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für Bildung
und Forschung

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany

One-off report

**Implementing the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the
validation of non-formal and informal learning**

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1. Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany

Since 2013, Germany has taken numerous steps to develop or improve rules for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012. This Report gives an overview of what has been achieved so far, and looks ahead to what is planned for the future. The focus is on measures for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills which are implemented by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) within its field of competence. In line with the target group definition in the Council Recommendation, however, this Report also includes tools for the identification of skills by employment agencies, for example.

1.1 Strategic approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in the German system of vocational education goes back a long way. This is often overlooked because the term *Validierung* (validation) itself has only gradually been finding its way into the German language, triggered by the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The terms *Anerkennung* (recognition) and *Anrechnung* (crediting) are also commonly used.

With the introduction of the **external students' examination** (see chapter 2.1) in the late 1960s, the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*, BBiG) has long offered an instrument that governs admission to a formal final examination without prior vocational training, and thus encompasses the validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills. Similarly, the Handicrafts Code (*Handwerksordnung*, HwO) specifies the external Chamber examination for aspiring journeymen.

The **Recognition Act** (see chapter 2.2) has conferred a legal right to the examination of the equivalence of foreign vocational qualifications with German qualifications since 2012, and also contains provisions on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. If leaving certificates cannot be submitted, for reasons beyond a person's control, the Act provides the option of carrying out a **qualification analysis** that also covers non-formally and informally acquired skills.

In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (*Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks*, ZDH) and the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag*, DIHK) together launched the reference project **Qualification-related Validation of Non-Formally and Informally Acquired Skills**

(ValiKom) (see chapter 2.3). Its aim is to develop a standardised procedure to record, check, assess and certify vocational skills by the end of 2018, and to test this procedure in practice. ValiKom therefore forms the backbone for a future set of rules for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills in line with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012.

The approach adopted by the ValiKom project is **based on existing initial and further training regulations as a standard**. Vocational skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts are thus being made comparable with each other. In the validation procedure, the full or partial equivalence of non-formally and informally acquired job-specific skills with formal vocational qualifications can then be established and certified by the participating Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Industrie- und Handelskammern*, IHK) and Chambers of Crafts (*Handwerkskammern*, HWK), as the competent bodies. In this process, proven evaluation tools, such as samples of previous work and technical interviews to examine specialist knowledge and skills, already used in application of the Recognition Act, have been adopted to determine equivalency. ValiKom thus represents a compatible complement to the system of regulation of vocational education and training in Germany. This approach opens up new perspectives for people without a formal vocational qualification who have developed skills through work, or people who have changed their career and now work in a field other than the one they originally trained in.

1.2 Vocational education and training: federal competencies and legal bases

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the distribution of competencies is laid down constitutionally by the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). Against this background, the measures taken by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to implement the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning are primarily focused on job-related skills.

Under the Basic Law, the Länder have the right to exercise state powers and discharge government functions, unless the Basic Law provides otherwise. The constitutional distribution of competences in the education sector is, therefore, as follows: the Länder are primarily responsible for the school education system, and for large parts of higher education (federal structure of education). They are responsible for legislation, administration and financing. The Federation has only selective competences in the field of education. Thus the Federation has concurrent legislative powers for vocational education and training outside school (Article 74(1)(11) and (12) of the Basic Law), the regulation of training grants (Article 74(1)(13)) and admission to institutions of higher education and degrees (Article 74 (1) (33)), but the Länder may enact laws at variance with this legislation. Examples

of federal legislation include the Vocational Training Act (BBiG), the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG), the Career Advancement Training Promotion Act (AFBG), and the Act to Establish a National Scholarship Programme (the *Deutschlandstipendium*).

Within the framework of the joint tasks under Article 91b(1) of the Basic Law, the Federation and the Länder may also cooperate on the basis of agreements in cases of supraregional importance in the promotion of sciences, research and teaching. Examples of this include the Higher Education Pact, the Excellence Strategy, the Pact for Research and Innovation, the Quality Pact for Teaching, and the Quality Offensive for Teacher Training. Furthermore, under Article 91b(2) of the Basic Law, the Federation and the Länder can mutually agree to cooperate on assessing the performance of education in international comparison and on drafting relevant reports and recommendations. Examples of this include national and international educational reports. On the basis of the newly introduced Article 104c of the Basic Law, since August 2017 the Federation has also been able to grant the Länder financial assistance to promote educational infrastructure in municipalities and associations of municipalities which have limited financial resources.

At federal level, vocational education and training in Germany is regulated through the Vocational Training Act (BBiG)¹ in particular and, for professions in the trades sector, also by the Handicrafts Code (HwO).² Vocational education and training pursuant to the Vocational Training Act comprises vocational training preparation, vocational education and training in the dual system, continuing professional development, and vocational retraining. The Act regulates the system of vocational training, vocational training contracts, the examination system, and the organisation of vocational education and training, inter alia.

The Vocational Training Act does not apply to vocational education and training carried out in vocational schools or in study courses that qualify for entry into a profession or other comparable courses at higher education institutions on the basis of the Länder school and higher education acts, or to vocational education and training under a public service employment contract. Nor does the BBiG apply to vocational education and training in non-medical healthcare professions; the respective professional legislation - for example the Nursing Professions Act³ - applies in these cases.

