

RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Collection of best practices

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Introduction

Formal learning is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional: i.e. the learner's explicit objective is to gain knowledge, skills and/or competences. Typical examples are learning that takes place within the initial education and training system or workplace training arranged by the employer. One can also speak about formal education and/or training or, more accurately speaking, education and/or training in a formal setting. This definition is rather consensual.

Informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience. The idea is that the simple fact of existing constantly exposes the individual to learning situations, at work, at home or during leisure time for instance. This definition, with a few exceptions (see Werquin, 2007) also meets with a fair degree of consensus.

Mid-way between the first two, non-formal learning is the concept on which there is the least consensus, which is not to say that there is consensus on the other two, simply that the wide variety of approaches in this case makes consensus even more difficult. Nevertheless, for the majority of authors, it seems clear that non-formal learning is rather organised and can have learning objectives. The advantage of the intermediate concept lies in the fact that such learning may occur at the initiative of the individual but also happens as a by-product of more organised activities, whether or not the activities themselves have learning objectives. In some countries, the entire sector of adult learning falls under non-formal learning; in others, most adult learning is formal. Non-formal learning therefore gives some flexibility between formal and informal learning, which must be strictly defined to be operational, by being mutually exclusive, and avoid overlap. What is more non-formal and informal learning are important elements in the learning process and are effective instruments for making learning attractive, developing lifelong learning and promoting the social integration of young people. They encourage the participation, active citizenship and social inclusion of young people, and are of practical relevance to the labour market by helping to acquire knowledge, qualifications and other key skills.

In this manual we have collected examples of best practices regarding non formal learning and its recognition. Manual has been created during Crossing Paths on The Road to Employability, project 4.3c within the frame of Youth in Action Programme.

Anna & Luca

Why do we need recognition?

While there is little debate on the importance of learning acquired in nonformal settings, how this should be reflected at the level of accredited qualifications, credits, certificates or diplomas has long been a matter of discussion and divergence. However, there are key points on which a relative consensus should not be hard to reach. Let's start with the rationale behind the promotion of NFL.

First of all, its role in the context of lifelong learning has been repeatedly pointed out. From the EC's "Memorandum on lifelong learning" (2000) to the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020", 2009), the need for concerted action in making NFL more visible and more integrated has gradually moved up the list of political priorities. In 2006, the Council adopted a Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field, which led, among others, to the implementation of Youthpass. In 2009, CEDEFOP published the "European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning", aiming to "support this process by identifying the main challenges facing policy-makers and practitioners and - to a certain degree - pointing to possible ways to respond". Other EU initiatives such as the European reference framework for key competences (2006) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008) have integrated the issue of NFL recognition and linked it to the broader aims of lifelong learning and the knowledge society.

In this perspective, lifelong learning does not represent just another aspect of education and training; it is seen as the guiding principle for participation the full continuum of learning contexts. Learning cannot be characterized as a limited phase in childhood and youth dedicated only to the promotion of the individual's vocational career, but rather as a continuous activity extending to all areas and phases of life and encompassing personal, social and professional goals. The ET 2020 strategic framework acknowledges this approach, regarding lifelong learning "as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning".

But the relevance of NFL is not restricted to the context of lifelong learning. "Its current success has probably to do with the fact that it is also presented as a way of improving the efficiency of the labour market through increasing the mobility of workers; the visibility of skills, knowledge and competences; the opportunities for immigrants etc." (Werquin 2008, 143). In the context of a labour market which requires mobile workers, updating of skills and qualifications and rapid professional conversion, NFL could greatly add to the efficiency of formal education systems, which are struggling to keep up with societal changes and labour demands. It may also provide more flexible ways of certification for adult learners who have a poor record of formal education and have problems re-entering the education system or finding a better employment.

In fact, these two dimensions overlap, as the individual moves across different opportunities for lifelong learning and between jobs. NFL recognition can facilitate both transversal mobility (between different qualifications or specializations) and longitudinal mobility (from one learning context or employment to the next one).¹

1. Source: <file:///C:/Users/LENOVO/Downloads/Recognition%20of%20non-formal%20learning%20in%20Europe%20fin.pdf>

Best practice - Austria

A possible shortening of the study period at a Fachhochschule institution is provided for by “recognising proven knowledge in the sense of an occupation-oriented training programme of the respective course of studies”. This knowledge may be credited to individual subjects or parts of Fachhochschule programmes, with additional exams required on certain conditions. On the other hand, there is the option that people with a subject specific qualification but without the Reifeprüfung take up a study at Fachhochschule. Also here, individual Fachhochschule providers have to provide for additional exams in certain cases. The Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP) and the Higher Education Entrance Exam (SBP) are procedures building on concepts similar to RNFIL. The SBP facilitates restricted access to the HE sector via specialist area recognition of knowledge acquired on the job or in a non-work-related environment. The BRP facilitates general access to HE institutions for graduates of VET programmes that is relatively time economical. In both cases, exams must be taken before exam boards.

Case study - “Tyrol Centre for the Future: Competence Balance and Competence Workshop”

The Tyrol Centre for the Future is a training and research institute funded by the Tyrol Chamber of Labour (majority owner), the Tyrol Provincial Government and the City of Innsbruck. This institution takes the following measures:

- conduct research work and contract out research projects.
- design schemes and projects.
- conduct pilot projects and develop them to a stage they can be implemented.
- research into novel ideas and themes on a global basis.
- network people and institutions.
- carry out events.
- raise awareness²

At the Tyrol Centre for the Future there is the possibility to complete a customised competence balance procedure: This coaching method is facilitated by personal coaches, lasts for about four weeks and is completed with the formulation of career objectives derived from the stocktaking procedure. The competence balance has been applied at the Centre since September 2003. It was developed by a scientific team headed by the organisational and business psychologist Prof. Dr. Lutz von Rosenstiel. In all, four dates of two hours each are provided for:

2. (<http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/about/was>, 12.12.2006)

An introductory workshop, which informs about the general contents, objectives and benefits of the balance procedure, followed by the first personal coaching talk, in the course of which awareness is created of important experiences and abilities as well as the significance of different life situations. In the second coaching talk, personal skills and abilities are discussed with the coach.

Since the introduction of the competence balance in late 2003, a total of 1,600 people have completed the process (key date: January 2007). According to Bertram Wolf, the head of the Centre, queries regarding this innovative procedure have come in from psychologists and experts in the USA, Germany, Bosnia and the companies VW and BMW¹. A survey conducted within the framework of an evaluation study among 1,000 participants has revealed numerous positive effects of the competence balance: One effect is that participants in the competence balance process manage problems and tasks significantly more proactively. They act more confidently and react positively to changing circumstances. These positive results of participation are effective also in the longer term: Even half a year following completion of the competence balance, participants are clearly better prepared to cope with stress⁴.

Special training programmes related to the recognition of competences offered at the Tyrol Centre for the Future include:
competence workshop training course for multipliers;
competence workshop training offers for teachers of lower secondary school;
a CVET course whose graduates are awarded the title „competence-oriented counsellor⁵

Reference:

Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture: (2007) OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning Country Background Report Austria, Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft

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3. (<http://tirol.orf.at/stories/64173/>).

4. (<http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/themen/kompetenzen/kompetenzenbilanz/ergebnisse-unserer-fragebogenstudie>)

5. <http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/angebote/ausbildungen/ausbildungen>, (30.1.2007)

Best practice - Belgium

The linking of credits or other standards to non-formal and informal learning paths or, more concretely, to qualifications (and therefore to the acquired competences) is probably the next step in the process towards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. However, ECTS study points cannot be used for the allocation of credits in such learning contexts because the study points are based on the number of hours of learning activity. This applies to a lesser extent to training courses following non-formal learning paths, because study points are sometimes involved. However, it is impossible to give credits for informal learning paths on the basis of study points. In the Flemish qualifications structure, credits are therefore not linked to study points. To facilitate the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes, work is in progress under the aegis of the European Community on a European credit system for vocational education and training (European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)). The aim is to promote mobility between the EU member states and between the various learning contexts within the member states, thereby stimulating participation in learning activities within the framework of lifelong learning. The ECVET credit system connects with the European Qualifications Framework. It is a method for allocating credit points to qualifications or to parts of qualifications ("units"). Transfer is thus aimed at promoting the transfer and accumulation of learning results ("learning outcomes") for people crossing over from one learning context to another (European Community, 2006).

In the first half of 2007, the European Commission organised a round of consultations in the various countries that have organisations, agencies and bodies involved in the certification of qualifications.

