFIL (known there as RPL) in Scotland. It is mentioned in some government strategies, but there is no overall strategy for implementation; there are no set processes in place. This case is strongly linked to encouraging employers to have their non-formal qualifications recognised on the SCQF.

The benefits of engaging with VNFIL to employers are summarised as follows: gives status to learning; drives workforce development; supports equality and opportunity; drives skills utilisation; supports company performance and productivity; improves employer profile.

For a qualification to be included in the SCQF, it must be: outcome-based; have more than 10 hours (credit of 1); formally assessed; internally and externally quality assured. So far, more than 400 examples of non-formal learning have been credit rated onto the SCQF, between levels 2 and 11. Typical qualification owners on the SCQF include professional bodies; employers; social partners and large public sectors, such as health, social care, fire or police.

SCQF Partnership see themselves as ‘ambassadors of VNIL’ by providing active support to employers, e.g. through a tailored website, publications (guides, brochures, etc.), free workshops, staff time and expertise.

Julie Cavanagh presented and discussed also ways in which employers were engaging with VNFIL along with examples.

Key points from the discussion:

VNFIL as a relevant means for managing human resources and skills within the company
The benefits/motivations to employers for engaging in VNIL were a recurrent topic throughout the cases presented. Employers essentially use validation for recruiting people, for retaining people within the company, and to be competitive at international level. In particular, this refers to

- reducing staff turnover and encouraging company loyalty ("The more you take care of your staff, the more loyal they are to you");
- driving workforce development and talent management within organisations;
- raising the qualification level of human capital (e.g. fulfilling qualification requirements when bidding for projects) within the company, thus boosting its competitiveness;
- positioning themselves as attractive employers;
- improving staff motivation, ‘social climate’ within the organisation (e.g. when a company goes through restructuring or a crisis).

**Communicating the benefits/ROI of validation to employers**

- The purposes and benefits of validation must be clearly and efficiently communicated towards employers. They must be able to see the benefits of validation before they will agree to engage in it.
- Try to achieve a more coordinated action/strategy in establishing cooperation with employers (‘acting as ambassadors of VNFIL’).
- Provide guidance material, workshops, information platforms to employers.

**Partnerships**

- The presented cases provide evidence of an active commitment by employers in establishing cooperation for engaging in validation.
- Who does what in a partnership? The clarification of roles and responsibilities in validation processes is of utmost importance.
- The case of SONAE (PT) provided an example of such a partnership, consisting of: national agency for qualification + validation centre + company.

**Tools used**

- Two of the cases use Europass-CV as a tool to document formal, non-formal and informal learning > further development necessary?

**Some of the challenges identified**

- ‘The reluctance of the private sector to let the public sector in’. Many companies are reluctant towards sharing information on their validation practices, unwilling to disclose what they might consider a business secret.
- Issue of portability: (How) Can individuals use the outcomes of validation undertaken with their employer once they leave the company?
- How do employers deal with people’s expectations of career advancement and pay rises following successful VNIL?
- Opposition between two fundamental actors: the individual and the enterprise <----> balance of interests.
7 SYNTHESIS SESSION

Monika Auzinger and Karin Luomi-Messerer (3s) summarised the presentations in the workshop and presented observations, recommendations and further issues pointed out in the workshop sessions.

The key points from the discussion in the workshops are presented in sections 5 and 6. In the following paragraphs, further issues are presented.

Some key success factors were pointed out in the discussions:

- Identification of the right candidates (e.g. motivated, sufficient work experience)
- The validation process has to be rather quick in order for people not to lose motivation
- Good cooperation with partners
- Tailored support (guidance, counselling) has to be offered based on individual needs
- Clear reference point (e.g. qualifications standards, professional standards, LO, competence matrix)
- Appropriate methods (fit for purpose, for target group)
- Quality assured approach
- Using EQF and ECVET in an integrated way for validation purposes
- Competent assessors
- Sector-based approach (for example, sectors with recruitment needs)
- Follow-up actions: e.g. providing support in finding jobs, monitoring labour market insertion of successful candidates

Other important issues identified by participants

- Terminological issues
  - Different terms are used for same/similar things (e.g. accreditation, validation, recognition)
  - How to ensure coherency?
- Benefits of VNFIL should be better communicated
- Validation opportunities need to be further promoted
- Higher education
  - More information/discussion regarding validation in HE is needed
  - Further EC level activities regarding validation e.g. guidelines, initiatives for refugees
8 LEARNING CAFÉ

The peer learning activity was concluded with a session titled ‘Learning Café’. During this interactive session, participants were asked to join one of four tables, for a duration of 15 minutes, to discuss one particular aspect of validation. After 15 minutes, discussants were asked to change tables, to discuss a different question. Each table/question had a table leader (EQF AG member) and a rapporteur assigned to it, who stayed there throughout the session, while discussants moved from table to table. This allowed table leaders to steer the discussion and to make sure that subsequent groups could build on the outcomes of the previous discussions at that table. This way, discussions at one table would not have to start from scratch each time. Afterwards, table leaders presented the main points of discussion to the entire group of participants. The participants enjoyed particularly the dynamics of the learning café, the building up of ideas and best practices and the possibility to discuss extensively.