¹ See www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bbig_2005/

² See www.gesetze-im-internet.de/hwo/BJNR014110953.html

³ See www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBL&jumpTo=bgbl117s2581.pdf

2 Instruments for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills

With the external students' examination and the qualification analysis within the framework of the Recognition Act, Germany already has statutory procedures which allow the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. As a complement to these provisions, the pilot project Qualification-related Validation of Non-Formally and Informally Acquired Skills (ValiKom) has created a framework for a future set of rules to further develop the applicable instruments. These validation provisions are presented below.

2.1 Admission of external applicants to final or journeyman's examinations (external students' examination)

2.1.1. Legal basis

As a rule, prior vocational education and training in the relevant training occupation is required to sit a final vocational examination or a journeyman's examination. The Vocational Training Act (Section 45(2) BBiG) and the Handicrafts Code (Section 37(2) HwO), however, also allow admission to these examinations in special cases. Accordingly, even with no previous vocational education and training, individuals may be admitted to the formal final or journeyman's examination (= external students' examination) if they can prove that they have worked in the occupation in which they wish to take the examination for a period equal to at least one and a half times the length of the prescribed training period. Training periods in another relevant training occupation are also considered to be periods of employment. The requirement to provide evidence of this minimum employment period may be waived in whole or in part if the candidate can credibly demonstrate, through submission of certificates or by other means, that he/she has acquired the professional skills that warrant admission to the examination. Foreign qualifications and periods of employment abroad are to be taken into account in this process.

2.1.2. Scope and target groups

An external students' examination can be carried out in all of the approximately 330 training occupations regulated under the Vocational Training Act and the Handicrafts Code. No priority is given to specific regions, industries or target groups.

The opportunity to take an external students' examination is used primarily by **people with few formal qualifications**. These are people with no vocational or professional qualifications, but with professional experience. Once they pass the examination, they obtain a full vocational qualification. The external students' examination is also aimed at **people who have changed their career** and now work in a field other than the one they originally trained in. Taking an external students' examination helps them advance in the field they are now working in, by opening up access to regulated continuing professional development, for instance.

2.1.3. Information and guidance

Information and guidance on the external students' examination is, amongst others, provided by Germany's state-run employment agencies and 'Jobcenters', and in particular by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce (IHK) and Chambers of Crafts (HWK). Under the Vocational Training Act, the Chambers are the competent bodies for vocational education and training, and for the final or journeyman's examinations. Guidance often covers the terms of admission to the external students' examination, and what supporting documents are needed, but also what the examination process involves, potential support in preparing for the examination, and funding options. Guidance also covers the choice of, and commitment to, an occupation in which the examination is to be taken.

2.1.4. Procedures and instruments

The procedure for the admission of external applicants to the final or journeyman's examination follows the customary steps in the validation procedure: identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired formally, non-formally and informally, and assessment and certification of learning outcomes.

The **identification** and **documentation** of non-formally and informally acquired relevant learning outcomes is the responsibility of the applicants, and is supported by the competent body in the

guidance process. Applicants document their learning outcomes, first by putting together documents such as employment references and certificates of further and continuing education and training, etc.

These supporting documents are then **assessed**. The competent body checks whether the supporting documents meet the criteria of the Vocational Training Act or Handicrafts Code, and whether the documented work activities meet the requirements of the target occupation. In individual cases, applicants may be asked for further evidence to enable admission to the examination.

Once admitted to the final or journeyman's examination, the examination board assesses the candidate's vocational skills as part of the examination procedure. If the candidate passes this examination, formal **certification** of the non-formally and informally acquired skills takes place through the award of the examination certificate.

2.1.5. Results and benefits

By passing an external students' examination, successful candidates acquire a formal qualification in a state-recognised training occupation.

In 2015, around 29,000 people sat an external students' examination. This corresponds to around 6 per cent of all final examinations. Although the number of participants has been in decline for several years, this fall is mainly due to a reduction in the numbers of those admitted to the final examination on the basis of a vocational training course completed at a *Berufsschule* (vocational school) under Section 43(2) of the Vocational Training Act (down 6.1% on the previous year). In the main target group, namely people with professional experience but no vocational qualifications, the decline is significantly lower (down 2.5% on the previous year).⁴ The external students' examination therefore continues to be an important tool for certifying vocational qualifications in a way that is recognised in the employment sector, and for improving career options and professional development opportunities.⁵

⁴ See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2017), p. 175 ff.

⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 170.

2.1.6. Costs and financing

The Chambers charge examination fees averaging between 200 and 400 euros to sit an external students' examination. Added to this, there are usually training costs for preparatory courses offered by training providers, and other expenses such as travel and accommodation costs. Cost vary between individuals, but average around 2,000 euros.⁶

Funding to take part in vocational further training measures and for examination fees is available inter alia under the Federal Ministry of Education and Research education grant programme *Bildungsprämie*, which covers 50 per cent of the fees, up to a maximum of 500 euros.⁷ For applicants who meet the appropriate personal requirements, help with training and examination costs can also be provided by Germany's state-run employment agencies or the *Jobcenters*, which award education vouchers to this end.⁸

2.1.7. Qualification and quality assurance

The Vocational Training Act contains a comprehensive set of tools to ensure the quality of vocational education and training. These range from national standards for training and examinations laid down in the training and further education regulations, to the obligations of the competent bodies to ensure that trainers are suitably qualified, and to guarantee the quality of vocational training in companies.

The external students' examination admission requirements are also clearly regulated (see chapter 2.1.1). The steps preceding admission to the external students' examination, i.e. information and guidance, the identification and documentation of achieved learning outcomes, and the assessment of the learning outcomes, are, however, only standardised to some extent. Proposals for the further development and standardisation of these procedural steps were developed as part of Germany's ESF-funded structural programme to promote vocational qualification, *Perspektive Berufsabschluss* (2008-2013).⁹ These approaches are being implemented by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce (IHK) and Chambers of Crafts (HWK) through guidelines and handouts, and are being

⁶ See Schreiber, Gutschow (2012), p. 42.