Case analysis with regard to advantages and obstacles

We turn our attention in this section to a number of interesting pilot projects and studies in Flanders within the framework of the recognition of acquired competences. In socio-cultural education, economic and educational advantages are regarded as the "summative function" of RAC, while social advantages (social integration, social commitment, and active citizenship) and personal development represent the "formative function" of RAC. For the purposes of the report, we have tried to distinguish between economic, educational, social and personal benefits. However, the results of the RAC pilot projects are not easy to reduce to a single denominator. These RAC developments often entail different benefits that are not of an exclusively economic or educational nature, but also have a strong social and personal component. The difference between economic, educational, social and personal benefits is artificial, and the various benefits complement each other rather than mutually exclude each other. Because economic and educational benefits on the one hand and social and personal benefits on the other often accompany each other, we opt here for a division between the benefits of the summative function of RAC and the benefits of the formative function of RAC.

Advantages attached to the summative function of RAC

The economic (but also non-economic) advantages and drawbacks will be made clear in the near future by the application of RAC within the framework of the certificate of experience. The certificate of experience is designed to identify and assess all the professional competences (regardless of learning path) of a person and to recognise the same via a certificate issued by the Flemish Government. These competences are always connected to a specific occupation. If, after testing, not all competences required for the occupation are present, the applicant is given advice regarding the further development path that he or she should follow. In this form, RAC is an alternative route for the recognition of competences besides the other types of evidence recognised by the Flemish Community. Critically, it has a dimension of development through the connection with person-specific advice. The assessment standards and success criteria are developed and validated by the social partners, the sector specialists for the occupation in question. One assessment standard is therefore adopted as the norm for each occupation for the certificate of experience in Flanders. The basis for recognition of the certificate on the labour market is therefore in place. (OVER.WERK Periodical of the Steunpunt WAV 2-3/2005). However, it remains to be seen whether and how it will be used in practice.

A number of pilot projects have been started up in the wake of the certificates of experience. In 2002, the 'Vlaams Instituut voor Vorming en Opleiding in de Social Profit' (VIVO vzw) received the mandate to map the acquired competences of nurses at bachelor level and develop examples of assessment and validation of those competences in cooperation with partners, colleges and the Risk Groups Fund of private hospitals. The main motivation, apart from the fact that these competences have never been clearly formulated in Flanders, was to compensate the shortage of nurses in Flanders through a reduction in study time. Nursing training courses were becoming more dominated by candidate-students who had already acquired the relevant competences from earlier training courses or work experience, or via non-formal learning. The reduction of study time must also ensure that more low-skilled people are able to access the nurse's diploma. The recognition of competences is also intended to raise awareness of and professionalise the sector (Vyt, 2005). At present, however, there are no known data on whether this objective has actually been achieved and whether disadvantaged groups do in fact now have better access to nursing training courses. This pilot project culminated in the formulation of a number of recommendations that are representative of the results from other pilot projects and may form a recurrent theme for initiatives in the future.

1. The granting of dispensation for part of a course is at present only possible by granting the dispensation for a complete module. Candidates may sometimes not be granted dispensation for a complete module but may still possess a number of competences or partial competences. Organising a module adapted to the individual might offer a solution for easing the transition to the regular modular path for these candidates.

2. Regulation is a stumbling block for the organisation of placement assessment. Candidates cannot simply undertake a placement assessment in a hospital. Nursing is a regulated occupation whereby people without the required diploma cannot apply for the job. To satisfy the regulation at present either employment in a hospital is necessary or the candidate must be registered for a training course. In both cases, a number of conditions must be satisfied, such as possession of a recognised certification/diploma to be able to work in the medical care sector, or satisfying the regulations in connection with a probationary period. Clear, flexible regulation in the organisation of assessments should render the procedure more accessible.

3. A RAC procedure is an imposition for the school/institution. It is very labour-intensive, but it does have benefit for the candidate and for society. The shortening of study time via the organisation of an RAC procedure involves a minimum cost for the training of a candidate. The number of man-hours invested in the RAC procedure is not compensated, and the school does not even receive the support for the trainee/student that it would have received for a student following a complete training course. One concession for such integration would be to compensate the charge to the school. The support of the candidate could thus be better organised and the candidate's prospects of success in the training course could be increased.

4. The structured regional organisation of RAC procedures that could lead to a reduction of the training course would reduce the charges defrayed by all schools (a group of assessors consisting of other representatives from different schools would ensure uniformity). Cooperation with VDAB could also be an option for job assessment.

5. The target public for RAC procedures needs flexible training opportunities. Certain regions, for example Antwerp, have little in the way of supply of 'alternatively organised training courses'. The creation of evening courses should be able to satisfy that demand

6. Candidates with a non-recognised foreign diploma may apply for assimilation of their diploma from the Department of Education and Training. That recognition is affected by a number of criteria. The diploma is therefore declared equivalent to a diploma at a lower level. The organisation of an RAC procedure could be a solution and may offer the candidate the possibility of obtaining a nursing qualification subject to completion of a short training course. A matrix of nursing courses (throughout Europe and the rest of the world) would be helpful to increase the transparency of the nursing training courses.

7. Special attention is given to the necessity of Dutch for the further training of non-native applicants. Specific measures such as flexible cooperation with other training course providers and/or the possibility of organising language coaching in the work environment may be a solution.

Still within the social economy, a project was set up in the framework of the 'Title of Professional Competence' focusing on the professional competence of travel and tour guides in a joint operation with SoCiuS, Toerisme Vlaanderen and VDAB. The social economy,

a project was set up in the framework of the 'Title of Professional Competence' focusing on the professional competence of travel and tour guides in a joint operation with SoCiuS, Toerisme Vlaanderen and VDAB. The social economy, the so-called third sector, thereby acquires a clear position in the employment and vocational training sectors (Bal, 2003). That project has led to the setting up of a framework for competences acquired through the training course for travel and tour guides.

Mapping and identification of competences is, in any case, more helpful for access to particular occupations within the labour market. The mapping of the competences of out-of-school child care workers in the framework of a pilot project around RAC, for instance, led to the creation of an occupational profile. In cooperation with SERV, a check can be run on which competences an individual must possess in order to be admitted to the short training course. In 2006, this led to the introduction of the certificate of experience for 'out-of-school child care workers'. In 2002, a number of pilot projects started in Education around the recognition of competences and the possibilities for short training courses. One project focused on the recognition of competences around illiteracy. This project is very important for access to basic education and combating illiteracy. All too often, we are confronted with a lack of linguistic competences, despite the level of academic attainment. It also means that access is no longer limited on the basis of academic attainment but is now determined on the basis of the level of real competence and, consequently, on the basis of an estimate of the acquired (and still present) competences, assuming adequate screening methods. This screening must optimise the training time in literacy courses. Existing competences need not be learnt again and it must be possible to grant dispensations (Alfabetplan, 2006). A second project was directed towards the recognition of acquired competences for teacher training (Carnel, 2005). The first draft of the teacher training decree was approved by the Flemish Government in early December 2006. However, that first draft had little to say regarding procedures for the recognition of acquired competences. In higher education, the recognition of acquired competences has been a priority over the last academic year. Current possibilities to reduce study time are offered for many training courses in higher education on the basis of RAC. However, as long as there is no recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the procedure remains very intensive and will have difficulties linking with higher education. For non-higher education, the RAC pilot project created possibilities to shorten study time and introduce flexible study paths in Adult Education Centres on the basis of the recognition of acquired competences. The colleges point out that differences between competences and qualifications sometimes cause difficulties.

Advantages attached to the formative function of RAC

Only time will tell whether the above developments and projects have any influence on the position of the disadvantaged in Flemish society. At the present moment, it is still too early to form an opinion. To explore the future influence, very specific indicators will have to be developed - bearing in mind the improving context for the target groups concerned. Increased activity will naturally lead to social benefits for the individual and for society. Social benefits, however, are linked to the development of social values, social cohesion, intercultural relations and the like. These are social benefits that are to be found pre-eminently in the socio-cultural sector, but also in education and in a work context. Socio-cultural education has had considerable experience in working with disadvantaged

in Flemish society. At the present moment, it is still too early to form an opinion. To explore the future influence, very specific indicators will have to be developed - bearing in mind the improving context for the target groups concerned. Increased activity will naturally lead to social benefits for the individual and for society. Social benefits, however, are linked to the development of social values, social cohesion, intercultural relations and the like. These are social benefits that are to be found pre-eminently in the socio-cultural sector, but also in education and in a work context. Socio-cultural education has had considerable experience in working with disadvantaged groups. It also has the advantage of being very accessible for people who have had negative learning experiences in formal education. Looking at youth competences, the VFJ (Flemish federation of youth houses; now: Formaat) run the aforementioned project WACKER and the RAC Project West- Vlaanderen. The Flemish Federation of Youth Centres and Youth Club joined forces with the Province of West Flanders in this latter project, in which various actors work on the structuring and the systematisation of informal learning in youth centres and youth work in general. The goal of the project is to provide an instrument by which young people can consciously use the competences that they acquire through youth work. However, so far there are no available data for either project yet. One project for which the pilot phase is now completed relates to voluntary work. The purpose of this project was to draw up a standard list of key competences that volunteer administrative staff could acquire. A method was also developed allowing the volunteers themselves to put together a personal portfolio. In the course of their work, volunteers amass a considerable amount of knowledge, abilities and know-how. It is therefore a social learning place par excellence. The volunteers themselves are also motivated to learn new competences in a new environment. Their CVs increasingly include analysis of the competences acquired as a volunteer (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005). Besides positive comments regarding the application of RAC, some critics were also added. Sample of the points of the view included the following (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005):

- the developed competences mainly concern key competences and interpersonal competences;
- the majority of volunteers take a negative view of the formal recognition of the learning effect of voluntary work;
- the RAC objective must primarily be defined in terms of the volunteer himself or herself;
- an external assessment at the request of the volunteer is usually considered in terms of a civil effect;
- the practical execution of an RAC procedure depends on its intended goal.