The four questions were as follows:

- **Table/Question 1: Bridging**: How to link competence assessment approaches within enterprises to public validation arrangements in order to ensure portability of validation results?
- **Table/Question 2: Costs/funding**: How to best ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for validation?
- **Table/Question 3**: How to organise guidance and counselling to ensure coordination of validation?
- **Table/Question 4**: How can validation be organised so as to avoid fragmentation and to ensure a coordinated provision of validation services to individuals?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question 1: Bridging: How to link competence assessment approaches within enterprises to public validation arrangements in order to ensure portability of validation results?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Table leader: <em>Andrina Wafer</em>; Rapporteur: <em>Monika Auzinger</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>The individual must be considered as key in the entire process.</strong> Aspects to take into account:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Requirements of individuals and enterprises are different</strong>: The purposes of competence assessment tend to be different; enterprises tend to assess according to their current needs; enterprise assessment tends to be ‘narrower’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Ownership of validation outcomes</strong>: Individuals should have the right to own the documentation of their validation results, and to take them with them. Enterprises, however, tend to oppose and consider the results of in-company validation procedures as their property.</td>
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- **Relevance of the type of standards used (and by whom they are developed).**
  
  - The development of learning outcomes based standards is one of the most central aspects of this question: strong importance of stakeholder involvement (e.g. social partners, enterprises) in developing standards (the stronger their involvement, the better the result); synergy between occupational and educational standards.
  
  - How to convince enterprises to use public standards?

- **Validation as a ‘process matter’**: With companies, validation is also a process matter; they want to embed validation processes in their quality assurance processes. Assessment methods must be trusted.

- The **sectoral level** (e.g. sector skills councils) could be an important intermediary in establishing the bridge between enterprises and public validation arrangements.

- **Getting enterprises involved**: It might be difficult to introduce a linked, integrated validation system at the same time. In many countries, it will be necessary to have a solid, quality assured public validation system in place, before enterprises can be asked to get involved; otherwise they will not have trust and provide the requested information.

- **Counselling/support to enterprises**: Involving companies can be a challenge. There is a need to convince them about the value of validation / lifelong learning, e.g. through career counsellors.

**Noteworthy observations:**

- ‘Unpacking the question’: the question itself raised several other questions among the discussion groups, such as the specific meaning of the terms ‘links’, ‘ensuring portability’, ‘public validation arrangements’ in this specific context.

- In the mindset of many discussants, validation is very closely linked/directed to obtaining a qualification. This very much shaped the discussions in the learning café.

- Some discussants also argued that validation for enterprises and validation for individuals would be two different things, and that they cannot/should not be mixed (‘Competence assessment is each company’s own business.’).
Question 2: Costs/funding: How to best ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for validation?

Table Leader: Jos Noesen; Rapporteur: Karin Luomi-Messerer

“Money is always a tricky thing…”

Who pays for validation: the enterprise, the individual employee, the State? The topic of funding is a complex issue and often represents the bottleneck why validation has not been taken up sufficiently.

There is no universal solution for this issue because the decision taken on a funding model depends on various factors:

- **Political decisions**: Governments have profoundly different overarching goals, national policies, and priorities. For example, in some countries, validation is seen as individual right of citizens. It also depends on how and to what extent validation is embedded in the education and training system or whether it is seen as something additional/supplementary.

- **Context of companies**: Enterprises operate in different situations, e.g. depending on their size (e.g. SMEs versus large enterprises) or in relation to the type of support for validation available within the enterprise. For example, large enterprises might have validation procedures integrated into their HR strategies and have the necessary resources available; SMEs usually do not have this opportunities and have to use available external structures if they are interested in validation (depending on the purpose – see below).

- **Purpose of validation**: Validation can have different purposes; and stakeholders involved have different interests. For example, enterprises might use validation for recruitment purposes or to enhance their competitiveness. Employees might want to use validation as a route back into education and for obtaining a qualification or for avoiding unemployment in case they are made redundant. The State/the society at large have an interest in enhancing the qualification level and employability of their citizens and in promoting equal opportunities for all individuals and social cohesion in general.