⁷ See the German site www.bildungspraemie.info/de/programm-bildungspraemie-21.php

⁸ See [in German]

www3.arbeitsagentur.de/web/wcm/idc/groups/public/documents/webdatei/mdaw/mdaw/~edisp/l6019022dstbai378487.pdf?_ba.sid=L6019022DSTBAI378490

⁹ The outcomes and working materials are available on the Internet [in German]: www.perspektive-berufsabschluss.de/de/811.php

used to optimise their external students' examination admission procedures. The ValiKom pilot project (presented in chapter 2.3) is, moreover, also developing a new, standardised procedure for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills; after successful testing, this may also lead to admission to the external students' examination.

2.2 Recognition of foreign qualifications

2.2.1. Legal basis

The **Act to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications acquired abroad**¹⁰ (Recognition Act), which entered into force on 1 April 2012, creates, for the federally regulated professions, a universal legal right to the examination of the equivalence of foreign vocational qualifications with German qualifications. Since 1 July 2014, corresponding recognition acts have also been in force in all Länder for professions regulated by Land law (teacher, early childhood educator, etc.).

The recognition procedure examines whether documents (certificates and diplomas, etc.) can be used to determine the equivalence of a foreign vocational qualification with a German vocational qualification (reference profession). The examination is based on defined criteria such as training content and duration. The prerequisite, and therefore the most important document for the formal examination, is the document certifying a foreign vocational qualification. If the foreign vocational education and training shows substantial deficits with respect to the reference profession, a second step is carried out to examine whether other evidence can be submitted to demonstrate the required skills and knowledge. In this way, the process can take account of learning outcomes that have been acquired informally (work experience) or non-formally (continuing education and training). Again, the learning outcomes achieved must be documented.¹¹

Applicants are not always able to provide supporting documents to demonstrate their qualifications. This is especially true of refugees, who often cannot submit valid documents, or cannot produce all of the documents required, for reasons beyond their control. In such cases, "other suitable procedures" pursuant to Article 14 of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) or Article 50b of the Handicrafts Code (HwO) (i.e. **qualification analyses**) can be used to assess

¹⁰ See www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bqfg/

¹¹ See Böse et al. (2014), p. 30.

professional skills, knowledge and abilities. The qualification analysis procedure is presented in chapter 2.2.4. Similar rules are found in the Länder recognition acts.

2.2.2. Scope and target groups

The Recognition Act is aimed at individuals with a vocational qualification acquired abroad. These are vocational qualifications obtained at a state or state-recognised educational institution, or through a state-approved course. Not only does the Recognition Act benefit professionals in regulated professions, such as doctors and caregivers, it also helps skilled workers with vocational qualifications in non-regulated training occupations, for example in skilled trades, industry and commerce. Skilled workers in non-regulated occupations do not need formal recognition to practice their profession, but can improve their job opportunities by obtaining formal recognition of their foreign qualifications.

2.2.3. Information and guidance

Comprehensive **information** on professional recognition can be found on the information portal Recognition in Germany¹² and on the BQ-Portal - the information portal for foreign professional qualifications.¹³ Additionally, the *anabin* database maintained by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Standing Conference, KMK) - Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB)¹⁴ is available (in German only) as a source of information for the recognition of foreign university degrees.

With the contact points of the Integration through Qualification (IQ) funding programme¹⁵ and the Working and Living in Germany hotline of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)¹⁶, the Federal Government offers quality-assured and nationwide guidance on general questions about professional recognition.¹⁷

The competent bodies – for training occupations in the dual system these are usually the Chambers, for regulated professions the bodies indicated in the relevant laws – offer individualised **guidance** to

¹² www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/

¹³ www.bq-portal.de/en

¹⁴ <http://anabin.kmk.org/anabin.html>

¹⁵ https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/iq_network_counselling.php

¹⁶ www.bamf.de/DE/DasBAMF/HotlineArbeitenLeben/hotline-arbeiten-leben-node.html

¹⁷ Detailed information may be found in the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Report (2015), pp. 56 ff.

interested parties prior to applying for recognition. The aim is to provide information on the reference profession, the recognition procedure, the legal basis and the requirements, for instance what documents need to be provided.¹⁸

2.2.4. Procedures and instruments

The recognition procedure covers all steps of the validation procedure as set out in the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Applicants provide supporting documents to demonstrate their professional qualifications along with their application for recognition. In addition to the foreign diploma or leaving certificate, this may include other certificates (such as employment certificates, certificates of continuing education and training, etc.). Applicants are responsible for the **documentation**.

Once a reference profession has been determined and the full application made, the **assessment of equivalence** is carried out. To this end, the competent body checks the equivalence between the foreign vocational qualification and the German reference qualification on the basis of the documents submitted. The main criteria are the content and duration of training. The assessment establishes full, partial or no equivalence. The result is communicated in a **written notification**.

If partial equivalence is found, the written notification indicates the main differences found compared to the reference profession. If differences are found in regulated professions, the compensation measures laid down by the competent body, such as an adaptation period or an aptitude test, must be successfully completed in order to work in that profession. This is not obligatory in non-regulated professions, but it can be helpful as a means of improving opportunities on the labour market by acquiring full equivalence, and obtaining employment commensurate with qualifications and appropriate pay.