The search for a civil effect outside of the voluntary domain requires more widely applicable standards against which it is possible to test the competences with a certain guarantee of objectivity and reliability. Volunteers are not inclined to reach for 'hard' assessment tests, but are more inclined to look to self-evaluation instruments, such as a personal portfolio. That may lead to an outcome that has value within voluntary work itself and, therefore, also within an organisation's own volunteer policy (correct placement and development of the volunteer) (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005). However, this has limited general use. The advantages as regards career development and the increasing of chances to succeed in the labour market or in education are also very important at personal level. Our talks with the stakeholders addressing employment opportunities and vocational training for the disadvantaged, placed particular emphasis on the psychological benefits that are attached to recognition of competences developed in a non-formal or an informal manner.

However, certain studies (Wouters & Douterlunge, 2002; Baert, 2004) reveal a number of barriers and obstacles to educational participation that are important in the light of lifelong learning. Besides the institutional and situational barriers, attention must also be paid to dispositional barriers such as lack of confidence, negative personal attitude towards education and training, perception of irrelevance of the benefits, lack of focus or control and lack of trust. It can be felt to be humiliating to ask a question because it is tantamount to admitting you have to learn something, that you 'can't manage on your own', and that you depend on other people, etc. In other words, the compulsion to be accepted as a valid individual prevents us from expressing a particular need, certainly when we give it educational expression. Some respondents speak of a 'culture' in which it is neither accepted nor obvious that anyone would wish to learn in order to make up for a shortage. Informal learning can to some extent compensate this deficit approach from formal learning, but its learning effects are less substantial and powerful than the benefits offered by formal learning – partly as a consequence of the absence of accessible instruments for the recognition and validation of experiential competences.

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Best practice - Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the fear of awarding qualifications that would not be socially accepted is explicit, to the point of envisaging a worst case scenario in which diplomas awarded following recognition of non-formal and informal learning would be confused with those awarded to candidates in the formal system. Also mentioned is the possibility that the awards created would be like blank cheques and cause difficulties vis-à-vis diplomas available in that system. The counterpart to lack of flexibility is often reportedly the problem of lack of motivation. In Czech Republic employees and employers alike are described as unenthusiastic about committing themselves to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

This expert workshop took place from 9 to 11/6/2008 in Prague, concentrating on the issue of recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field and taking stock of developments since the endorsement of the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth” adopted by the Commission in November 2001. It brought together participants from various backgrounds: practitioners, researchers and policy-makers such as representatives of the European institutions and of national governments, youth organisations, universities, the National Agencies for the “Youth in Action” Programme, etc.

They discussed the current situations in their respective countries, examples of good practice in enhancing the recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field and possibilities and needs for future initiatives and partnerships among the stakeholders present. The workshop was jointly organised by the Youth Partnership, the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre, the National Agency for the Youth in Action programme of the Czech Republic and the Czech Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports.

The aim of the workshop was to continue discussions on the strategies to improve the social and official recognition of non-formal learning, education and training in youth work activities as published four years ago in the joint working paper by the youth departments of the European Commission and the Council of Europe and the CoE – EU Youth Partnership „Pathways towards Recognition”.

The participants in the workshop comprehensively discussed developments over last few years in the field of recognition and validation of non-formal learning and suggested some future strategies and measures, particularly in the youth sector. It was essential to develop a common understanding of the subject and to analyse the needs of different groups and stakeholders in the practical aspects of youth work. The participants stressed the vital importance of close links with other sectors, such as labour market and employment, education and training, and civil society when discussing any future agenda and strategy in youth policy, youth research and youth work practice.

Despite all the progress made in the last years, the workshop highlighted the outstanding need to improve the formal and social re-

cognition of non-formal learning. It also confirmed the enormous impact of the joint working paper “Pathways towards Recognition” in recent years and the need to update this paper from an institutional point of view. The workshop produced the material for such an update, which would result in an ambitious range of further initiatives for the coming years.

The discussions are to continue with a conference to be organised under the Czech Republic’s Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2009⁶.

Reference:

RNFIL Project Task Force (2007) OECD ACTIVITY ON RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT CZECH REPUBLIC; National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

6. [http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth partnership/ekcyp/BGKNGE/Prague_recognition_workshop.html](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth%20partnership/ekcyp/BGKNGE/Prague_recognition_workshop.html)

Best practice - Denmark

When the debate on competence development started in Scandinavia, the term used in Denmark was „reelle kompetencer” - real competences. Realkompetence is thus an overall designation for all that a person is capable of knowing and doing in any given situation, no matter how those competence have been acquired.

Recognition may be awarded after individual competence assessment against the education goals or standards of the desired education programme, using various assessment methods. Before the individual is ready for assessment in relation to a certain education or training programme, it may be necessary to go through stages of competence clarification, either in connection with independent guidance or in connection with study guidance at the education institution. In order to facilitate the assessment, the individual will need good instruments of competence documentation of his or her competences acquired in work life or in the third sector, for example in a competence folder, which may be internet based. Broadly speaking, then, realkompetence encompasses:

- Formal learning, competences acquired and assessed within the formal education system.
- Non-formal learning, competences acquired outside the formal education system but within organized learning activities such as workplace courses or folk high school courses.
- Informal learning, competences that are not acquired in a planned manner, but which are acquired in informal learning situations such as family upbringing, workplace culture, personal experience, travel, and everyday life in general.

This conceptual understanding may contain some built-in difficulties if we are to develop methods for assessment and recognition while retaining quality, validity, and comparability. One such difficulty is in knowing if it is in fact a competence that is being assessed or a personal attribute;³¹ another is how to assure the transferability or the overall value and merit of competences, given that the term emphasizes that competences are context-dependent. These challenges are considered in the comments to the proposed framework legislation on the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training through:

- A stated legislative right.
- National initiatives in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders developing common frameworks and to build a common terminology to document competences, although it will be voluntary if individuals wish to use these or other tools.
- Ministerial quality frameworks.
- Appeal procedures.

The proposal for a new legislative framework on recognition of non-formal and informal learning stipulates an adequate supply of

tools, methods, and procedures for competence assessment that can assure dependability, visibility, and documentability. Education institutions will have the task of assuring visibility of requirements and procedures for recognizing non-formal and informal learning. As part of ministerial supervision, The Ministry of Education will elaborate administrative rules for the education institutions regarding goals, frameworks, and conditions for carrying out competence assessment, and regarding information requirements.

The qualitative study from the Daghøjskole provision (day folk high schools) gives some soft evidence on this; the evaluation design has not provided a framework to track any hard evidence other than individual perceptions (Dansk Folkeoplysning 2005). The association of Day Folk High Schools (daghøjskoler) has developed tools and runs a series of pilot projects in six different day high schools. The target groups for the initiatives were low skilled and/or specific marginalized groupings. The pilots took place and were evaluated in the period 2004 - March 2005.

Key findings from the evaluations show that the individual's reflection as part of the documentation process is a key parameter if the portfolio is to have any value across different contexts. The process seems to contribute to the individual's self esteem, and seems to be a factor that increases motivation to participate in learning and personal planning and development. Personal competences are difficult to verbalize and document for the individual. The pilot projects furthermore have shown that it has been difficult initially to demonstrate the potential value of recognition of prior learning, whereas the participants after the projects have been content with the outcomes. One possible solution the evaluation points to is more use of real life case examples.

Reference:

Shapiro, H. (2007) OECD THEMATIC REVIEW ON RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING Country Background Report Denmark; Dansk Folkeoplysning (2005). Bløde kompetencer i folkeoplysningen- synliggørelse og dokumentation af realkompetence.

