European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Austria

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

There is no uniform legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Austria. Nor is there an explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, Austria’s educational policy and practice has limited differentiation in formal, non-formal and informal learning (Markowitsch et al. 2007, 5). Nonetheless, in the education and training system, different acts and regulations include mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. Various ministries and institutions have developed measures and initiatives for identifying and formally recognising competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (see Section 1.5).

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a central element in the Austrian lifelong-learning (LLL) strategy, which includes the principle of ‘competence orientation’ (cf. DUK [ed.] 2007): educational actors and relevant stakeholders should jointly develop a system in which competences, in the sense of learning outcomes, can be used to enhance transparency and comparability between the different sectors. The strategy recommends that recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be supported, either through individual competence portfolios or by a national system of recognition.

Public debate increasingly addresses the issue of recording, validating and recognising competences. In addition, supra-regional political initiatives can be identified (cf. Schlögl 2009, 23p). For example, Austria took part in the RNFIL initiative (Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning) by the OECD (cf. ibw 2007). Also, the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (bm:ukk) has published a relevant systematic analysis (cf. Zürcher 2007). In recent years, policy discussions have covered measures to validate non-formal and informal learning, particularly in connection with the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF). Finally, relevant stakeholders participate in working groups that elaborate proposals on how to make learning that takes place outside formal settings more visible.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

The NQF currently under development places high importance on the general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired qualifications, i.e. the learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. Although the same definition of qualifications is used in the context of the NQF as for the EQF, there is still an open question relating to learning outcomes from informal learning or certificates from non-formal learning without an equivalent in the formal system. It is not clear how these will be converted into a qualification that can be allocated to an NQF level. Currently, there is an ongoing discussion regarding which concrete criteria will need to be met - based on the EQF definition - so that a bundle of learning outcomes can be considered a qualification. Some certificates that can be acquired in non-formal learning will be quite in line with these criteria (for example, some certificates that can be acquired in in-company based trainings or at CVET providers), while others will have to be changed if they should also be allocated to the NQF.

In the long term, the NQF should substantially help to construct a ‘strategy of lifelong learning’. The NQF development process started after the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) consultation in 2006. A consultation paper on the NQF was produced in 2007 and a national consultation process was conducted in 2008. Based on the results of the consultation process and of some test projects, at the end of 2009 the national NQF steering group agreed upon a ‘political strategy paper’ on the further development and implementation of the Austrian NQF. The Austrian NQF primarily seeks to map all national
qualifications and present them in relation to each other. The NQF should encompass all forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and all sectors of education (including general education, higher education, adult education, further education and vocational education and training). The main objectives include supporting lifelong learning and enabling stronger links between the adult learning sector and the formal education and training system as well as recognising a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning) (cf. Luomi-Messerer 2009).

Within the NQF, non-formal and informal learning contexts should be given the same value as the formal learning processes. However, a difference is laid down in the time frame which is also reflected in the division of the NQF development process into three strands (‘sectors of learning’): 1. the formal qualifications system, 2. qualifications acquired in non-formal learning (for example, in adult education institutions outside the formal education and training system) and 3. informal learning. In 2009, a thematic working group prepared a proposal for a strategy paper related to qualifications (i.e. learning outcomes) acquired in non-formal learning (cf. Schlögl 2009). The proposal suggested setting up ‘bodies responsible for qualifications’ (Qualifikationsverantwortliche Stellen, QVSs) …as regulators for qualifications which are valid sectorally and/or nationally, without an equivalent in the formal education system, which will undertake the validation and quality assurance function. (bm:ukk 2009, 25).

However, these issues are still under discussion in Austria: So far, there is no political commitment concerning the establishment of such QVSs and no political decision has been made so far on the inclusion of qualifications (i.e. learning outcomes) acquired in non-formal learning contexts into the NQF. The proposal describes just one possible scenario. To further explore this issue, pilot projects have been and will be conducted, for example, dealing with the possibilities of classifying offers of non-vocational adult learning within the NQF and the role of key competences in this context (cf. Erler 2009). A pilot project from the construction sector and exemplary referencing of non-formal qualifications (i.e. learning outcomes) from this sector are also planned. Based on the experiences from these projects, the preliminary strategic considerations and proposals will be evaluated and refined. At the same time, the strategy of categorising qualifications coming from non-formal learning will be developed, and implementation will begin afterwards (bm:ukk 2009, 25).

Austria’s current certification policy focuses on ‘external examination’: almost all qualifications (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) can be obtained without participating in the relevant programmes or courses, but not without passing the same exam (as ‘externals’) as required in the regular system (Markowitsch et al. 2007, 5). Therefore, the formal education system contains a major share of the procedures for recognising non-formally or informally acquired knowledge and skills in Austria. External exams are theoretically possible in all authorised Austrian education and training institutions for both general education and VET. As a result, the same education and training standards used in formal education and training are taken into account; in the case of apprenticeship training, this also includes occupational standards (the occupational profile associated with a qualification). Procedures also exist for acquiring certification without any corresponding qualification in the formal system. Such procedures are often focused on recording individual development processes. Some measures have developed their own standards (for example, the certification offered by the wba (www.wba.or.at) or the competence identification procedure offered by KOMPAZ – see Section 1.5), others are more or less oriented towards the procedures and standards used in the formal educational system.

1.3 National institutional framework

Austria does not have a national institution responsible for validation across all sectors. The respective procedures or measures involve different institutions and actors with different roles and responsibilities (see Section 1.4). The main actors are:
• The Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (bm:ukk),
• The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (bm:wfj),
• The Federal Ministry of Science and Research (bm:wf),
• Educational institutions (secondary academic and VET schools and colleges, universities of applied sciences, universities, adult education institutions),
• Social partner institutions,
• Apprenticeship offices of the competent economic chambers,
• Some cases also involve companies or the Austrian Public Employment Service.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The previously described actors divide their responsibilities for the different measures and procedures of validation (cf. ibw 2007, 57pp). The main role of the relevant ministries is preparing and adopting the legal framework conditions for validation procedures. Social partners play a major role in the designing of the legal, economic and social framework conditions in Austria. Educational institutions organise or provide preparatory courses; furthermore, they hold exams or design other procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning in order to issue certificates (based on their respective quality assurance procedures). In the case of exceptional admission to the final exam of the apprenticeship training (see Section 1.5), apprenticeship offices of the responsible economic chambers hold the exam. The ministries and the social partners are the main actors in providing information, promotion and awareness-raising, whilst counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

The most relevant practices for validating non-formal and informal learning are classified in the study by Schneeberger et al. (2008), which was prepared in the context of the development of the Austrian NQF consultation paper. Some examples are described below (see also ibw 2007; Prokopp & Luomi-Messerer 2006, 2009):

• Acquisition of Hauptschule qualifications by adults (‘second chance education’):
  Some lower secondary schools in a particular school district give an external exam that allows the retaking of exams to obtain Hauptschule qualifications within the framework of the lower secondary school-leaving certificate (i.e. not requiring prior school attendance).

• Exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination (LAP)
  In addition to those who have completed an entire apprenticeship, people without formal training can take the final apprenticeship examination. The only requirement is that they are over 18 years old and have evidence of having acquired the corresponding vocational skills and knowledge in another form; for example, in practice (work experience) or in courses.

• Awarding of the professional title Ingenieur
  It is possible to grant the Ingenieur title that is awarded to graduates of VET colleges of engineering (HTL), based on professional experience of at least three years, which must include ‘specialist subject-oriented activities’.

• Recognition of work experience or work experience and further education as access requirements to regulated professions or professional positions [Berufspositionen] without or in addition to formal education:
  - Many regulated professions require a period of practical experience after graduating from higher education (HE) programmes (for example, medical doctors or lawyers). Other regulated professions (for example, certain VET teachers) only require a certain period of
relevant occupational practice. These requirements usually do not define the learning outcomes but only set the required duration of the practical phase.

- Access to certain exams requires relevant professional work experience; for example, for the state-run examination for company accountant (Staatliche Fachprüfung Bilanzbuchhalter). Regulated trades (reglementierte Gewerbe) demand a certificate of competence (Befähigungsnachweis) for setting up a business in a certain sector. In some cases, an examination is not sufficient; additional training and/or relevant professional experience is needed.

- Since 2002, the master craftsperson examination (Meisterprüfung) is structured in modules with individual units allowed to credit knowledge, skills and competence gained through relevant professional work experience. However, the master craftsperson examination has no other requirement other than being over 18 years old; it no longer needs evidence of formal training or work experience.

- Non-traditional access to HE programmes (without completion of the school-based upper secondary certificate)
  - ExternistInnenreifeprüfung: External candidates can sit for the Reifeprüfung exam (upper secondary school leaving exam providing direct access to HE) or examinations on individual subjects or school years. Entry to the exams normally requires records of a specific number of completed years of school, or a graduation from a school. Examination preparation occurs independently, course attendance is not mandatory. The candidates can select the date and order of the individual examination modules.
  - Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP; higher education entrance examination): This exam provides restricted access to post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions. It enables those who have not taken the Reifeprüfung exam to study specific subjects or subject areas at these institutions. Admission to the SBP requires, among other things, a record of a successful vocational or non-vocational qualification for the desired field of study. The SBP consists of specialist exams taken individually and includes four compulsory and optional subjects. The study course selected will determine the compulsory subjects to be taken by the exam candidate. Adult-learning institutions and universities offer non-compulsory bridge courses – for the preparation of the exam.
  - Berufsfachprüfung (BRP; special VET diploma): This exam provides general access to HE and grants the right to study in all disciplines at post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions without the Reifeprüfung exam. In principle, this exam can be taken without prior attendance of upper secondary schools. The BRP is comprised of four partial exams differentiated by content: German (a five-hour written exam); Mathematics (one four-hour written examination); modern foreign language (in accordance with the candidate’s choice, one five-hour written examination or an oral exam); specialist area (one five-hour written and oral examination about a topic from the candidate’s occupational field and a relevant oral exam with the objective of dealing with contents at a higher level). The exam subject ‘specialist area’ links to previous occupational knowledge. Partial exams can be taken jointly on one date or separately. Specific preparation courses are offered by adult learning institutions. Credits can be obtained from examinations completed in a different context such as the master craftsperson examination (Meisterprüfung), for individual areas or certain language certificates. In a new initiative called ‘Lehre mit Matura’ (apprenticeship with special VET diploma), during their apprenticeship, apprentices can attend preparation courses for the special VET diploma and can take three of the four parts of the exam. Thus, they can finish both the apprenticeship and the BRP at nearly the same time when they have reached the age of 19.

- Admission to degree programmes at universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) without taking the Reifeprüfung exam and shortening of study period: The universities of applied sciences have specific admission regulations for candidates with ‘relevant
professional experience’. This phrase usually indicates that the candidates are skilled workers or graduates of secondary technical and vocational schools without a Reifeprüfung. Depending on the competences necessary for starting a degree programme, candidates may have to sit supplementary examinations (for example, in mathematics, German and English) in the first year of study. Based on the recognition of proven knowledge, study periods can also be shortened. Since the relevant legal regulations for accreditation of prior learning are rather general, the extent of exemptions varies depending on the institution and how different programmes accredit different amounts of subjects or semesters.

- Access to CVET university courses without Reifeprüfung: Access can be granted to people who have relevant vocational training and long-term practice.
  - Competence audits, portfolios, etc. in adult learning institutions

In Austria, several procedures for identifying and recording competences have been developed. They are mainly offered in adult learning institutions and are often oriented towards career planning for specific target groups (cf. Zürcher 2007; Preißer 2007; Prokopp & Luomi-Messerer 2006). Austrian public Adult Education Centres are particularly active in developing methods to validate non-formal and informal learning. The approaches are tailored to specific sectors or competences. Some of the procedures developed in the Austrian Adult Education sector build on established methods, such as the Swiss Qualifications Handbook CH-Q System of Managing Competences; others have developed new methods. (Projects targeted towards migrants and disadvantaged groups are described in Section 3.4.; however, the initiatives described below also partially address these target groups.)

- Competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke - www.kompetenz-portfolio.at): This competence portfolio approach was initiated by a Socrates project in 1998 (Informal learning in the context of volunteering) and was further developed with support from ESF funding (‘Development of competences through volunteering’), Leonardo da Vinci (‘AVE: Assessment of volunteering in a professional perspective’, www.iriv.net) and Grundtvig projects (‘SLIC: Sustainable Learning in the Community: Raising awareness of older people's competences and identifying new opportunities for learning and engagement’, www.slic-project.eu). The competence portfolio is a folder aiming to systematically document skills and competences acquired by volunteers. Following preparation of the portfolio, the individual has the option to prepare a competence certificate for job applications with the portfolio facilitator (cf. Kellner 2009).

- Competence profile KOMPAZ (www.kompetenzprofil.at): The centre for the recognition of competences at the Volkshochschule Linz (Adult Education Centre Linz) was founded in 2004. The centre offers workshops for identifying non-formally and informally acquired competences (from all areas of life and work). The Swiss Qualifications Handbook (CH-Q) System of Managing Competencies is used for methodological orientation. The results of competence identification are compiled using a competence profile created through the portfolio method (cf. Schildberger 2010). The CH-Q was presented in 2001 in Switzerland with the aim of making it possible for young people and adults to record and document formal, informal and previously acquired skills in a process oriented way and to apply for the validation of these skills. It is conceived as a portfolio and contains comprehensive instructions on how to use the instrument, a folder with a wide variety of forms, enabling a clear, systematic and chronological sorting and filing of evidence, references and individual remarks and notes. It contains comprehensive instructions, intended to encourage and support the process of self-reflection.