Qualification analysis

Applicants are not always able to provide diplomas or other supporting documents or to provide sufficient information about the content and duration of their training abroad. This is especially true for refugees, who may have lost their certificates or be unable to obtain supporting documents due to

¹⁸ Detailed information in *ibid.*, pp. 46, 69f.

the situation in their country of origin. In such cases, **qualification analysis** gives applicants for recognition an opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to carry out professional activities that cannot be proven through documents.

A standardised procedure for carrying out qualification analyses pursuant to Article 14 of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG)/Article 50b(4) of the Handicrafts Code (HwO) was developed as part of the joint Prototyping¹⁹ project (01 July 2011 – 31 January 2014) funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This includes recommendations and working materials for the competent bodies, sample tasks and a training concept for examiners. In the Prototyping Transfer project jointly conducted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and seven partner Chambers, the competent bodies are given support with implementing qualification analyses in order to encourage broader use of the instrument.²⁰

Again, qualification analysis begins with information and **guidance**. An agreement is reached on the object of the qualification analysis. This sets out which core activities of the reference profession are to be covered. The competent body then assigns individualised tasks for the qualification analysis, in which proven **instruments** of the Chambers can also be used (including in combination).

Common instruments include:

- work samples,
- technical interviews,
- role play and simulated discussions,
- presentation of work products,
- trial periods in a company.²¹

Qualification analysis is carried out by practitioners who have been appointed by the recognition body and document the results of their analysis. The **documentation** is used to process the application for professional recognition, and is also used in the above examination of equivalence. Qualification analysis is a practical verification, not an examination.

¹⁹ See *Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag* [West German Chamber of Trade Association] (2014).

²⁰ See www.erkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/de/2012.php

²¹ See Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2015), p. 91.

Qualification analysis is part of a recognition procedure and so here, too, a vocational qualification is a formal prerequisite. The qualification analysis, however, does not distinguish whether the qualification was acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning processes.

Between 2012 and 2016, 483 qualification analyses were carried out within the scope of application of the federal Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG), mainly in the skilled trades. In over half of the cases (50.9%, 246 written notifications), qualification analysis found full equivalence of the vocational qualification, with partial equivalence established in more than a third of cases (35.6%, 171 written notifications). A further 24 written notifications required a compensation measure to be effected. In 42 cases, no equivalence could be determined.²²

2.2.5. Results and benefits

Following a recognition procedure, applicants receive a **written notification** of the full or partial equivalence of their foreign professional qualifications with a German vocational qualification. This facilitates access to the labour market and to a job that is commensurate with their qualifications.²³

In the period between the entry into force of the Recognition Act in 2012 and the end of 2016, over 86,500 applications for recognition were filed in federally regulated professions alone. Furthermore, in 2015 alone more than 8,300 recognition procedures were carried out for professions regulated by Land law. In 2016, 66 per cent of all procedures established full equivalence. No equivalence could be found in only in 3 per cent of the applications.²⁴

2.2.6. Costs and financing

Applicants are charged fees for a recognition procedure; these are fixed by the competent bodies and are not uniformly regulated. In non-regulated occupations, the fees are usually between 100 and 600 euros. Qualification analysis incurs additional fees. In individual cases, there are additional costs for

²² See the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Report (2017a), p. 39.

²³ The Recognition Act is subject to continuous monitoring and underwent an impact assessment five years after its entry into force. See detailed information in the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Report (2017a).

²⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 8 f.

procuring documents from abroad or for the translation of documents. There are also fees for those taking part in preparatory courses or completing adaptation periods.²⁵

Various funding options are available to finance the costs of recognition. The main national instruments are the funding instruments available under the employment promotion scheme (Social Security Code, *Sozialgesetzbuch SGB III*) and basic social security benefits for jobseekers (SGB II). In some cases, education funding is available for training measures – for instance, grants under the Federal Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, BAföG*), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research education grant programme *Bildungsprämie*, and the Career Advancement Training Programme (*Aufstiegsfortbildungsförderungsgesetz, AFBG*).²⁶

Beyond the scope of the Social Security Code and individual education funding, additional funding instruments are available at federal and Land level. At the federal level, the recognition grant (*Anerkennungszuschuss*) was introduced in December 2016. Up to 600 euros may be granted per person to help cover the costs of recognition and the translation or certification of documents. In addition, the qualification analyses special fund (*Sonderfonds Qualifikationsanalysen*) introduced in 2015 as part of the Prototyping Transfer project, supports the implementation of qualification analyses.²⁷

2.2.7. Qualification and quality assurance

For continuous monitoring of the recognition procedures and the application of the legal rules, the Federal Government has commissioned the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) to monitor the Recognition Act. The recognition procedure and its implementation by the administrative bodies are continuously being optimised and developed as part of this monitoring process.²⁸

²⁵ See further details in Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2015), p. 119 ff.

²⁶ See the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Report (2017a), p. 48.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 48 ff.

²⁸ See detailed information in the annual reports on the Recognition Act.

2.3. Qualifications-based Validation of Non-formally and Informally Acquired Vocational Skills (ValiKom) pilot project

With the external students' examination and the qualification analysis within the framework of the Recognition Act, there are already tried and test statutory procedures which allow the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. These form the starting points for the Qualifications-based Validation of Non-formally and Informally Acquired Vocational Skills (ValiKom)²⁹ pilot project, through which the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, together with the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), is currently developing and trialling a quality-assured standardised validation procedure in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Like the recognition procedure for foreign qualifications, the validation procedure uses **existing initial and further training regulations as a standard**. The establishment of the full or partial equivalence of non-formally and informally acquired skills with formal qualifications by a competent body complements regulated initial and continuing vocational training in a way that is compatible with the current education and training system.