Best practice - Finland

In Finland there has been a system called „Recreational Activity Study Book” since 1996. The system is developed by Youth Academy, which is a co-operation organisation for major Finnish youth & sports NGOs. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture supports the study book system. The study book is a non-formal and informal learning CV for young people. They can collect entries from all learning experiences in voluntary and leisure activities. There are over 70.000 study book owners in Finland (30.10.2004). The book serves young people as a tool for making all the experiences and learning – self-development, growth etc. - outside school visible. It is also an instrument for identifying and crediting nonformal learning when applying for a job or further education. Youth Academy has a written agreement with 250 formal educational institutions on how to value and credit the entries in the book. The study book is a feasible way to document and recognise the non-formal and informal learning of young people. The entries in the book can be collected either in Finnish, Swedish or English.

The Recreational Activity Study Book system is feasible for the documentation – and recognition – of both qualifications and competencies acquired by participating in youth voluntary activities. More focus is, however, placed on the competencies. That has to do with the individual learner-centeredness of the study book system. In the study book, more emphasis is put on the development of each young person’s personality rather than the actual qualifications of the skills required in particular job requirements.³ The underlying idea is that by participating in youth voluntary or recreational activities, young people do have a chance to acquire key competencies in regard to personal development, such as social, communicative etc. competencies.

Reference:

Savisaari, L. (2007); A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: Examples of Good Practice - Recreational Activity Study Book: Youth Academy, Finland

Best practice - Germany

The developments in the Federal Republic of Germany that are equivalent to those at European education-policy level are set out in the “Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany” written by the BLK in 2004. This is intended to “identify changes necessary in the individual educational sectors (...) in order to make lifelong learning a must in the educational biography of every individual”. Learning is understood to mean the “constructive conversion of information and experience into knowledge, insights and competences” and covers formal, non-formal and informal learning processes equally. The background to the “inclusion of informal learning” is the acknowledgement that “most learning takes place informally in everyday life and work situations outside of educational institutions” BLK (2004), p. 14. On the one hand, therefore, the strategy is structured according to the different life phases “children, adolescents, young adults, adults and the elderly”, and on the other it cites development focuses that are deemed to be essential to promoting lifelong learning. In addition to self-directed learning, competence development, networking, modularisation, learning guidance, and a new learning culture/popularisation of learning and equal opportunities, the inclusion of informal learning is cited as being of primary importance. The focus here is exclusively on informal learning; non-formal learning is not mentioned. The combination of life phases and development focuses results in a matrix that can be used to describe steps “to encourage all citizens to participate in learning during all phases of their lives and in all walks of life, at different places of learning and through many different types of learning” BLK (2004), p. 14.

The “inclusion of informal learning” development focus has been firmed-up as follows for the various life phases (BLK (2004), p. 17 et seq).

- Children

Informal learning is given the greatest significance here over the course of one’s life. In particular, parents and other central figures, as well as kindergarten teachers and teachers at primary school are tasked with creating a learning environment that motivates and fosters children’s development.

- Adolescents

Informal learning in this phase of life should be included in the work of the formal educational establishments. These are tasked with discussing non-school informal learning and increasing learning outcomes as part of new teaching and learning methodologies that use realistic problems and authentic situations. The relevance of learning to practical work and social life is also highlighted as important for future employability.

- Young adults

Competences acquired in a social, vocational, cultural and personal context are an important foundation for further education processes. Informal learning acquired in this way should be further developed by means of the specific support of infrastructure measures. The documentation of competences acquired informally is therefore particularly important, especially against a background of interrupted educational careers. Educational organisations are encouraged to increasingly take up informal learning activities and to secure them with supporting measures.

- Adults

The concept of occupational usability is the explicit focus in this phase of life. Certification and recognition of informal learning are used as a precaution against unemployment and an improved career on return to work after parental leave or unemployment. However, informal learning as on-the-job learning also contributes to an expansion of competences and the ability to cope with a dynamically changing world, both at work and outside. Last but not least, certification of informal learning is held up as an incentive for greater commitment to voluntary work.

- The elderly

In this life phase, formal learning becomes less important. From this fact is derived the need for informal learning to be supported by CET in a way that must respond flexibly to the needs of older people.

Details and information on the creation and practical implementation, goals and principles of individual steps that are anchored on a legal basis or below regulatory level can be found in the descriptions in Part A.

The informal acquisition of knowledge has increasingly become a focus of CET statistics during recent years. The Reporting System on Continuing Education collected the first representative information on informal learning at a very early stage. However, since then survey methods, along with the status of research on lifelong learning and competence development, have developed and become more sophisticated, meaning that statements on the development of informal learning in Germany are not currently possible. In the 2003 survey on participation in CET distinction was made between the informal acquisition of vocational knowledge (61 % of the working population) and self-learning outside working hours (35 % of the population). For more information, see sections B.1.1a and b. For the same period participation in CET/non-formal learning of a vocational and general nature was 41 % nationally, with at least 68 % of all respondents using one of these forms of learning. 251 The national education report presents the participation in lifelong learning in relation to the rest of Europe and refers to the results of the ad-hoc module on lifelong learning in the labour force. According to these results, the adult participation rate for all forms of learning is 42 % in Germany, which is well below the rate established by the Reporting System on CET. In comparison with other countries, Germany's participation rate is rather low.

For references:

BLK (2004b): Selbst gesteuertes und kooperatives Lernen in der beruflichen Erstausbildung (SKOLA), Gutachten und Dossiers zum BLK-Programm, Heft 120.

BLK (2004c): Kooperation der Lernorte in der beruflichen Bildung, Abschlussbericht des Programmträgers zum BLK-Programm, Heft 114.

BLK (2004d): Neue Lernkonzepte in der dualen Berufsausbildung, Abschlussbericht des Programmträgers zum BLK-Programm, Heft 113.

BLK (2005a): Bildung für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung ("21"), Abschlussbericht des Programmträgers zum BLK-Programm, Heft 123

Best practice - Greece

The literal translation of the term “Recognition of non-formal and informal learning” in Greek is “Αναγνώριση μη- ησοικής και άησης μάθησης”. The term has not yet been incorporated as such in any legal framework previously stated (Component 2). Nevertheless, conceptual associations to the term are to be found in the legal framework of ESSEKA and the “Accreditation System for programs, knowledge, skills and competencies” (Component 2). Within the framework of ESSEKA, the “Accreditation System for Vocational Training and Vocational Qualifications” provides for the accreditation of vocational qualifications regardless of the way acquired and their matching to professional certification. Within the framework of the EKEPIS “Accreditation System for programs, knowledge, skills and competencies”, the system provides for the accreditation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired upon successful completion of an accredited vocational training program. In respect to “Certification/recognition of language proficiency” under the Ministry of Education, the term used in Greek is “νίζησης”, which translates literally into “accreditation”. Conceptually, this type of accreditation means certification and recognition. In respect to “Certification/recognition of computers skills” under OEEK (same Ministry), the term used in Greek is «νίζησης», which translates literally into “certification”. Conceptually, this type of certification means recognition.

To this date, there is no comprehensive legal framework for qualifications. Thus, there is no clear linkage of the recognition of non formal and informal learning to qualifications, qualifications systems or legal framework of qualifications. In this way, it is not possible to record any impact of such linkages. The recognition of non formal learning in the field of continuing vocational training is a process which will be put into effect under the provisions of the JMD “Accreditation System of Programs, Knowledge, Skills and Competencies”.

The implementation of the EKEPIS Accreditation System for Programs, Knowledge, Skills and Competencies leads to the awarding of a Certificate of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired via a training program. However, the fact that in Greece, job profiles have not yet been developed and accredited poses difficulties for the linking of non -formal learning to the above-mentioned framework. The process of “Certification/recognition of language proficiency” under the Ministry of Education leads to the awarding of the “Language Proficiency State Certificate” (KPG) fully recognized by the state. The process of “Certification/recognition of computers skills” under OEEK (same Ministry), leads to the awarding of the “Computer skills Certificate” fully recognized by the state.

References:

The National Accreditation Centre For Continuing Vocational Training (Ekepis) (2007); Oecd Thematic Review On Recognition Of Non-Formal And Informal Learning Country Background Report Greece

Best practice - Iceland

Promotion of the ideology behind validation of competences, aimed at policy makers and practitioners, started in January 2003 with a seminar organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In continuation, the Education and Training Service Centre initiated benchmarking activities and first development. This work was presented in the organisation's annual journal and annual assembly in 2004. As the work progressed, a brochure detailing the methodology, criteria and validation process was issued in 2006.

In order to reach the end-users, targeted advertisements have been put in newspapers to try to track down specific target groups, e.g. people, working in specific sectors that have not finished their education or have dropped out. The goal of this promotion was to motivate these individuals to participate in the pilot project regarding recognition of competences in the sectors in question. As for promotion aimed at policy makers and practitioners in the field of education and training, the project has been promoted in conferences and seminars as well as in print, mainly in the annual journal published by the Education and Training Service Centre.