Two main funding approaches were identified in the discussion:

- **Cost sharing model**: Suggests that those who initiate the process and benefit from it should pay. For example, when validation is based on occupational standards or when enterprises use validation to enhance their competitiveness, they should also cover the costs. In case employees are made redundant and validation is used to avoid unemployment, the State should step in. Public funds should also be used
when formal structures (e.g. national educational standards, school curricula) are used as a basis for validation. The individual should always be at the centre of these activities. Individuals could also cover part of the costs but should receive subsidies in order to avoid barriers to access validation procedures. However, it is not always possible to clearly identify the beneficiaries and it could also be argued that it is always the society at large that benefits from validation initiatives.

- **Integrated funding model:** In case validation is clearly embedded in national policies and systems (e.g. education, employment, social and health policies), funding for validation is integrated into different funding mechanisms. Thus, various types of sources and funding models can be used.

**Open questions identified in the discussion & recommendations:**

- **Effectiveness:** There are different approaches of calculating costs for validation procedures and many countries have not yet identified an appropriate model. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyse and provide evidence of cost effectiveness of validation.

- **Impact:** Different types of cost models have different impact. Thus, it is suggested mapping these different models and analysing their different forms of impact.

**Question 3: How to organise guidance and counselling to ensure coordination of validation?**

Table leader: *Baiba Ramina*; Rapporteur: *Yolande Fermon*

- Before guidance and counselling, there is a need for awareness raising and preliminary information that could be given to individuals through different channels, for example, national databases for qualifications, online platforms, HR services in the companies, etc.

- **Guidance and counselling** should accompany all steps of the validation process, until the individual learner succeeds in finalising his or her validation process.

Guidance and counselling should be fit for purpose: according to the validation system chosen by the country and what is sought through validation, counselling can go from simple information (on the validation system, on the opportunities offered by the labour market, on the existing qualifications, on the relevance of the validation with regards to the individual’s project) to mentoring, which means a more “technical” service brought to the individual to help him gather the documentation and describe his knowledge and skills (especially in the case where validation leads to a whole qualification).
Guidelines: General national guidelines for guidance/counselling are needed although these services are offered in different contexts (educational, occupational).

Guidance and counselling should be part of the quality assurance system chosen and implemented by the country.

One possibility would be to set up one-stop shops for lifelong learning, where learners find information on validation possibilities, learning/training opportunities, information on qualifications. Validation should not be treated as a separate concept; it should not be ‘cut’ from lifelong learning. It should be considered as validation is a tool for lifelong learning.

Training of counsellors: A minimum knowledge and skills standard has to be set. Although counsellors may come from different backgrounds, there should be specific training programmes for counsellors related to validation, to equip them with the specific knowledge, skills and competence required to do this job.

Question 4: How can validation be organised so as to avoid fragmentation and to ensure a coordinated provision of validation services to individuals?

Table leader: Marijke Dashorst; Rapporteur: Jens Bjørnåvold

Individual as a starting point/point of departure: To ensure coordination and avoid fragmentation, the departure point must always be the individual. Individuals have different reasons for entering into validation – this must be acknowledged. We should not be thinking from the systems and institutions’ perspective and their needs, but from the individuals and their different needs.

Provision of information: How can we best provide and coordinate information provided on validation? The idea of ‘structured networking’ with a strong focus on validation emerged in the discussion. How this can be realised depends on the different structures in countries/regions. For example, how can public employment services work together with education providers, businesses, etc.?

Validation has to reach people where they live, where they work. It is important to think about these different dimensions when channelling people to the right access points where they can have their needs met.

Tools: There is a need for a kind of a lifelong portfolio (‘from cradle to grave’). There is a need to encourage people to think about this from an early stage on. The competence to reflect on one’s own personal capital needs to be developed. This is something that should be
learned, that people should be made aware of (example: Finland). Tools for documentation must enable transferability and portability of skills and experiences, also across sectors.

- This is also a signal to some of the tools developed at European level which do not have such features at the moment: different types of tools are developed without linkages.

- There as is a need to develop a sense of ownership of one’s own portfolio among individual learners.

- Such tools could use existing technologies like LOD (Linked Open Data), which allow for portability/transferability. Also the opportunities provided by social media could be explored.