The project is being carried out by the *Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag* (West German Chamber of Trade Associations) in collaboration with four Chambers of Crafts and four Chambers of Industry and Commerce, together with academic support from the *Forschungsinstitut für Berufsbildung im Handwerk* (research institute for vocational education in the skilled crafts) at the University of Cologne. The Chambers of Crafts and the Chambers of Industry and Commerce are the competent bodies, under the Vocational Training Act, for monitoring the implementation of vocational training, including the examination system, and they also have extensive experience of advising those interested in initial and continuing vocational training. All relevant stakeholders from the Federation and the Länder, and from employers' associations and trade unions, are represented on the ValiKom project advisory board. This ensures broad acceptance, and lays the foundation for the subsequent implementation of the project results.

The ValiKom reference project is aimed at a heterogeneous **target group** of people with no vocational qualification, or without a recognised vocational qualification that can be used on the labour market, who have not previously been adequately addressed by the existing instruments. In

²⁹ www.validierungsverfahren.de

total around 1.9 million people in Germany aged between 20 and 34 have no formal vocational qualification. Many have acquired skills through their work which they cannot adequately demonstrate as they have no official documents or certificates. Their employment prospects, career options and opportunities on the labour market are far worse than those of people with a recognised qualification. However, it is not only the low-skilled who are at greater risk on the labour market and have fewer opportunities, but also individuals without a qualification, who have many years of work experience above helper level. The same applies to people who have changed their career and now work in a field other than the one they originally trained in, or those who, after extended time off to raise a family, wish to return to work in the job they originally trained in. At the same time, the ValiKom project takes account of the different circumstances in life, family commitments and learning experiences in the target group. Hence, formally low-skilled people often find it difficult to prove their non-formally and informally acquired skills in a formal examination situation. ValiKom offers them a way to document their skills by having their – full or partial – equivalence determined by a competent body, and therefore improve their prospects on the labour market, or to close gaps through upskilling training ending with a vocational qualification (external students' examination), or even to access regulated professional development training.

Companies, too, are finding it difficult to reliably assess the actual skills of applicants, given the absence of standards and the plethora of certificates issued by education providers. The Federal Government therefore aims to shed a light on hidden talents by certifying the existing skills of applicants without them having to acquire a formal qualification through a final examination, thereby facilitating the recruitment of skilled workers.

The ValiKom reference project, based on the different Chambers and structured in compliance with the existing system of education and training, therefore lays the foundation for a nationwide validation system.

2.3.1. Scope and target groups

The validation procedure, which is currently being developed in the ValiKom pilot project, is aimed at people who have acquired relevant vocational skills but are unable to demonstrate this through a formal qualification. The target group includes both the (formally) low-skilled as well as skilled workers who are changing job direction, or upskilling, within the initial and continuing vocational training system and who work in a field other than the training occupation. It is generally irrelevant

whether the vocational experience was acquired in Germany or abroad. The validation procedure is open to those aged 25 or over.

ValiKom is still being implemented as a pilot project. The goal, however, is a Germany-wide implementation. In the pilot phase, the validation procedure is being carried out in the following preferred professions:

- plant mechanic for sanitary, heating and air conditioning systems,
- baker,
- bakery salesperson,
- electronics technician for energy and building technology,
- specialist in the hospitality services industry,
- specialist in metal technology,
- warehouse operator,
- vehicle varnisher,
- tiler,
- hairdresser,
- industrial cleaner,
- office manager,
- machine and plant operator,
- painter and varnisher,
- watchmaker,
- salesperson/retail trade clerk.

In principle, however, all recognised training and further training qualifications can already be used as reference qualifications in the pilot phase.

2.3.2. Information and advice

General information on the validation procedure in the pilot project ValiKom can currently be found on the website www.validierungsverfahren.de.

During the pilot phase, the validation procedure will be examined by four Chambers of Crafts, and four Chambers of Industry and Commerce. These Chambers provide **guidance** to interested persons

about the validation procedure, and the documents needed. They also help with the choice of the appropriate reference occupation which is referred to in the subsequent determination of equivalence. The procedure goes on to assess whether the individual has sufficient skills to practice the chosen reference occupation properly.

2.3.3. Procedures and instruments

Identification and documentation of job-relevant skills is effected by means of standardised questionnaires. In a CV-based **summary sheet**, participants in the validation procedure provide an overview of all vocational skills acquired in everyday working life, in initial and further training, and in the participant's spare time, for example through volunteer work. Then, with the help of a **self-assessment form**, they reflect on the skills they have acquired with regard to the selected reference occupation. Support with completing the documents is provided by the competent bodies during the guidance.

The summary sheet and self-assessment form are part of the application for participation in the validation procedure. The application documents are evaluated by the competent body. The aim of the evaluation is to identify which areas of the reference occupation should be part of the external assessment. This is done in agreement with the applicant.

The **external assessment** is carried out by professional experts. Various practical instruments can be used in this assessment. These include inter alia:

- work samples,
- specialist interviews,
- trial periods in a company.

The result of the external assessment is passed on to the competent Chamber. The Chamber issues a **validation certificate** that attests full or partial equivalence of the skills acquired with the reference occupation.

2.3.4. Results and benefits

The validation certificate issued by the competent body confirms the competences acquired. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Chambers of Crafts are the competent bodies for the

examination system in accordance with the Vocational Training Act, and hence the certificate confirms informally and non-formally acquired skills in a way that is recognised on the labour market.