All information about the validation system can be accessed directly at the Education and Training Service Centre's office and webpage¹⁰. In addition, the collaborating partners can provide most information regarding the pilot process. These partners, located all around the country, are the nine regional lifelong learning centres, the vocational upper secondary schools, Mímir lifelong learning centre in the capital owned by the Federation of Trade Unions, and the sectoral training centres for the regulated professions.

Psychiatric Ward of the Landspítali University Hospital – social care study line, 2004

This was a joint project between the Education and Training Service Centre, Efling Trade Union, Landspítali University Hospital and Mímir lifelong learning centre, which was the project leader. The Education and Training Service Centre took care of coordination, registration of skills and counselling in the process of recognition. The aim of the project was to validate skills of specialised employees of the psychiatric ward for entrance into the social care studies at Mímir lifelong education centre. Twelve individuals participated in the project, with the objective of validating their competences for shortening their learning cycle in social care. The participants had extensive educational backgrounds, which made this project special in many ways. After the validation process, the participants all finished the social care studies at Mímir lifelong learning centre and a part of the group went on to formal studies as assistant nurses at Ármúli Comprehensive College.

Unemployed people in the Sudurnes region, 2004. Cooperation between the Sudurnes Regional Lifelong Learning Centre that was the project leader, the Education and Training Service Centre and the Sudurnes Comprehensive College. The Education and Training Service Centre took care of coordination, registration of skills and counselling in the process of recognition. The goal was to develop educational opportunities for unemployed people in the region, offer them a chance to undergo validation with the aim of strengthening their position on the labour market. Guidance counsellors met thirty individuals at the beginning of the validation process and then divided the group in two parts by age. Ten persons in the older

group went on to write their skills portfolio with a counsellor from the lifelong learning centre and went on to complete the validation, whereas the younger group of 20 individuals worked with the college in exploring their options for further studies.

Telecommunications electricians, 2004-2005

Cooperation project involving Reykjavík Technical College, the Education and Training Service Centre, Starfsafl education and training fund, and Efling Trade Union and Síminn Telecom, but the last two led the project, which was part of collective agreement between the company and the trade union. The Education and Training Service Centre took care of coordination, registration of skills and counselling in the process of recognition. The aim of the project was to offer the chance of tailor-made on-the-job training for all workers at Síminn Telecom company, which would improve their work skills as well as provide opportunity for entering technical studies in their field. The validation process was applied to evaluate the knowledge and professional experience acquired by each employee. Twenty individuals showed an interest in the project, of which 11 sent the necessary material for validation, 7 of those finished evaluation for 33 courses for a total of 72 course units and went on to study at Reykjavík Technical College.

Human resources at a multicultural workplace, 2005-2006

Project of Landspítali University Hospital, Efling Trade Union and the Education and Training Service Centre, which was supported with a grant from the Vocational Training Fund of the Directorate of Labour. The role of the Education and Training Service Centre in this project was to provide professional advice and prepare the methodology for analysis, the skills criteria, self evaluation forms and questionnaires to analyse the existing knowledge. This was a pilot project for groups of unskilled workers at the hospital that could serve in transferring knowledge and competences within the workplace and between workplaces. Individuals of different skills, backgrounds, from different countries and cultures were grouped together. The project started with 25 individuals, 10 of them were active during the process but only 7 handed in their portfolio as final result.

The objective of the project was threefold: a. to identify human resources and knowledge at the workplace and devise methods that facilitates knowledge sharing within the place of work b. to strengthen cooperation, communication and work culture between workers and enable them to develop and grow as employees c. to improve the service provided by using existing human resources and skills.

Occupational Council for Pedagogy and Sport, 2005-2006 Project partners were the Education and Training Service Centre, the Occupational Council for Pedagogy and Sports, Borgarholtsskóli Comprehensive College and Mímir lifelong Learning Centre. The aim of the project was to identify skills criteria for validation leading to shorter study programme pathways in Pre-School Education and Primary and Lower Secondary Education and to develop a checklist based on curricula and course descriptions, which could be used for self-evaluation for individuals in specific courses and as preparation for validation interviews.

VOW (Value of work), 2005-2007

A Leonardo da Vinci pilot project coordinated by the Education and Training Service Centre. The European partners are SYNTHESIS Centre for Research and Education Ltd. from Cyprus, The Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, The City of Malmö Centre of Validation and NIACE from the UK. Icelandic partners are Kaupthing bank, Landsbankinn bank, Glitnir bank, the Federation of Icelandic Bank Employees, Kópavogur College and the Ministry of Education. The objective of the project is to develop methodology to facilitate recognition of competences in the workplace and also to apply the methodology to other sectors. Participation of relevant stakeholders is important to the project. The target group is bank employees who have not finished upper secondary education but have constantly updated their skills and competences through non-formal education and training. Nineteen employees participated and finished the pilot process, which included compiling a personal portfolio, self-evaluation, interviews, supervisor assessment and real skills performance.

Reference:

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland (2007); OECD Thematic Review On Recognition Of Non-Formal And Informal Learning Country Background Report Iceland ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. (2004) European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Iceland.
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Education and Training 2010: The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the Context of Europe" (2007) Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.
The Educational System in Iceland. 2002. Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Memorandum on Lifelong Learning: Report from Iceland. 2002.
OECD. Education at a Glance 2006. OECD, Paris.

Best practice - The Netherlands

In the Netherlands the term “Erkennen van verworven competenties” (EVC) is used, literally translated in English: “Recognising acquired competencies”. EVC is aimed at the recognising, validating and further developing all an individual has learned in all kinds of learning environments: in formal places like school, but also in non-formal or informal settings like the workplace or at home. EVC wants to build on the competencies a person has already acquired.

EVC is to be considered at the same time a concept and an instrument. This means that, in the strict (or summative) sense of the term “EVC”, EVC is concentrated on the recognition and validation of all a candidate has learned. When this validation is taking place on the basis of a recognised standard, such as the MBO qualification standard, this will provide the candidate with certificates or a diploma.

In a broader (or formative) sense of the term “EVC”, EVC comprises also the stimulation of the real learning or knowledge development. The broader approach is directed to the development of the individual participant. In practice, this development proves to be of great value to organisations. EVC in this sense can be seen as an important instrument of career development. The EVC procedure can be divided into a number of steps.

Step 1. Informing the candidate;

Step 2. Individual agreements: making a development-plan;

Step 3. Finding and inventorying competencies;

Step 4. Recognising and judging competencies;

Step 5. Describing the results of the procedure in an EVC-report;

Step 6. Proceeding with the elaboration of a personal development plan.

Looking at the way EVC is carried out in a wide variety of projects, we conclude, that several names are used for EVC-procedures and also the elements of the procedures used are diverse.

EVC as an alternative route to diploma's (the summative approach)

The summative approach focuses on recognising competencies within existing qualification- of certification structures. As an alternative route to diploma's, EVC procedures have to concur with the goals of the formal (legal) qualification structure (educational programming of MBO schools, the KCE standard or the accreditation framework of HBO institutions (NVAO) or standards developed by economic sector organisations or branche union, like quality standards like ISO-norms).

EVC as a system for career development (the formative approach)

EVC as a system for career development does not always necessarily lead to formally recognised certificates. EVC in the formative approach focuses on career modelling, connected to any form of participation in society, paid or unpaid. Important to mention in this context is, that enterprises are stimulated to make a kind of portfolio or report in the personnel dossiers, in which the actual competencies of the individual employee are described, as well as his/her personal development plan (POP) and the perspectives he/she appears to have on the labour market. The quality of this

kind of portfolio or report depends on the quality of the manager or personnel assessor.

EVC is important because of its diversity, not only in supply, but also on the demand side. However, it is still possible to structure the broad area of EVC services in spite of the big diversities.

The structuring of EVC in the Netherlands is based upon two main lines; the objective and the context.

In a matrix these lines form the four working spheres of EVC.

Qualifications

An EVC procedure can have as a result:

- Exemptions from the need to participate in subjects of a training programme. This will happen in educational institutions, as well as in training programmes recognised by the economic sector;
- (Subject) certificates or diploma's recognised by the economic sector;
- A (subject) certificate or diploma in accordance with the regulations of the Minister of Education;
- Recently also: an EVC report, in which a survey will be given of all competencies of the individual. This document has value in itself, it is considered "proof of experience" (as it is called in Belgium). Or, as the Knowledge Centre EVC puts it: "EVC now has it's own thing".

At this moment, senior secondary vocational education in the Netherlands is making a switch to competence oriented educational programs and standards. This development started in the midnineties, and is going to be completed in 2008. Obviously, many similarities between EVC and the regular educational system could materialize, in the way competences are tested and examined.