- ‘Knowing what I am capable of’ - workshops offered at the Adult Education Centre Burgenland (‘Wissen, was ich kann’, Volkshochschule Burgenland - www.vhs-burgenland.at/ind_kompetenz.html): these sessions identify competences based on the CH-Q (the target group is unemployed women).
- ‘Family Competences – the key to more success on the job’ (‘Familienkompetenzen – Schlüssel für mehr Erfolg im Beruf’ - www.familie-und-beruf.at/Familienkompetenzen/Familienkompetenzen.htm): This project was developed by Family Alliance (a merger of organisations from across the spheres of politics, business, employment, media and science) and implemented under the former Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations. It is targeted toward those returning after a career-break and offers them the opportunity to receive a certificate that recognises key competences that were gained through family work. This should be useful for re-entering the labour market.

- Other EU-funded projects: Instruments and procedures that could be used for validating non-formal or informal learning have been developed by projects supported with EU funding with Austrian partners or coordinated by Austrian institutions. For example, the Leonardo da Vinci project ‘EBIFF - European passport on professional education in early intervention’ (www.infopro.at/ebiff_inst/index.php?lang=ger&) developed an education pass to assess the competences of professionals in the area of interdisciplinary early support and family guidance. The Leonardo da Vinci project ‘VQTS - Vocational Qualification Transfer System’ and the Lifelong Learning project ‘VQTS II’ (www.vocationalqualification.net) developed competence guides to facilitate international transfer of vocational learning outcomes that can also be used for identifying informally acquired competences. The Leonardo da Vinci project ‘MOSEP – More Self-Esteem with my E-Portfolio’ (www.mosep.org) developed a set of measures for the use of e-portfolios in different contexts in order to strengthen the self-esteem of young learners. The Leonardo da Vinci project ‘Lifelong competences – informal learning in social fields’ (www.informal-learning.org) set up tools to recognise the informal learning of employees working in the ‘social fields’ of services for people with disability, in social work, in education and training and to set up methods on how to develop implicit know-how into explicit knowledge.

- Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie, wba - www.wba.or.at): The wba in the sector of adult education is a new approach (started in 2007) for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning of adult educators. The wba certifies and issues degrees to adult educators according to defined standards. A framework curriculum has been developed and people active in adult education can have credits awarded for their acquired competences, skills and practice periods. The acquired competences are documented in an e-portfolio and missing competences can be acquired at different educational establishments for adults. Certificates are offered on two levels: wba-certificate: certified adult educator (rated at 30 ECTS) and wba-diploma: graduate adult educator (rated at 60 ECTS, with specialisation in one of four fields of adult education: teachers/trainers, education managers, counsellors and librarians). The wba aims to facilitate links between the adult learning sector, CVET and HE and to enhance the professionalisation of adult learning (cf. Steiner 2010).

Validation at the Academy of Continuing Education (wba) is described in more detail in the box below.
## Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie, wba)

The wba project was implemented in the adult education sector in 2007. The project aims at the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of adult educators. The wba certifies and issues diplomas to adult educators according to defined standards. Its four target groups are different types of experienced practitioners in adult education: teachers/trainers, education managers, counsellors and librarians.

A framework curriculum has been developed by the wba and credits within this framework can be awarded for competences and skills which may have already been acquired in different ways. The acquired competences are documented in an e-portfolio and where the participants lack competences, these can be acquired at different educational establishments for adults. In the portfolio, candidates can include certificates or confirmations that they have taken part in certain courses. Professional practice is proven via employers’ confirmation letters and recommendations or similar documents. For practitioners in voluntary work, a ‘competence portfolio’ for volunteers can also be used. Certificates are offered on two levels: wba-certificate: certified adult educator and wba-diploma: graduate adult educator (rated at 60 ECTS; with specialisation in one of four fields: teachers/trainers, education managers, counsellors and librarians).

The process includes the following steps:

1. **Information and counselling**
2. **Evaluation (with the e-portfolio)**
3. **Development of an individual education and training plan (with a specifically trained wba counsellor)**
4. **Acquisition of missing competences**
5. **Qualification ‘Certified Adult Educator’ (wba-certificate):** when all required competences have been acquired, all candidates must attend a final three-day workshop with various tasks, discussions and multiple-choice tests. After the workshop, the certificates are awarded.

6. **Qualification ‘Graduate Adult Educator’ (wba-diploma):** The graduate adult educator can specialise in one of the four professional fields. More seminars are needed, and this level has a stronger academic orientation. As well as achieving the ECTS credit points listed, candidates for the second level must hand in a paper, which is discussed in a final colloquium.

Staff members at the wba are responsible for counselling, assessing the documents of portfolios, allocating credits and providing counselling related to the process. These staff members must be experienced professionals in adult education, i.e. they need to have worked over several years in one or several of the specialisations branches.

The evaluators in the certification workshop are experienced professionals in adult education, educational management, teaching/training and library- and information management. The evaluation costs EUR 130 per candidate, the cost of the ‘certified adult educator’ certificate is EUR 650 and the cost of the ‘graduate adult educator’ certificate is EUR 320. These costs do not include travel costs and costs for courses the candidates must attend individually. Experience has shown that in many cases the costs can add up to EUR 1 500 or EUR 2 000. Some costs can be refunded (though possibilities for funding differ widely).

The wba aims to facilitate links between the adult learning sector, Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and HE. The wba-diploma, awarded after passing two examinations, is intended as a qualification for special university studies. The wba also aims to enhance professionalism within adult education: at the end of their studies, adult educators in Austria are able to obtain a widely recognised diploma within the profession.

An accreditation council has been set up that evaluates all applications of candidates as well as relevant training offers and deals with quality issues and monitoring. The council comprises of experts working in adult education, the economy, universities and teacher training colleges. The wba develops and ensures quality standards and these, as well as the professional quality management at the wba are confirmed by the certificate ISO 9001:2008 of Quality Austria. Up to January 2010, 683 people registered for the certification, 167 wba-certificates have been issued and 52 wba-diplomas.

Feedback from certified and graduate adult educators shows that the certificate has positive effects on their self-confidence. The certificate and the wba service are evaluated positively. Any negative criticism mostly relates to the multiple-choice test in the certification workshop, the literature that sometimes seems too complicated and the required seminars that are not offered at all times. The wba certificate is also gaining importance in other institutions, partly in connection with qualifications necessary for conducting ESF-projects. On an international level, already half a year after the wba model was launched, the OECD showed interest in it. In October 2007, the wba was presented as model of good practice at an OECD meeting with 65 guests from 22 countries.