3 Additional instruments for the documentation, assessment and crediting of skills

The external students' examination and the qualification analysis within the framework of the Recognition Act are statutory procedures which allow the validation of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. There are also other instruments and rules for the documentation, assessment and crediting of skills. These instruments and rules are discussed in specialist publications and discourses in connection with the development of validation rules in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. They are, therefore, also briefly presented in this Report.

Portfolio instruments such as Europass³⁰, Youthpass³¹, *ProfilPASS*³², the career choice passport *Berufswahlpass*³³ and the certificate of cultural competences *Kompetenznachweis Kultur*³⁴ serve primarily to identify and document a wide range of individual experiences acquired in diverse formal, non-formal and informal learning situations. Given their broad scope, these instruments are compatible to only a limited degree with the procedures described in chapter 2 aimed at the validation of vocational skills. They are not, therefore, used in these procedures as standard instruments for the identification and documentation of skills.

Employment agencies use **potential analyses**. When job seekers or individuals seeking training opportunities register with them, Germany's state-run employment agencies, the *Agenturen für Arbeit*, assess their professional and personal characteristics, and the professional skills and aptitudes required for placement (potential analysis). Based on this analysis, an *Eingliederungsvereinbarung* is drawn up; this is an agreement on integrating the individual into the training system/employment, and details the aim of integration, placement efforts and the services planned by the *Agentur für Arbeit* or *Jobcenter*, as well as the efforts to be undertaken by the individuals themselves. The profiles obtained as a result of this potential analysis make it easier for the placement officers in the *Agenturen für Arbeit* and the integration specialists in the *Jobcenters* to find the right placement.

³⁰ www.europass-info.de

³¹ www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/youthpass/

³² www.profilpass.de

³³ www.berufswahlpass.de

³⁴ www.validierungsverfahren.de

There is no certification or validation of skills in the context of job placement and training placement. In principle, however, the validation procedures described in chapter 2 are available to job seekers.

The immigration of asylum seekers and refugees³⁵ in recent years has, moreover, given rise to the need to adapt and expand the product portfolio offered by Germany's state-run employment agencies to cater to changing needs and target groups. **Skills assessment** is one of the core components of job placement. The **MySkills project** is supposed to enable a systematic assessment of the professional skills of individuals without formal qualifications, especially migrants, refugees with recognised protection status, and asylum seekers with good prospects of being granted permanent residence in Germany, and also low-skilled individuals from within Germany itself. The project has developed an IT, video and image-based testing procedure for 30 professions to improve guidance and the labour market integration. The tests are available in six languages (German, English, Standard Arabic, Modern Persian, Turkish and Russian).

The Federation and the Länder have, moreover, taken measures in their respective areas of competence to improve mobility between vocational training and higher education, and thus create individual opportunities for advancement. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) and the Länder have made initial provision for **admission to higher education for applicants with vocational qualifications** but no higher education entrance qualification (*Abitur*, *Fachhochschulreife* or *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife*).³⁶ Another step towards improving mobility is the **crediting of knowledge and skills obtained outside higher education to a university degree course**. Whether anything can be credited, and if so how much, is decided by the respective university on the basis of the documents submitted by the applicants. Up to 50 per cent of a study course can be substituted by credited knowledge and skills. The framework for this is set by resolutions of the Standing Conference³⁷, which are transposed into Land law by all Länder.

The existing provisions refer both to the crediting of learning outcomes from formal education contexts such as vocational education and to the crediting of non-formal and informally acquired skills to a university degree course. Until about 2014, crediting procedures at German universities

³⁵ For an overview of the Federal Government's measures for refugees, see Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2016)

³⁶ www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2015/2015_09_08-Hochschulzugang-ueber-berufliche-Bildung.pdf; For implementation in Land law see www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2014/2014_08_00-Synopse-Hochschulzugang-berufl_Qualifizierter.pdf

³⁷ www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2002/2002_06_28-Anrechnung-Faehigkeiten-Studium-1.pdf

tended to be model procedures implemented primarily in projects. Now, however, opportunities for awarding credits at institutions of higher education (especially in continuing education and part-time study courses) are increasing rapidly.³⁸ Key pilot projects include the Federal Ministry of Education and Research's ANKOM - Transitions from vocational to higher education³⁹, and the ongoing joint Federal Government-Länder competition, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research up to 2020, Advancement through Education: Open Universities.⁴⁰ The focus of both measures is on crediting knowledge acquired in non-university formal education courses to higher education. But the crediting of non-formally and informally acquired skills also plays a significant role in these projects.⁴¹

4 Consistency of the validation provisions with the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR) was developed to implement the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (European Qualifications Framework, EQF) under the joint responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Standing Conference, KMK), and was officially launched on 1 May 2013. The German Qualifications Framework has been developed and implemented with the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders from general education, higher education, initial and continuing vocational training, the social partners and business organisations, as well as other experts in the fields of theory and practice. The aim of the German Qualifications Framework is to make qualifications more comprehensible and more easily comparable, and thus to promote transparency in Germany and Europe.

The German Qualifications Framework consists of a total of eight levels of competence, which were aligned to the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework as part of the referencing process in 2012; the EQF acts as a translation tool between the different national qualifications frameworks in Europe. The competence levels defined in the German Qualifications Framework are described in terms of learning outcomes, irrespective of the specific qualifications. The decisive factor is not where learning took place, and how long for, but what, at the end of the day, learners know,

³⁸ See Wiercinski, Müskens (2017)

³⁹ See ankom.his.de/bmbf

⁴⁰ www.wettbewerb-offene-hochschulen-bmbf.de/. Academic supporting handouts are also available on the website.