Communication efforts

Regional Learning and Working Desks

As has been explained in earlier chapters (Component 1.2), the Government has made it possible to start with the establishment of regional learning working desks where (interactive) information is made available about EVC procedures in (V)MBO schools and about the recognition system. Media to be used by these desks will be: flyers, brochures, websites, personal instruction, network meetings, direct e-mail, internet, broadcasting and sector bulletins. Only a few desks just started, so it is not possible to give relevant quantitative data concerning the number of people who have used the desks in one way or another.

CWI

To enlarge access of unemployed individuals to EVC, the Centre for Work and Income has decided to develop a “Handbook EVC”. The handbook will help the professional guides and advisors at the CWI’s to inform their unemployed clients about EVC. The handbook will be developed by the Knowledge Centre EVC.

Websites

All kinds of information for employers and employees concerning vocational and professional career, practical work, courses, training programmes and financial benefits are to be found at one website:
www.opleidingenberoep.nl.

The surplus value of this portal is, that people interested in this information can find all information collected and are not obliged to get it by difficult Google procedures. This website is hit 2.000 times a day. The development of the portal is part of the PR campaign “Developing works” of the Project Directorate Learning and Working. The campaign would like to make employers, employees and unemployed aware that the combination of working and learning will have profits.

Sector funds (O&O Funds)

O&O funds are also giving all kinds of information about the recognition system of vocational and professional training programmes. Within quite a number of economic sectors the employer’s organisation, the trade unions or other organisations are trying as much as possible to collect and make information or databases available, for example about best practices.

Nuffic

Nuffic communicates the above mentioned information on EVC in universities and HBO institutions to foreign students.

HBO institutions and universities

The universities and the HBO institutions provide applicants for their institutions with all kinds of information concerning the admission procedures. This is done by information desks, websites and brochures. Also these institutions advertise in newspapers. Some newspapers (for instance De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad) once a year publicise special sections on higher education institutions in which also their admission policies are explained.

Knowledge Centre EVC

Finally, the Knowledge Centre EVC (see component 2.1.h) is supplying quite some information about EVC in general and of course also about recognition systems. In the period September 2005 – August 2006, its website (www.kenniscentrumevc.nl) was visited 2.935.197 times. The peak period for visits was January 2006.

In the National Action Programme A life long learning (1998), it is indicated that the Government should be explicitly careful for groups of employees who for one reason or another do not have sufficient attention and possibilities for learning. These groups are for example: elder employees, employees without a starting qualification and flex workers. Especially for these categories of employees, the government stimulates the use of EVC procedures.

It is generally accepted, that besides the groups just mentioned, the government holds the view that EVC can be seen as a new possible pathway for the following disadvantaged groups in the Netherlands:

- youths who are at risk to end up in a socially backward position;
- allochtone women;
- re-enterers in the economic system;
- refugees/immigrants without (recognised) previous education or a very minimum of education;
- (ex)detainees;
- elder people.

EVC procedures should give members of these groups the opportunity to get a starting qualification, because the regular educational pathways seem not to be a proper instrument of learning.

Especially the re-enterers and the refugees/newcomers have often had their educational training too long ago. Drop-outs do not often possess the required starter's qualifications and have a shortage of working experience. EVC can be helpful in order to improve the understanding in the motivation people have or in the possibilities to become active or in the desired training programme.

According to the Empowerment centre EVC, the EVC procedures for backward groups begin to get results, especially in qualitative sense. Specific data are not available. There are many initiatives on project basis, but also structural changes have been made, in order to get individuals with educational arrears on the right learning track. Examples are the projects of Nuffic (see 3.3.e), the use of portfolio by COA (centres of reception of refugees), the methods of CWI (Centre of work and income) and the use of EVC instruments in re-integration routes.

A disadvantage of the Dutch system is that the way of financing, is rather determinant for the procedure to be supplied or to be followed by different target groups.

The Yearbook 2004 of the Knowledge Centre EVC provides several cases.

Heineken Breweries

A participant (a packing technologist and manager of 14 people) received his HBO degree technology in a period of 1 year, and finished his post graduate course Maintenance management. Without EVC, he would have needed at least 1 year but perhaps 2 years more for the 2 studies. After finishing these studies, he started a pilot study for dual routes in metallurgical electronics of the HBO institution of Utrecht.

Post offices BV

A few years ago, this organisation became aware, that a number of its employees possessed quite some of the MBO competencies, thanks to their experience within the organisation and to the internal training programmes. In co-operation with an MBO school in Dordrecht, a pilot EVC-project has been started for 24 people. The project started with the determination of their subject qualifications on the basis of a portfolio and a number of tests in writing. These tests were not satisfactory, so the next project has started with a information evening, after which the participants themselves have to draft their portfolio. The portfolios will be evaluated by the teachers of the MBO school. The teachers can give some clues to improve the portfolio's and finally award the exemptions from the tests. It appeared that the participants are getting for almost 75 % of the subject qualifications an exemption. After that it is only a minor effort to get the final degree.

BSN Glasspack

In 2003 a number of 119 candidates of BSN Glasspack have applied for the EVC procedures. Of the applicants 30% has dropped out after a quick-scan. All those who have been successful in passing the complete route, have realised a shortening of their study period of 80% resulting in a degree up to level 3 of the MBO system.

Mondriaan College

This MBO school in Rotterdam has EVC procedures for Social Pedagogical Work (SPW) levels 3 and 4. On the basis of EVC procedures, a candidate will be admitted to a shortened vocation accompanied route (BBL route) of a year. The programme is clearly defined but individual candidates can get a number of exemptions of examinations and tests. The aim of the EVC procedure is to determine whether a candidate has sufficient knowledge and experience to follow with success the shortened BBL route. Only students who answer the

following demands will be admitted:

- Older than 21 years;
- A fixed job or traineeship for at least 20 hours a week;
- Intelligence level of pre-secondary vocational education-c;
- Related previous education;
- Presented by the employer.

The EVC procedure usually takes half a year. The training supervisor has an information meeting with the candidates. After that, the candidates make the portfolio, supported by their employer and the training supervisor. The portfolio is reviewed by a team of four teachers. After the test, a personal training plan is made.

At this moment, arrangements concerning EVC have been made in 10 collective labour agreements (CAO's). The collective labour agreements of the following economic branches contain concrete arrangements concerning the use of EVC.

Construction sector

- An EVC project is agreed upon to stimulate 250 employees from the construction sector to get a recognised diploma. These employees should possess relevant working experience, which will lead, by EVC procedures, to a number of (partial) exemptions of examination subjects. For this project parties concerned have made available an amount of € 816.805,- from the O&O fund of the sector.
- Starting July 1st 2006, the construction worker is entitled to an EVC route aiming at professional certification, with financing from the schooling fund up to a maximum of 10 days.
- The subsector 'finishing': the costs of EVC procedures (training costs, travel costs, lay-off costs and bonuses) are financed out of a budget of € 86.000,-.

Housepainters, window glass setters

- Employees of at least 25 years old, who have worked in the sector for at least 5 years, have the right to have their acquired competencies recognised, to follow training programmes leading to an official degree.
- In the CAO it has been agreed (paragraph 4) that employees who are qualified for EVC, will receive the training needed for an official degree.

Children's reception centres

Up until December 15th 2006, the children's guides could apply for EVC procedures to get their experiences recognised, in the form of official subject certificates or even diploma's. The employers will take care of the costs of these procedures.

Retail

The department store Bijenkorf B.V. has started a pilot project MBO-sales of 1 year. Sales employees can get a certificate recognised by the government. The progress of the pilot will be subject of discussion periodically with the trade unions. After evaluation of the pilot, social partners will decide whether the project will be made available for all employees of Bijenkorf B.V.

Hotel and catering services

In the annual evaluation discussion of the employer or the manager with the individual employee in which the functioning of the employee is subject of discussion, the two parties together have to make agreements on the personal development of the employee. Upon the request of the employer or the employee, it is possible to make further arrangements concerning the training, the recognition of acquired competencies or the gathering of advice for further training, and the leave necessary for that. Periodically, both parties will discuss the progress of the agreed arrangements and will adjust the arrangements if needed.

Industry

Metallurgical electronics

Art. 2 of the CAO contains the arrangement, that annually employers and trade unions will determine the maximum number of EVC procedures to be financed. The employer can receive a gross amount of € 750,- per employee for his/her costs for an EVC procedure, of course under certain administrative conditions further elaborated in the CAO.

Philips

In connection with the Employment Plan agreed upon in the context of the CAO, the company will carry out the project "Certification of craftsmanship" which will give the opportunity to employees to get job experience and to participate in training facilities and to get certifications.

Personal services

Hairdressers: In the annexes to the CAO, mention is made of the foreign diploma's, recognised by the CAO parties as equivalent to the Dutch diploma's. Also a procedure of recognising other foreign diploma's has been described in the annexes.