- Need for business-friendly tools/more active approach towards businesses: If the private sector is supposed to get involved, it is important that tools are developed for and with the private sector (also keeping in mind social media, such as LinkedIn).
ANNEX A – AGENDA

VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING:
WHERE INDIVIDUAL PATHS AND COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYMENT CROSS

Peer Learning Activity in Paris, France
11-12 January 2016

Location: Ministry of Higher Education and Research – Pavillon Foch – Amphithéâtre Henri Poincaré
25, rue de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève – 75005 Paris

AGENDA

Moderators & rapporteurs: Régis Roussel (Centre INNFO), Monika Auzinger & Karin Luomi-Messerer (3S)

MONDAY 11 JANUARY 2016

8:45 – 9:30 Registration
9:45 – 10:00 Opening of the meeting and presentation of the agenda

- Lieve Van den Brande, European Commission, Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Unit Skills and Qualifications

10:00 – 10:40 Session 1: the state of play in Europe
Mapping of the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) for employment:
- Jens Bjornevold, CEDEFOP
How is VNFIL used by the private sector in the EU? What are the main purposes of competence assessment, the standards and methods applied, the employee groups targeted? How are the results documented and used? How and to what extent do companies use skills audits? How do HR and career development links to VNIL? Connection between private and public validation initiatives? Is certification an issue? 3

3See also publication: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3065
Challenges and perspectives for VNFIL on a European level:
- Lieve Van den Brande, European Commission, DG EMPL-E2
With information on upcoming calls (Erasmus+: policy experimentations) and initiatives

10:40 – 11:00 Coffee break
11:00 – 12:30 Session 2: the state of play in France.
How is the VAE (Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience) integrated in the employment policies? Is there an evolution in the way the VNFIL is considered today to improve employment? What are the consequences on the qualifications and our national qualification framework?

Round table with:
- Michel Ferreira, Ministry of Labour, General Directorate of employment and vocational continuing training
- Yves Beauvois, Ministry of National Education, Directorate General of School Education, Unit of vocational continuing training
- George Asseraf, President of the National Commission of Vocational Qualifications
- Marella Lewandowski, Conference of further education service managers (universities)
- Anne-Marie Toutain, VAE Representative, Région Ile-de-France
- Maurice Pinkus, Union of industries and professions of metallurgy
- Christian Jouvenot, Democratic French Confederation of Labour (CFDT)
- Francis Péterl, General Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch – Buffet
14:00 – 17:30 Session 3: WORKSHOPS (2 parallel workshops)
15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break

Workshop 1: VNFIL and the management of regions and sectors skills needs
Everywhere in Europe, to be competitive, the regions and sectors have to anticipate the economic mutations and the evolutions of jobs and skills. How do regions and sectors intervene with regard to VNFIL? How do they organize to achieve their goals? Who are the main targets? How is validation funded? How do they assess, validate and recognize transversal skills?

Country cases:
- Ana Isabel Vitórica Leoz and Lejarzegi Gonzalez Roberto (ES)-Departamento de Desarrollo Económico y Competitividad / Ekonomiaren (Basque Country)
- Nadine Desplébin (FR) – Regional Directorate for Enterprises, Competition, Consumption, Labour and Employment (DIRECCTE),Ile-de-France Region
- Maria João Alves (PT) , Head of Unit - Director of the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP)
- Rudy Van Sweefelt (BE-VL) - VDAB
- Mathilde Lecuyer (FR) – Regional Centre of Studies, Actions and Information for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (CREAI of Burgundy).

Workshop 2: VNFIL and the enterprise
VNFIL should be a relevant means for managing human resources and skills within the company. What really is the situation in the companies today? Which ones are using VNFIL? What are their motivations? How do they audit or diagnose talent? How do they validate 'soft' or transversal skills? Do they emphasize certification? Have the conditions leading to successful processes of validation been identified? What kind of services do they provide to the candidates? With whom has the company to cooperate to reach its objectives?

_Cases:_
- Bernard Ivars (FR) Orange, Professions and Skills Project Manager
- Elisabete Robalo (PT), DRH, Enterprise SONAE-Continet Modelo
- Martina Needham (IE)
- Marijke Dashorts (NL), Frank Veringa (NL army)
- Julie Cavanagh (Scotland), Manager, Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework.

19:30 Dinner in a typical Parisian restaurant

**Tuesday 12 January**

9:30 – 11:00 Synthesis of the outcomes of the workshops. What recommendations and issues have arisen?

11:00 – 11:20 Coffee break

11:20 – 12:20 Learning café: discussion and recommendations around 4 main issues identified during the workshops

12:20 – 13:00 Final conclusions and recommendations

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch - Buffet
ANNEX B: PARTICIPANTS LIST