⁴¹ See Hanft et. al. (2014)

understand and are able to do. The German Qualifications Framework therefore provides a reference framework for the alignment of qualifications, and at the same time provides a guidance framework that can be used as an additional tool to support the identification and assessment of skills during validation procedures.

As well as ensuring the transparency of qualifications, a further objective of the German Qualifications Framework is specifically to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The German Qualifications Framework therefore not only enables the assignment of formal qualifications, it is also open to the inclusion of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. Qualifications from the formal education system, i.e. those the state regulates via acts or regulations, have been aligned with the German Qualifications Framework initially. In a further stage, qualifications from the non-formal education sector are also to be aligned with it. The German Qualifications Framework working groups are currently developing procedures and criteria to this end. Since the German Qualifications Framework does not reflect individual skills, the prerequisite for considering informally acquired learning outcomes in the German Qualifications Framework is that they first be validated.

5 Role of stakeholders

5.1. Working Group on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research set up the **Working Group on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning** in 2013 to better coordinate different approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Up to 2018, the Working Group has been involved in an advisory capacity to help implement the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Working Group was made up of all relevant stakeholders from the Federation and the Länder, employer and employee organisations, other associations, and representatives in the fields of theory and practice:

- Federal Ministry of Education and Research
- Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
- Federal Ministry of Health
- the Federal Employment Agency [*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*],

- Ministry for School and Further Education of the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia
[*Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, MSW*]
- Ministry of Labour, Integration and Social Affairs of the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia
[*Ministerium für Arbeit, Integration und Soziales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*]
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Land of Saxony-Anhalt [*Ministerium für Arbeit und Soziales des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt*]
- German Association of Towns and Municipalities [*Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund*]
- Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA)
- Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK)
- German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH)
- German Trade Union Confederation (DGB)
- German Civil Service Federation and Collective Wage Association [*dbb – beamtenbund und tarifunion*]
- German Rectors' Conference
- Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)
- German Institute for Adult Education
- Concerted Action in Continuing Education [*Rat der Weiterbildung – KAW*].

Other experts from educational research and practice were also consulted on an individual basis.

The Working Group first drew up an **inventory** of existing provisions and instruments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. By way of support, and on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) then produced a thematic overview of skills development, with a particular focus on the validation of informal learning. A key finding was that the approaches in existence up to 2013 had been developed only in model form, and were mostly limited to the collection and documentation of skills. There was no assessment and certification in recognition of those skills.

To improve focus, the Working Group also looked more closely at validation provisions in the Netherlands and in Switzerland.

In terms of content, the Working Group essentially agreed to base future provisions on the certification or **validation of non-formal and informal learning on standards of the formal education system**. This was intended to avoid the emergence of a parallel system which would be difficult to align with the formal education system. On this basis, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research initiated the Qualifications-based Validation of Non-formally and Informally Acquired

Vocational Skills (ValiKom) pilot project (see chapter 2.3.). The aim of this project is to develop and trial a quality-assured standardised validation procedure in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, using existing initial and further training regulations as a standard.

Through its sub-working groups, the Working Group on Validation has also explored the possibility of validating non-formally and informally acquired skills in selected pilot areas.

➤ Teachers and trainers in continuing education

There are no regulated routes to qualification for teachers and trainers in adult and continuing education, and no professional teaching standards. The GRETA⁴² project Basics for the Development of a Cross-Provider Recognition Procedure for the Competences of Teachers in Adult and Continuing Education, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, therefore aims to develop a cross-provider recognition procedure. At the heart of the project is a unified “competence model” (i.e. a skills model) that maps all of the basic adult education skills and competences that are needed to be able to teach well. The model is used as a basis to describe two approaches, and to develop the necessary concepts and tools that can contribute to the recognition of teacher/trainer skills and may subsequently lead to a certificate: on the one hand, through a validation procedure that recognises the informally and non-formally acquired skills of teachers and trainers, and on the other by completing specific further training programmes with curricula aligned on the “competence model” (skills model). In a planned follow-up project from December 2018 onwards, the practical application of validation will be tested in a pilot project; this will be geared towards development, and will trial conditions conducive to acceptance.

➤ Continuing education

The sub-working group on continuing education addressed the issue of how it might be possible to validate qualifications acquired through continuing education, for instance, that lie above the level of the first vocational qualification and below that of the Master. This aspect is now being addressed further in the Qualifications-based Validation of Non-formally and Informally Acquired Vocational Skills (ValiKom) pilot project (see chapter 2.3.).

⁴² See www.die-bonn.de/greta

➤ Higher education sector

Existing provisions for the crediting of knowledge and skills obtained outside higher education to a university degree course usually refer to vocational skills, which include learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal education contexts (see chapter 3.). The sub-working group has investigated the opportunities for the recognition and crediting of informal learning outcomes in the higher education sector. To this end, inter alia a closer look was taken at a model being tested at the University of Oldenburg to credit vocational skills to higher education study programmes.⁴³ The aim of this model is to reduce the length of studies by crediting individual modules that are not re-examined during the study programme. The University of Oldenburg has been applying this procedure not only to postgraduate studies (Master programmes), but, since January 2017, also to all undergraduate Bachelor and consecutive Master programmes.

The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) service helps vocationally and professionally qualified students to put together a structured portfolio for the award of credits. In the portfolio, students describe the knowledge and skills they have acquired through work, and relate them to the learning outcomes of the study modules which they are applying to have credited. Proof of knowledge and skills is provided through supporting documents and certificates from learning, training and work. The equivalence of the skills demonstrated with the learning outcomes of the study modules is examined by expert representatives from the faculties. The introduction of the credit portfolio has led to a significant increase in cases of credits awarded at the University of Oldenburg.