Hospitals

Parties have acknowledged the importance of the Recognition of acquired competencies. It is agreed that employees learn in practice besides training and education oriented to awarding of diploma's. Because of the uncertainties of procedures and the EVC instruments, the CAO parties have developed a brochure "To recognise experience with EVC". The brochure has been published and distributed in 2006. The employer's organisation together with the trade unions will organise a work conference for personnel managers, care managers and training experts, with the aim to inform them about the opportunities, best practices and existing uncertainties and to eliminate the barriers.

Reference:

Advies, R. et al. (2007); OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning Country Background Report for the Netherlands

Best practice – Slovenia

Nefiks¹ - Index of non-formal education. The main purpose of the project is to create a unified system of recording all non-formally gained knowledge and participation in activities. Its basic idea is to attribute greater value to non-formal education of the youth taking place in various institutions and levels. Basically, all non-formally acquired knowledge is written down in a small booklet called index. The index “Nefiks” has been designed for various target groups, ranging from pupils, students to unemployed, the only condition being that they have to be at least 14 years old. The project does not aim to lessen the importance of formal education, but to assert non-formal and informal learning as a supplement to formal education. Nefiks is complementing EU efforts for assessment and transparency of qualifications and competences. The mission of the project is to enforce social validation of non-formally acquired knowledge and to contribute to better employability of youth on the labour market. Some of the main objectives are as follows:

- enabling systematic recording of non-formal education
- improving personal and professional development of individuals
- collecting data on non-formal training and informing Nefiks users
- offering personal guidance and counselling to the youth in their professional development
- establishing links between employers, faculties and students which enhances transparency of their needs.

Nefiks can be used in the following fields:

- Personal growth: ability to systematically monitor and upgrade one’s personal growth.
- Easier preparation of the personal CV.
- Knowledge self-evaluation.
- Nefiks database: all index holders are registered.
- Links between employers and unemployed.

7. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=50FWwoiuexM

Best practice - Spain

In Spain various programs and institutions exist that offer non-formal learning processes. Such is the case of the Vocational Integration Studies Program established by Organic Act 1/1990, on the General Organization of the Educational System.

The Vocational Training Plan contemplated in such Act endeavours for citizens to attain a professional qualification that allows them to pursue professional activities. Vocational integration studies programs provide students with a basic vocational training level for incorporation into an occupational activity, or to continue vocational training studies. They are targeted at people who have just dropped out of basic training without a degree in compulsory secondary education, and provide a basic professional qualification that gives them access to professional activities and, if so desired, to the subsequent attainment of vocational training studies. They are targeted at students without any diploma whatsoever, between 16 and 21 years of age.

Case of a student in the vocational integration studies program that enrolled in the educational system.

Juan Antonio is 20 years old. He did not complete his compulsory secondary education and, therefore, does not have the corresponding diploma that would allow him to study for the trade that he likes best: that of chef. His frustration was great, but he could not continue his secondary education in an official centre and neither could he commence an intermediate-level vocational training cycle, for which he would have had to complete his secondary education.

He enrolled in a vocational integration studies program. He hoped to later take the open test for the degree in secondary education. He did just that after reaching the age of 18 and, thanks to the program, was able to pass the exam. He was able to access vocational training in the branch of Hotel and Tourism, which is what he really enjoyed. At the end of the process he obtained the degree of Kitchen Assistant, which not only served to integrate him into the employment market, but also to continue official training and aspire to higher training levels.

Economic benefits from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

A 24-year old man was undergoing vocational training in the mechanics sector. For health reasons, after working as a qualified technician in the sector, he could no longer continue working in an automobile manufacturing company. He found work in the hotel sector as a bellboy. He worked at this job for 2 years without any specific qualifications in the sector.

The story of this young man is interesting: during his years in the hotel he managed to learn about computers and accounting, because occasionally he was asked to work as a receptionist (at night and in substitution of other employees) and this meant computerizing client data and tallying the daily incoming and outgoing accounts. He acquired this knowledge either on his own: computers; or by means of a

non-formal course: accounting. Courses and learning that he performed easily because he had previous studies. Furthermore, the occasional practice he had as receptionist served to consolidate such learning without fear of asking for advice: he was under no obligation to have such knowledge and competences.

As the private company in which he worked expanded, it became necessary to cover new receptionist positions. The company then recognized the skills and competences that this lower-ranking employee had demonstrated for the job, and chose him for the new job: promoting him from the category of bellboy to that of hotel receptionist.

At first there were some obstacles to be overcome so that he could obtain the full financial benefits associated with his new category. By not having the officially-recognized professional qualifications, the company argued that he could not receive the same wages, while instead offering him wages greater than those of a bellboy and the benefit of greater social prestige. Finally, the young man was able to benefit from the same wages as the rest of the receptionists in the company.

This case describes the particular recognition by a company of the competences and knowledge of one of its workers that was not backed by official accreditation.

University degrees for older people who acquire non-formal learning: “universities for older adults”

To define the work of the university with older adults, several terms and respective combinations are used: university, older adults, seniors, senioribus, open experience, classrooms and programs. The combinations are varied: university for older adults, university of experience, older adult classrooms, classroom of older adults and experience, university programs for older adults, senior citizen university, etc. There are also seven institutions that use other, alternative names, like Peritia et doctrina (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), Fourth Cycle (Santiago de Compostela), Living with Vitality (Autonomous University of Madrid), University Degree in Culture and Solidarity (Deusto), Intergenerational Professorship, (Córdoba), La Nau Gran (Valencia) and UNATE (Cantabria).

There are currently 49 Universities in Spain offering education to older adults using this method. The Autonomous University of Madrid, for example, offers to different platforms: Living with Vitality and the Older Adult University Program.

The programs are organized within a non-formal framework: learning does not lead to the attainment of a university degree, but to a diploma or training certificate that is characteristic of and specific to each university.

These programs target a population sector of adults aged 50 and over. The length of the programs varies greatly, from a period of 10 months (the Lecture Hall Extension of the University of Gerona), to five years or more (University of Santiago de Compostela which, after three years, grants the diploma of “Senior Graduate”, after five years the diploma of “Higher Senior Graduate” and, after a dissertation,

diploma holders may opt for the “Excelsior” degree).

It is important to emphasize the social impact of these types of institutions through the recognition of learning given to older adults and the self-esteem generated by the system among participants. The recognition of this type of learning is a great platform for promoting the importance of learning at any stage of life and by various methods.

In some cases, for example in the University of Valladolid, older adults who do not comply with the requirements for enrolment may take part in the open configuration courses offered by such university in its various centres (Valladolid, Soria, Segovia and Palencia). The intergenerational presence provides an unforeseen teaching, social and personal enrichment.

In Spain, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning takes place through different channels.

The Report shows how Spain has clearly wagered for lifelong learning to become a reality in our country, considering it a strategy for the development and improvement of the recognition of learning acquired through non-formal and informal channels.

Spanish legislation linked to recognition is done mainly through the Education System and, to a lesser degree, through the Labour System. Traditionally this has served to foster access to training, to the possibility of exemption from requirements for access to the various requirements and to facilitate the total or partial attainment of certain diplomas or accreditations.

Demographic and employment market reasons exist that justify the existence of the recognition process and the need to promote it

Statistics show that significant percentages of workers exist who do not have formal accreditation of their professional competences. Data has likewise been submitted on the characteristics of some immigrant groups that in turn require recognition processes in order to improve their inclusion in the job market.

Reference:

Subdirección General de Orientación y Formación Profesional, the Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones and the Instituto de Evaluación. (2008); OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non formal and Informal Learning Country Background Report Spain

Best practice - United Kingdom

Case Study A: Foundation Degree in Health & Social Care (Radiography Route) Student: Jackie Bevan Provider: University of Teesside Validating University: University of Teesside Employer: City Hospitals Sunderland This case study is a shortened version of a case study on the Foundation Degree Forward website – see <http://www.fdf.ac.uk/files/CaseStudyJackieBevan.pdf> Jackie Bevan left school with no interest in further academic study. A succession of jobs followed - and then she got married and had a son. She applied to City Hospitals to work as a Helper in the Radiography Department and did this job for five years. During that time she was able to watch radiographers at work - helping them deal with patients, observing the routines and understanding how things were done and why. Jackie began to think about getting on with her career and embarked on a Higher Education Access course with a view to considering a university degree. However the Hospital offered her a different opportunity - to get more involved in a professional sense and they interviewed her for the post of Trainee Assistant Practitioner. Jackie got the job and part of the agreement included enrolling for a Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care with the University of Teesside. The way this worked was that over a period of two years Jackie would attend the university for two days per week and for the rest of the time she would undertake radiography duties at work. Jackie found it tough and juggling studies, job and family required careful planning, but she soon began see the relevance of the course to her work and became increasingly confident in her job. "Assessments were always related to the job – for instance one important item was a portfolio of my work; the clinical experiences, the relevant policies and protocols, my reflective analysis of what was being achieved. Other assessments tested my research skills and practical clinical performance. It all sounds daunting but you perform well because you are properly trained and supported in your studies and in the job."