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1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

Austria currently does not have an explicit national credit transfer system. However, there are credit arrangements in the form of ‘regulations governing the crediting of learning outcomes if learners change between training institutions and/or training levels. Most of these regulations refer to the crediting of learning times and are based on a comparison of curricula or training plans’ (Tritscher-Archan [ed] 2009, 15). European credit transfer systems are only partly being implemented in Austria. The HE sector has implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) according to the Bologna process. The European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) has not yet been implemented. It has been planned to use ECVET primarily as an instrument only to promote transnational mobility in training and continuing training. One reason for not implementing ECVET at national level is that IVET curricula only partially include formulations with learning outcome orientation and most are not divided into learning-outcome units or modules.

Modularised structures can currently only be found in some segments of the formal education system, while in the non-formal area modularisation is a basic principle. For example, due to the Bologna process, study programmes at HE institutions are delivered through a modular scheme. Since 2002, the Meisterprüfung (master craftsperson examination) has been structured in modules; whereas modularisation of apprenticeship training and the creation of modular vocational degrees are only now being implemented. The Vocational Training Act (BAG, Berufsausbildungsgesetz) amendment in 2006 created the legal basis for the modularisation of apprenticeship training. A modular apprenticeship trade has a maximum training period of four years and comprises, for example, a two-year basic module and various other modules lasting 18 months. In addition, a special module can be selected (cf. Archan 2006). There are currently four modular apprenticeships and others are being discussed or developed. Full-time VET schools and colleges are usually not structured in units or modules, but several technical and vocational schools offer evening classes for people in employment. Modularisation of these courses starts in the academic year 2010/11. This will give participants the chance to provide evidence of acquired knowledge by sitting for a module examination without having taken part in lessons.

1.7 Funding framework

The funding for validation activities depends on the respective measure, procedure or project. For example, the bm:ukk and the Public Employment Service of Austria support those who are preparing for the Hauptschulabschluss, the Studienberechtigungsprüfung or the Berufsreifeprüfung. Co-financing is provided by the ESF. Those preparing for the Studienberechtigungsprüfung can find a range of subsidies: in Vienna, for example, there is the possibility of partial course cost reimbursement via the Educational Account of the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF) or the Vienna Chamber of Labour grants an educational voucher for bridge courses for parents on maternity leave (ibw 2007, 61). The development of new methods in pilot projects and research is financed in many cases through EU initiatives, such as the ESF funded EQUAL-Projects, Socrates, Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci projects. Frequently, these projects are then co-financed by the responsible ministries and/or social partner organisations. Depending on who maintains or implements the project or measure, the municipal and provincial governments also provide support and ministries and social partner institutions may also set up their own initiatives.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall data on flows of beneficiaries is available. Most measures and initiatives can be linked with
second-chance education. Beneficiaries seek to enhance their employability (for example, acquisition of Hauptschule qualifications or taking the Apprenticeship-leave exam as adults) or to gain access to HE programmes (for example by taking the ExternistInnenreifeprüfung, Studienberechtigungsprüfung or Berufsreifeprüfung). Those applying for the professional title Ingenieur want to make their professional status visible (cf. ibw 2007, 99p). Many of the competence audit or portfolio initiatives offered by adult learning institutions (partly in cooperation with social partner institutions or the Austrian Public Employment Service) particularly focus on empowerment of the participants. The number of applicants or successful candidates can only be given for certain initiatives, these figures represent candidates who have achieved the certificate / qualification via a system of validation of non-formal or informal learning.

- Acquisition of Hauptschule qualifications in second-chance education: more than 800 candidates per year.
- Apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) in second-chance education (exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination): approximately 5 300 per year (Schneeberger et al. 2007, 18).
- Awarding of the professional title Ingenieur: approximately 3 800 per year (Schneeberger et al. 2007, 18).
- Berufsreifeprüfung: In the school year 2007/08, more than 2 600 persons have successfully taken part in the Berufsreifeprüfung exam (Klimmer et al. 2009, 17).
- Access to university programmes without taking the Reifeprüfung exam: In 2008, Austrian universities newly enrolled 120 students with the ExternistInnenreifeprüfung as an entrance qualification, 96 with the Studienberechtigungsprüfung and 838 with the Berufsreifeprüfung (Source: Statistics Austria).
- Admission to degree programmes at universities of applied sciences without taking the Reifeprüfung exam: In the winter term 2009, Austrian universities of applied sciences newly enrolled 195 students with the Studienberechtigungsprüfung as an entrance qualification and 838 with Berufsreifeprüfung (Source: FH Council).
- Competence profile KOMPAZ: Since 2004, approximately 800 competence profiles were issued.
- Adult Education Centre Burgenland: Since 2007, approximately 120 competence profiles were issued.
- Competence Balance of the Tyrol Centre for the Future: Since 2003, approximately 3 000 certificates or competence balances have been issued (Seipel 2010, 2).
- Competence portfolio for volunteers on a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke): Since 2002, approximately 200 competence portfolios have been issued.
- Academy of Continuing Education: Up to July 2010, 816 people registered for the certification, the academy has issued 271 wba-certificates and 75 wba-diplomas (wba-statistics).

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

As mentioned above, almost all qualifications (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) might be obtained by taking external exams. Usually, these exams are taken at the responsible institution from the formal sector of education and training. Sometimes, these providers also offer preparatory courses.
- Acquisition of *Hauptschule* qualifications in second-chance education: To obtain this qualification, an external exam has to be taken in front of an examination committee at a lower secondary school in the respective school district. Preparation takes place at different locations: at schools or adult learning institutions.

- Exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination (*LAP*): admission is not granted, as usual, by the Apprenticeship Offices (of the regional economic chambers in the provinces) but via the administrative district authority. The applicants must bring the appropriate application to the respective Apprenticeship Centre of the Chamber of Commerce and sit for the written and oral apprenticeship examination.

- *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung*: Applications for admission to this exam have to be submitted at the regional boards of education, such as the Vienna school board. The examinations take place at the corresponding schools (upper-secondary academic schools or VET colleges) or at specially set-up examination centres. Adult-education institutions or private schools offer preparation courses.

- *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (*SBP*): The application for admission to this exam must be directed to the university rector whose sphere of activities includes the selected (first) study programme. If admission requirements have been met, the responsible official will be obliged to propose admission to the rector and subsequently propose the required exam subjects. The rector will appoint the study-qualification board, whose members are university employees and representatives of the social partners. The board will cooperate in the procedure to obtain the study qualification and also in reviewing programmes that prepare for the SBP offered by adult-learning establishments.