Even though the ongoing joint Federal Government-Länder competition Advancement through Education: Open Universities has focused the issue of credits on universities, there is still a general need to develop the system and, above all, to actually implement it in institutions of higher education. Vital support with this task is offered to universities by the German-language leaflet *Anrechnung an Hochschulen: Organisation – Durchführung – Qualitätssicherung* [Credit Transfer at Universities: Organisation – Implementation – Quality Assurance], published in December 2017 as part of the German Rectors' Conference *nexus* project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.⁴⁴

⁴³ www.uni-oldenburg.de/plar/

⁴⁴ HRK nexus (2017)

5.2. Role of stakeholders in general

Stakeholders are involved in shaping vocational education in Germany in many ways.

The Federal Government's statutory advisory body in fundamental matters of vocational education and training is the Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Representatives of employers and trade unions, and of the Länder and the Federation, collaborate in this Board.

In the procedure to develop training regulations, employers and trade unions are also involved in decisions on the content, objectives, duration and requirements of the dual system of combined education and training. This ensures that the results of this collaboration are accepted by those who offer training in practice. The Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training gives its opinion on all training regulations and on the legal ordinances laid down by the Federation to regulate advanced training examinations.

In the context of the dual system of training and education, a variety of public law tasks relating to the organisation and implementation of vocational training have been transferred to the Chambers as self-regulatory industry bodies (competent bodies). These tasks include guidance and monitoring of individual apprenticeships, organising the entire examination system, and issuing examination certificates and diplomas. The Chambers have to set up examination boards composed of representatives of employers, employees and vocational schools. The vocational training committees also to be set up by the Chambers are to be informed about, and heard on, important vocational matters. These committees are composed of equal numbers of representatives of companies, trade unions and, in an advisory capacity, vocational schools. They are tasked with working towards the continuous development of the quality of vocational education and training.

6 Evaluation and monitoring

Every two years, Germany's national **Education Report**⁴⁵ provides information on the current status of, and outlook for, the German education system as a whole. The Education Report is part of the joint tasks of the Federation and the Länder pursuant to Article 91b (2) of the Basic Law.

⁴⁵ See www.bildungsbericht.de/de/nationaler-bildungsbericht

The most important tool for monitoring the development of vocational education and training is the annual **Report on Vocational Education and Training**. Through this Report, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research complies with its legal mandate (Section 86 of the Vocational Training Act, BBiG) to continuously monitor developments in vocational education and training, and to report annually to the Federal Government on 1 April. The Report on Vocational Education and Training is supplemented by a Data Report issued by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). The Data Report also provides information on, inter alia, participation in vocational final examinations; participation in external students' examinations is reported on separately (see also chapter 2.1.5).

In its previous **Reports on the Recognition Act** (BQFG), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research described the implementation of the Recognition Act. The 2017 Report also contains the results of the comprehensive impact analysis through the independent evaluation of the Act. With these Reports the Federal Government is meeting its obligation under Section 18 of the Recognition Act (BQFG) to review the application and effects of the Act four years after its entry into force.⁴⁶

7 Outlook

Germany has, since 2013, taken important steps to develop or improve rules for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012.

With the Qualifications-based Validation of Non-formally and Informally Acquired Vocational Skills (ValiKom) reference project, by the end of 2018 a standardised validation procedure will be developed and tested in practice. The target group is people living in Germany who have previous professional experience but no vocational qualification. To test the project results, the next step is to extend the validation procedure to other professions and Chambers. A transfer project is being developed to this end.

The aim is to establish a set of rules for the validation of relevant vocational skills, which complements the existing vocational education and training provisions in a way that is compatible with the current system. At the end of the validation procedure, participants will receive a national certificate of full or partial equivalence issued by the Chambers as the competent bodies. Options for

⁴⁶ See the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2017a)

establishing a legal basis for the validation procedure, and matters relating to financing the procedural costs, as well as any necessary qualification or adjustment measures, are to be examined.

In the crediting of knowledge and skills obtained outside higher education to a university degree course, progress has recently been made in the inclusion of non-formally and informally acquired skills. At present the focus is on the broader application of existing models in practice.

The development and design of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning will, in future, continue to be embedded in the continuous development of the education system in Germany.

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9 Abbreviations

BAföG	<i>Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz</i> (Federal Training Assistance Act)
BAMF	<i>Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge</i> (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)
BBiG	<i>Berufsbildungsgesetz</i> (Vocational Training Act)
BIBB	<i>Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung</i> (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training)
BMBF	<i>Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung</i> (Federal Ministry of Education and Research)
BQFG	<i>Gesetz über die Feststellung der Gleichwertigkeit von Berufsqualifikationen</i> (<i>Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz</i>) (Professional Qualifications Assessment Act)
DIHK	<i>Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag</i> (Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce)
DQR	<i>Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen</i> (German Qualifications Framework)
ESF	European Social Fund
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GG	<i>Grundgesetz</i> (Basic Law)
HwO	<i>Handwerksordnung</i> (Handicrafts Code)
HWK	Handwerkskammer (Chamber of Crafts)
IHK	<i>Industrie- und Handelskammer</i> (Chamber of Industry and Commerce)
KMK	<i>Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland</i> (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany)
SGB	<i>Sozialgesetzbuch</i> (Social Security Code)
ZDH	<i>Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks</i> (German Confederation of Skilled Crafts)