Jackie completed the course, received her degree in November 2005 and is a fully qualified Assistant Practitioner Radiographer. She now performs a range of radiography duties under her own steam and is continuing with the studies needed to complete her qualification as a radiographer. Paul Stephenson who is Business Manager at the Radiology Directorate was impressed with the course. "During the practical part of the course which is done on site here – the duties performed are closely matched to the specification of the course. So there is no gap between the needs of the university course and those required on the job. Jackie visibly grew in confidence and ability throughout the course, becoming more mature in her judgments and clearly obtaining more job satisfaction."

Case Study B: Assessment of Practical Skills in the Nursing Cadet Course Provider: London South Bank University (LSBU) Essex Campus, based at Harold Wood Hospital Employers: Three NHS Trusts in Essex This case study is derived from research undertaken for the European-funded REVIMP project in which QCA was a partner. It illustrates the use of assessment based on work placements, using the NVQ model, and how credit from a predominantly work-based course can give both entry to Higher Education and credit towards an HE qualification. The Nursing Cadet course offered by London South Bank University (LSBU) at its Essex Campus, based at Harold Wood Hospital provides a route into LSBU's pre-registration nursing course for young people and adults who lack the normal academic pre-

registration nursing course for young people and adults who lack the normal academic entry requirements. It is one of a number of nurse cadet or apprenticeship courses across the UK. The course aims to reduce staff shortages by increasing recruitment into nursing, especially from local people who are likely to stay in the area. It also forms part of LSBU's „widening participation“ work. Nursing Cadet courses have some similarities with „Access to HE“ courses, but differ from normal Access Courses in providing a high proportion of practical work in a real work setting.

Structure

The Nursing Cadet course lasts one year, beginning in March of each year. The first half is preparatory and the second half covers part of the normal pre-registration nursing curriculum; cadets who complete the course satisfactorily are exempted from the first 6 months of the pre-registration nursing course.

Much of the time is spent on placement, but there is formal classroom study for one day each week and in occasional one-week blocks. Cadets do 3 or 4 clinical placements in different types of hospital ward, and one placement in a Primary Health Care setting (eg attached to a doctor's surgery). During the placements the cadets prepare for the level 2 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Health and Social Care. This is assessed mainly through observation and oral questioning in the work setting, supplemented by a „portfolio of evidence“, which includes a reflective diary written by the cadet and records of activity. These are cross-referenced to the requirements of the qualification. The emphasis is on competent performance of practical tasks (eg taking a blood pressure reading) and on communication with patients and other staff, including behaviour and attitude. Provision of the NVQ ensures that successful cadets leave with a recognised qualification, even if they do not go on to the full nursing course. Classroom study includes related theory, together with numerical, written communication and ICT skills and also study skills. The cadet's achievements during the course are considered equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (the target school leaving achievement).

Students and staff

Students are a mixture of young people and adults. They are selected through an assessment day and interview on the basis of their perceived ability to succeed. Two Practice Facilitators play a crucial role in supporting the cadets, providing extra tutorial support and some pastoral support, where needed, helping in the completion of portfolios and acting as NVQ assessors. Whilst on the wards, cadets work under the direction and supervision of permanent ward staff. The staff/ student ratio is relatively high, reflecting the non-traditional background of the cadets and the high level of support provided.

NVQ External Verification

As with all National Vocational Qualifications, NVQs in Health and Social Care are subject to „verification“ overseen by the awarding body. Verification is designed to ensure that standards of assessment, and hence the standard of performance required to achieve the certificate, are consistent within and between assessment centres. „Internal verifiers“ are appointed from within the centre and check that the assessors are applying the standards consistently; their activity includes observation of the cadets working in their placements. „External verifiers“ are appointed by the awarding body (in this case City & Guilds) and visit centres to ensure that there is consistency between them.

Course effectiveness

Data compiled by the course team in June 2006 showed that of the 191 cadets who had started the course since 2000:

- 19 were currently active
- 138 achieved an NVQ at either level 3 (131) or level 2
- 6 completed the course without gaining an NVQ
- 28 left before the end of the course, of whom 8 had their employment terminated.

This gives a „success rate“ (percentage of starters who gain their target qualification) of over 80%.

Of the 126 who left the course and whose destinations were known:

- 102 began a pre-registration nursing course at LSBU
- 17 entered HE courses elsewhere or other healthcare employment.

Former cadets from this fairly small sample had higher success rates in the pre-registration nursing course than students from the more academic Access to HE courses. During interviews the cadets showed a great enthusiasm for the course. Aspects which they said they liked included:

- practice-based learning makes it much easier to see the relevance of the theory
- they are encouraged to be reflective
- the emphasis is on the patient as a whole person
- the course provides a better preparation for the pre-registration nursing course than purely academic study.

Other interviewees from amongst the LSBU team said that:

- ward staff like the enthusiasm of the cadets and report that they are eager to learn
- former cadets have better attitudes and professionalism than student nurses from the more traditional route
- in the previous (two year) course, cadets completed a level 3 NVQ, but did not qualify for „advanced standing, which meant that in the pre-registration nursing course they were repeating some material they had learned in the cadet programme. The change to a one-year course which gives 6 months „advanced standing overcomes this problem.

Case Study C: Achievement of ECDL by support staff in a small company This case study, based on an interview with one of the participants,

illustrates the use of the European Computer Driving Licence to raise the IT skills of a group of support staff to a uniform level, recognising their existing skills, however gained. The setting for this case study was a small defence-related company based in the South East of England, which identified a need to ensure that all their support staff had an adequate and up-to-date level of IT skills. The company is an accredited Investor in People. The support staff were mainly female; many were young and all had a range of existing IT skills, gained from school and from informal learning, including learning at work. The aim was to consolidate this learning, to fill in any gaps, to ensure that staff knew the most efficient ways of using the software and to assess and certificate their skills through the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). An outside trainer was contracted to run the training in house. For each of the required seven modules of ECDL there was a session led by the trainer, after which participants were expected to undertake some self-directed learning and practice, using the associated book. CBT (computer based training) was also available, especially for those who missed the trainer-led session. In a subsequent revision session the trainer provided any necessary additional help. The time spent with the trainer averaged about half a day per module. At the end of the learning period for each module the participants took the ECDL test, which is computer-delivered and computer-marked. This meant that results were available immediately. Altogether about 20 staff completed the programme. The case study illustrates a pattern which is also common in NVQs, where a qualification is used to provide recognition for knowledge and skills acquired through a mixture of prior informal learning, self-directed learning and formal learning.

Case Study D: This case study gives a brief summary of the RARPA pilot project at Blackburn and Darwen College, supported by the Learning and Skills Network. The college was piloting the staged process of learning recognition¹⁰⁰. The Indian Head Massage course was set up in a local primary school by a Family Learning Development Officer for a group of parents whose children attend the school. This group were female, ethnic minority learners. Most of the group had not met each other before and none of them had done any learning “for years”. To maintain interest, the tutor ensured that the first session included a practical Indian Head Massage activity, but it also included a discussion of learner aims in order to negotiate an Individual Learning Plan. Staff asked learners what experience they had in the subject (they had none!) and what they hoped to do by the end of the course, providing suggestions of possible aims when necessary. This led to a formulation of learning objectives. During the course the tutor assessed the learners development of practical skills and also set a mid-term „quiz“ (partly multiple-choice) to test related knowledge. These provided formative assessment, enabling her to help the learners with their weak areas. At this point the learners reviewed their learning plans and in some cases revised them in the light of their experience of the course so far. The end of course assessment was conducted by the tutor and a development officer, but also included a self assessment by the learners, who recorded whether they had achieved what they had initially wanted, or indeed more than they originally expected. A number identified an increase in „soft skills such as self confidence. The college found that a great deal of peer assessment took place during the summative assessment and found it helpful to capture this on sound recordings. Amongst the outcomes identified by the college staff were the following:

- All learners had stated that there were no drawbacks to the Staged Process of learning recognition - only benefits
- All learners stated they had achieved their learning goals
- All except one learner stated they had achieved more than they set out to do

- All learners were able to identify an increase in skills from the starting point identified at initial assessment
- All learners were able to identify „soft outcomes as a result of attending classes, such as an increase in confidence
- All learners had transferred skills they had learnt in the classroom into their own/their families lives.
- All learners had completed the course and a number had expressed interest in other Lifelong Learning and College courses.

Reference:

Full Case Study prepared by the College for the National RARPA Pilot Evaluation 2004.

Leney, T., Ponton, A. (2007); Oecd Thematic Review On Recognition Of Non-Formal And Informal Learning Country Background Report United Kingdom



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