- *Berufsreifeprüfung* (*BRP*): The application for admission to this exam must be submitted to the secondary school or VET College where the candidate intends to take the *BRP* exams.

- Admission to universities of applied sciences without *Reifeprüfung*: Under certain conditions, the universities of applied sciences can admit applicants who have not taken the *Reifeprüfung* examination. Several universities of applied sciences offer preparation courses for apprentices or persons in supervisor courses specifically designed for access to study programmes in these institutions.

To support the Austrian HE institutions that have been actively addressing lifelong learning (LLL) issues, in autumn 2008, the bm:wf set up an Advisory Board on LLL in the HE sector; this board consists of representatives of universities, universities of applied sciences, students, etc. The Advisory Board has certain tasks that promote the opening-up of education, including discussing permeability, access, recognition of prior learning, flexible forms of teaching and learning, financing etc.

The most recent report on the implementation of the Bologna process in Austria (cf. bm:wf 2009, 83) mentions two major goals in this context: global recognition of prior learning (recommendation in the 2004 University Act) and recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. The report mentions a “turnaround” in some institutions (without naming them) that handle the recognition of prior learning in a reasonable and uncomplicated way. However, the report also states that overall awareness of the recognition of prior learning still needs to grow. Universities Austria (Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz) is currently conducting three projects on specific issues of the Bologna Process to support Austria’s public universities in taking an active role in these current debates. One project focuses on non-formal and informal learning. A study (Spiel et al. 2009) commissioned by Universities Austria represents an important step in this direction. This study discusses the political framework, various definitions and the selection processes at universities in order to prepare the ground for recommendations for APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning) in universities. These recommendations include: the receiving institution should grant recognition; the students’ and graduates’ profiles should reflect and relate to the universities’ aims and tasks; the underlying philosophy of competence assessment should be made transparent; and theoretical and educational
quality criteria should be met. This study mapped the recognition procedure and gave further recommendations (e.g. concerning the European perspective, the role of the European University Association, the application of validation for modules within a study course). The main challenge is seen in combining the complexity of the task and efficient handling of the process.

2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

As noted above, the ministries and the social partners are the main actors in providing information, promotion and awareness-raising on validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions.

In the development of an Austria-wide, independent educational counselling network in the adult learning sector, a major role is played by the expansion of competence assessment procedures (competence portfolio, competence profile, competence audit, etc.). The ESF project ‘Educational Guidance in Vienna’ (‘Bildungsberatung in Wien’, [www.bildungsberatung-wien.at](http://www.bildungsberatung-wien.at)) is a network of educational providers bringing independent educational information and guidance to all people who need it. One sub-project carried out by a platform of Austrian Adult Educational Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke) seeks to develop, test and implement tools for the work of educational counsellors in the education providers. Its aim is to provide tools for identifying informally acquired skills, to sensitise both counsellors and clients to informal learning, and to provide them with guidance about existing or missing skills when making educational decisions. The tools are also geared to particular target groups (for example, for counselling processes relating to second-chance education, for young people, and for people with disabilities).

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

Certifications of in-company education achievements are important instruments for human resource development in many big companies (for example, Spar Österreich, Porsche Austria, Xerox Austria; cf. Markowitz & Jonach 2006). In some cases, the certificates offered are structured according to different levels of achievements. They can be acquired based on work experience, in-company training and/or demonstrating the required knowledge, skills and competence. These certificates are very important in the companies, but usually do not have any connection with the formal system.

Several pilot projects mainly in adult learning institutions experiment with recognition of individual competences. Some examples that are closely linked to social partner organisations are described below:

There are a number of projects initiated by social partners in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For example, the BIFO (Career and education information of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce and the province of Vorarlberg) developed the **Quali-Box** ([www.bifo.at/text/qualibox](http://www.bifo.at/text/qualibox)) within the framework of an ESF project by cooperating with the project team of CH-Q. It comprises several brochures with exercises for participants to identify their own interests, knowledge and competences.

Another example is the ‘YOU have competences!’ (**DU kannst was!** - [www.dukannstwas.at](http://www.dukannstwas.at)) project. In 2007, a consortium of social partners in the province of Upper Austria started this project to support people with professional experience in nine selected professions to have their prior learning accredited for the final apprenticeship examination (target groups: low qualified adults, adults with migration background). The procedure includes using a portfolio process to display acquired competences and to compare the competences with those of the corresponding job profiles and examination regulations as well as counselling related to any necessary further education and training (cf. Bauer 2008). This initiative is described in further detail below (see section 3.4).
The Tyrol Centre for the Future (Kompetenzenbilanz des Zukunftszentrum Tirol – www.zukunftszentrum.at), the think tank of the Tyrolian Chamber of Labour, delivers Competence Audits (Kompetenzenbilanzen). The Centre offers workshops and coaching to reflect on personal competences. The stock-taking procedure results in the formulation of specific steps and objectives for a person’s further professional and private future (cf. Seipel 2010).

2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

As mentioned in Section 1.5 under the heading ‘competence audits, portfolios etc.’, some procedures for identifying and recording competences have been developed in Austria. They are mainly offered in adult learning institutions and are often oriented towards career planning for specific target groups. In addition, third-sector institutions carry out the initiatives listed under Section 3.4 (except the Berufsreifeprüfung and catch-up on lower secondary school qualification). Preparatory courses for taking external exams, the Berufsreifeprüfung or the Studienberechtigungsprüfung are often offered at adult education providers. The third sector is also actively involved in developing and implementing the strategy for including qualifications (i.e. learning outcomes) acquired in non-formal or informal learning contexts into the future NQF.

In 2005 the Austrian Volunteer Passport was introduced, providing certification of competences and qualifications obtained through volunteering that can be documented and properly demonstrated in the passport. It enables volunteers to use them to complement their job applications. Organisations working with volunteers can commission the Austrian Volunteer Passport at the Austrian Council for Volunteering. The following information is filled in by the organisation for its volunteers: the certificate gives information on the time spent by the volunteer on a voluntary activity, the person’s function within the organisation, the volunteer’s tasks, skills and competences as well as all relevant further training.

2.5 Costs to organisations

No data is available about the costs to organisations. Presumably, costs vary between the different measures, initiatives and projects.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

As noted above, the ministries and the social partners are the main actors in providing information, promotion and awareness-raising on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Information is provided primarily by those institutions offering the preparation courses for the different measures or by those institutions offering the portfolio processes. In addition, information about possibilities for validation is shared by the Public Employment Service, responsible ministries, social partners and various advisory centres for different target groups. The bm:ukk website: www.erwachsenenbildung.at, offers comprehensive information on Austrian adult learning and second-chance education offers, including possibilities for the validation and recognition of informally developed competences.

The bm:wfj informs the public about apprenticeship training as well as the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination at the following website: www.bmwfj.gv.at. This website also gives detailed information about the awarding of the Ingenieur title.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

The economic chambers have set up an extensive career information system, which includes information on available second-chance education for young people and adults. This system is accessible at: www.bic.at. The Public Employment Service Austria operates ‘Career Information Centres’ (BIZ). These centres offer occupational information, career guidance and vocational counselling.
As noted above, counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions. In the following, three examples including guidance provided during validation procedures are given:

- Circle of Austrian Adult Education Institutes ‘Competence portfolio’: The competence portfolio is a folder that documents an individual’s skills gained through voluntary work. The assessment process involves a 2-hour discussion with a certified portfolio tutor (Portfolio Begleiter) which is then jointly evaluated. The competence portfolio is designed to identify skills gained in all areas of volunteering. As such, it has pioneered the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Austria. Since 2003, work on the competence portfolio has been developed further through the ESF project “Development of competences through volunteering”. In this project the regional members of the Circle of Austrian Adult Education Institutes get involved in the validation work by providing competence portfolios, competence workshops and information events.

- The competence portfolio of the Adult Education centre Linz: It contains information about an individual’s core competences. This is achieved by means of three workshops guided by two trained coaches, an individual’s work at home in between these workshops and a concluding discussion to address any unresolved issues and open questions. In these three steps a portfolio is created that contains information on the following issues:

  Career progression: this shows all of the steps taken in the formal education and training system as well as the steps that have led to the acquisition of skills and competences through non-formal and informal learning.

  Analysis of potential: this is an analysis of individual tasks and activities that an individual has carried out in different roles and stages of their life in view of the skills and competences used, or gained, to complete them. Individuals also carry out a self-assessment of their competences.

  Personal profile: the abilities highlighted in the stages above are reduced to core competences. The individual has the choice of which competences are selected.

  Once the portfolio is complete, the coaches are responsible for highlighting the individual’s core competences and for assessing the extent to which the indicators that have been set to define social and communication competences can be found in an individual’s competence portfolio.

  The portfolio method is complemented with an assessment centre where a group of people who have completed the work on the competence portfolio undergo a number of tests including: psychometric tests, mock job interviews, group discussions, role plays, case studies and other tasks. Several observers are assessing the behaviour of the participants in view of six dimensions of social competence: ability to work with others, team work, ability to reflect, ability to resolve conflicts, self-awareness, communication skills.

- The sub-project ‘Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance’ is part of the current project on ‘Educational Guidance in Vienna’ ("Bildungsberatung in Wien") (see Section 2.2). The tools developed and used in the sub-project ‘Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance’ are an adaptation of tools from the ‘competence portfolio for volunteers’, one of Austria’s first competence portfolios developed by a platform of Austrian Adult Educational Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke, RÖBW) for showing results of informal learning. The tools were developed also using experiences from other projects, for example, competence workshops for elderly people.

  The sub-project carried out by the RÖBW seeks to develop, test and implement tools for the work of educational counsellors. It aims at providing tools for identifying informally acquired competences, to sensitize both counsellors and clients for informal learning, and to provide them with guidance about existing or missing skills when taking educational decisions. The main interest focuses on using experiences from many years of portfolio-
work to develop a tool for educational guidance, especially the experience that a good
discussion in the first meeting can lead to very successful results for the client. Thus, the
sub-project aims at elaborating smaller formats than whole portfolios and to adapt the
method of competence balance for educational counselling. The target group comprises
clients who have acquired competences in special fields of activity but have no certificates
to prove these competences or are not even aware that they possess these competences.
The tools that have been developed and tested so far are two ‘mini-formats’ of competence
portfolios describing competences in one single field of activity: a very rough ‘competence
sketch’ that results from the first counselling session, and a ‘competence profile’ that is a
more elaborated and better formulated ‘competence sketch’. In the tool’s pilot project,
counsellors from different institutions considered and decided which ‘regular’ clients could
have acquired relevant competences for elaborating a ‘competence sketch’. As a result, the
pool of participants was rather heterogeneous. Still, the candidates can be divided into four
major groups: persons with a migration background; disabled persons; young persons with
special needs; persons interested in second-chance education, especially persons trying to
get access to tertiary education via the Higher Education Entrance Examination.

3.3 Costs to individuals

Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall
data on costs to individuals is available. The direct and indirect costs differ between the
different measures and initiatives. Some examples are given below.

The exam fees for the external exams (ExternistInnenprüfungen) for the Hauptschule
qualification are relatively low (approximately EUR 26). The relevant costs arise from the
course fees for the preparation courses, which although in principle are not obligatory, are
usually necessary for the participants to pass the exam successfully. The bm:ukk sponsors
such preparation courses so that they are in most cases cost-free for the participants. The
exceptional admission to the apprenticeship-leave exam requires an exam fee of EUR 82
and an application fee of EUR 25 (cf. ibw, 2007, 60). Because the duration and work
involved in the exam organisation vary between apprenticeship occupations, costs also
vary. There are various options for subsidies but in most cases, the Public Employment
Service Austria bears these costs.

Costs for the Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP), are distinguished between those for preparation
courses and exam fees. On average, approximately EUR 310 of exam fees should be paid
for all four exams. Depending on the combination of subjects taken, the costs for
preparation courses might differ between EUR 1 700 and EUR 2 100. Because of different
subsidy options, it is also difficult to identify who will bear these costs. Within the initiative
‘Lehre mit Matura’, the BRP exam can be taken free of charge if one of the partial exams is
already taken during the apprenticeship training and the others not later than five years
after the end of the apprenticeship training.

The exam fees for other external exams (ExternistInnenprüfungen) in upper secondary
schools or colleges (AHS or BHS) within the public school system are equal to the fees for
the Hauptschule qualification for external exam candidates. In some provinces, people can
receive financial support from the authorities, chambers of labour, chambers of commerce
or the bm:wfj. The bm:ukk provides preparation courses for free or for a low fee. Cost-free
opportunities are available at schools for employed persons and are offered in the
framework of the initiative ‘Lehre mit Matura’.

Exam fees for the Studienberechtigungsprüfung are about EUR 100. Depending on the
combination of subjects taken, the costs for preparation courses might differ between EUR
570 and EUR 1 000. A range of subsidies exists. Vienna, for example, offers the possibility
of partial reimbursement of course costs via the Educational Account of the Vienna
Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF). The Vienna Chamber of Labour, for example, grants
an educational voucher for bridge courses (cf. ibw 2007, 61).
The costs vary for the competence portfolio initiatives offered at different institutions: For example, the competence profile ‘KOMPAZ’ costs EUR 195 (there are various possibilities to get funding such as from the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria); the competence portfolio of the Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke costs EUR 15 per person; and the Competence Audit of the Tyrol Centre for the Future costs EUR 150. The status-quo evaluation offered at the wba costs EUR 130, the wba-certificate (including a three-day-assessment-centre) costs EUR 650; and the wba- diploma costs EUR 320. Travel costs and additional expenses for courses that candidates might have to attend in order to acquire missing competences are not included. Additional costs can therefore vary from near to nothing to EUR 2,000 or more, depending individually on how much the candidate’s competences have already been evidenced and recognised. Some costs can be refunded (though possibilities for funding differ widely) or can be set off from tax liability.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

For the preparation of the Berufsehereprüfung and the Hauptschule qualification, competence-based curricula for courses at adult learning institutions (which take into account the special situation of adult learners) are currently being elaborated. In this context, German language competence and foreign language competence represent major elements. Project activities particularly in the specialist area serve to support independent learning. In addition, procedures to identify competences as well as portfolio instruments to document competences are being developed (bm:ukk, bm:wf 2009,18). The initiatives described (see Section 1.5) are focussing on specific target groups such as the low qualified and early school leavers (for example, taking external exams for the Hauptschule qualification, or the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination) or those seeking a HE qualification (for example, external exams at upper-secondary academic schools or VET colleges, Berufsehereprüfung, Studienberechtigungsprüfung, ‘Lehre mit Matura’). Some initiatives particularly addressed to migrants are described below.

The National report for Austria on the implementation of the education and training 2010 work programme includes special measures for immigrants (bm:ukk, bm:wf 2009,14). These measures take account of the specific circumstances of the target group and offer entry to an education process that enables participants to actively design their integration by attending low-threshold educational offers and coaching sessions. Language promotion is not conducted in an isolated manner but integrated into educational measures that include language competence, and digital and mathematical learning to learn, social and civic competences. Language courses are also part of the preparatory measures for the Hauptschule qualification; approximately 40% of the participants are immigrants. The framework of individual multilingual educational counselling supports immigrants in the use of their resources, the presentation of their competences, and the recognition of the qualifications acquired in their country of origin. In addition, measures promote the development of schemes of documentation, assessment and the recognition of competences in the field of basic education and language acquisition.

The EQUAL project ‘Qualification Empowers’ is considered to be a good example of the use of practices to recognise non-formal and informal learning as part of strategies to integrate migrants. The project comprised two subprojects that focused on collecting and recording immigrants’ skills. The first one was implemented at Integrationshaus Wien with the title ‘Language and qualification portfolio’ (period of development: 2002-2004, www.integrationshaus.at/portfolio/html/arbeitsteil.html). In particular, the project took into account the experience acquired through migration (dealing with an unfamiliar cultural context, developing skills to manage difficult situations in a new context, reconstructing identity etc.), rated them as ‘key skills’ of relevance for the labour market and placed the skills within the framework of a vocational guidance measure. Based on the portfolio, all the acquired abilities, knowledge and competences were collected and evidenced for employers in the portfolio. In addition, the project participant sought to define occupational objectives and develop a plan for entry to the labour market. Following completion of that
work, a collection of individual potentials was created, where the process of portfolio-related work was continued. In a first evaluation, this instrument was assessed and was seen to be extremely positive and efficient. The abzwien, a non-profit organisation which seeks to enhance gender equality at the labour market, implemented a second sub-project to develop qualifications through partnerships; the subproject was entitled ‘Nosqua’ – recognition and qualification for immigrants (project period 2002-2004, www.abzwien.at/projekte/migrantinnen/nosqua.html). This aimed to make immigrants’ potential visible and their vocational qualifications accessible for the Austrian labour market. The programme emphasised identifying skills and competences and elaborating problem-solving strategies. In addition, the overall objective was to build the participants’ capacity in everyday tasks, education and occupation as well as recognising qualifications when preparing applications. Demand for this measure far exceeded originally planned capacities, which underlines the need for such programmes (cf. ibw 2007, 23).

The initiative ‘Join in a Job!’ was developed in an EQUAL project and further developed in a Leonardo da Vinci project (http://join-in-a-job.eu; cf. Fleischer 2010). This project focused on 15 to 25 year-old migrants without a complete (vocational) education or who were unemployed. The method combined social work (case management), career-planning advice and vocational counselling. One aim was to visualise already acquired competences by using the portfolio method.

The thematic network ‘Bewusst kompetent!’ is a joint effort of five EQUAL development partnerships whose aim was to develop and test new possibilities for qualification acquisition for disadvantaged people. Sensitising job seekers and also those offering jobs to non-formally or informally acquired competences should open access to the labour market and educational opportunities (http://www.bap.or.at/www_main.php?page_id=256).

The ‘Migrare -Centre for Migrants in Upper Austria offers competence profiles using the CH-Q method (since 2008). Migrare works on behalf of the Public Employment Service of Upper Austria. Migrants registered there are allowed to take part in the programme (www.migrare.at/cms/index.php/Hintergrund-Ziele-Kompetenz.html; cf. Kovacs 2010).

The aforementioned ‘Du kannst was!’ (‘YOU have skills/competences!’) project targets people with low levels of qualifications and also immigrants. It is described in the box below.
The ‘You have skills/competences!’ (DU kannst was!) initiative is a pilot project for the validation of professional competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning and is carried out in the province of Upper Austria. The project was initiated in 2005 and in 2007 the provincial government approved the project proposal.

The target group of the project is persons with low qualifications and immigrants - participation is voluntary. Participants can obtain certificates for the final apprenticeship examination in one of nine fields. The nine professions were chosen in cooperation with the Upper Austria Labour Market Service (AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice) and were cooking, masonry, welding, gardening, metalwork, carpentry, IT, retail sales and gastronomy.

The process includes:

1. Information/acquisition of participants via target group specific communication channels (workers’ union, chambers, persons responsible for personnel in companies)

2. Access counselling: potential participants are informed on chances and requirements of the process and can decide if they want to take part.

3. Personal portfolios are created with focus on competences relevant for the chosen profession.

4. First performance check: competences made visible in the portfolio process are compared to those in the corresponding job profiles and examination regulations. The performance check results in a ‘positive list’ with proven competences and an ‘open list’ of competences that still must be acquired.

5. Counselling on further education, the development of an individual training plan to cover the competences in the ‘open list’.

7. Counselling related to certification focuses on a discussion of the ‘open list’ of competences and information on the final performance check.

8. A second performance check focuses on the competences in the ‘open list’.

9. Validation as skilled worker: The overall result of the validation process is regarded as equivalent to a regular apprenticeship certificate issued after passing the final apprenticeship examination. The apprenticeship office validates the competences and issues the apprenticeship certificate.

The process meets the common European principles for accreditation and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The provincial government of upper Austria provided funding for the portfolio process for around 150 people. To minimise the costs for participants, the project organisation is also considering ways to get grants for the participants' further education within the programme.

A continuous external evaluation was carried out by the University of Linz. However there is currently no evidence of results available.

http://www.dukannstwas.at/
3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Hardly any data has been published on validation’s impact on individuals. Evaluation studies addressing this issue are only (publicly) available for certain measures.

One study (Triebel 2005) assesses the Kompetenzbilanz (Competence Audit) of the Zukunftszentrum Tirol (Tyrol Centre of the Future), a portfolio project without formal certification. In particular, this study surveyed the participants’ satisfaction, their expectations regarding the competence audit and whether they have been met, and the concrete individual consequences of participation. Participants felt that the experiences from the Competence Balance process enabled them to more actively and creatively approach problems and tasks; improve their knowledge, skills and competences; and increase their problem-solving abilities and stress-coping strategies. At the workplace, they felt less pressure because they found new perspectives in the Competence Audit process and could clearly improve their work situation (see also Schildberger 2010).

In a recent dissertation (Prokopp 2009), interviews with people responsible for two initiatives that involved validating non-formal and informal learning provided partial feedback from participants. An academic secondary school for adults in the city of Salzburg has practiced validation of non-formal and informal learning since establishing a modular course system in 2000. Thus, students can have their prior learning accredited and accordingly start courses at various module levels. Students’ feedback on that reform was said to be positive; the number of dropouts has been reduced. In the province of Burgenland, the regional Volkshochschule (adult education centre) offered a programme for validation of non-formal and informal learning with development of personal portfolios for women who want to return to the labour market after an absence from working (mostly because of raising children). After the programme, these women gave feedback that stated that they had learned to recognise and describe their competences acquired non-formally or informally and that this had been of great help when applying for a job. Two thirds of the 116 participants had been able to find a job subsequent to the programme.

Kumpfmüller & Morgan (2007) have analysed in detail several of the Austrian portfolio initiatives. They studied the development, aims, practices and methods of the programmes and analysed the experiences and feedback of participants. Furthermore they suggested possibilities for further developments. They stated that although validation methods differ, some common principles exist: for example, the alternation between working individually and receiving support as well as people working individually on their portfolio development, and also receiving support to do so... Despite these similarities, no concerted actions for developing general standards or building publicly efficient networks can be seen according to the report.

An evaluation of the competence profile of KOMPAZ showed that 63% of people who were unemployed before participating in the measure were successful in finding a job after completion. They were more self-confident, developed their learning strategies and could also actively use their informally acquired knowledge and competences for improved profiling within the working context. In general, people with higher formal qualifications stated that they got more benefits out of the portfolio process than those with lower formal qualifications; this included finding appropriate further education useful for the labour market. The authors state a need for better linking-up of educational institutions and the labour market to gain transparency on the actual usefulness of particular qualifications and competences (Auer et al. 2007).

Process-accompanying evaluation is carried out for the Weiterbildungsakademie (wba). It shows the reasons/motivations to aim at a certificate or a diploma. The first such reason / motivation is to ‘bundle’ competences in order to acquire an acknowledged certificate or diploma. The second is to confirm professional competences in adult education by an authority. The third is for further development of qualifications and the fourth is to gain advantages in competing for jobs.
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In Austria, different ministries and resorts within these ministries are responsible for the different qualifications in the formal system and also for the relevant quality assurance activities. Manifold and partly systematic quality efforts exist in the different segments of the Austrian qualifications system. Some are directly in line with European principles for quality assurance. Since most procedures and initiatives for validating non-formally or informally acquired knowledge belong to the formal education system and/or aim at a qualification equivalent to one of the formal system, the same quality assurance activities as in the formal system are relevant. Due to the wide distribution of responsibilities across various ministries, there is no overall quality assurance framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning and it is also not seen as necessary.

Some examples of quality development and assurance activities are described below:

Legal responsibility for the type, content of curricula and quality assurance of secondary academic schools and VET schools and colleges rests with the Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture and is regulated in the School Organisation Act. The most important quality initiatives are the following (Tritscher-Archan 2010, 61pp):

- Within the framework of the Q.I.S.-project (Quality in Schools – www.qis.at), which was launched in 1999, the main aim consisted in stimulating and encouraging schools to question their own quality, steer it and develop it further. Q.I.S. is a service offered at schools with material, information, experience exchange, discussion and presentation options in a virtual quality network.

- Quality development efforts in VET schools and colleges have been supported by QIBB (VET Quality Initiative – www.qibb.at) since 2005/2006. QIBB is the first Austrian initiative in which all levels of the system – schools as well as school inspection and administration – are systematically involved. Despite its voluntary nature, the degree of implementation regarding internal elements of quality development such as the creation of the mission statement and school programme as well as self-evaluation is now generally relatively high in the full-time school sector. In 2007, ARQA-VET (Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training - www.arqa-vet.at) was set up, which is used as a contact point and service facility for all questions associated with the theme of quality in VET and supports the General Directorate II for Vocational Education and Training of the bm:ukk in the implementation of QIBB and the national and European activities of the ENQA-VET (European Network for Quality Assurance) (www.arqa-vet.at).

- Internal evaluation and quality management are accompanied by the introduction of educational standards in the main subjects and testing procedures at schools that are based on these standards. This initiative was launched in 2002 in the general education sector, with a binding introduction of educational standards at primary school and lower secondary level effected on a legal basis starting from January 2009 on. The development of educational standards for the VET sector was started some time later in 2004/2005, and here in a first step general education and in a second step profession-related core competences were defined for the 13th grade by standards. The piloting stage has been ensued in three pilot phases (October 2007 to June 2010).

- A reform related to the Matura (HE entrance examination) is also supposed to enhance quality: The new partially centralised Matura will be implemented for the first time in 2014 at all higher general education schools (AHSs), the VET colleges (BHSs) will follow a year later. The new regulations will also apply for the external Matura and the Berufsreifeprüfung.
In higher education, there are currently three agencies addressing quality assurance and accreditation:

- The AQA (Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance), which is at the disposal for all higher education institutions,
- the FH-Council (Fachhochschule-Council), which is the accrediting body for the sector of universities of applied sciences,
- and the Austrian Accreditation Council (AAC) which is the accrediting body for the private university sector.

In Austria the internal quality assurance, its approaches and arrangements are within the institutional responsibility of the different higher education institutions. However, the evidence of the efficiency, accountability and quality of the internal systems has to be assured through external quality assurance mechanisms and has to be carried out/established by an independent and competent organisation.

Adult education providers play an important role in this context. For example, preparatory courses for taking external exams, the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (BRP) or the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (SBP) as well as procedures for identifying and recording competences (competence audits, portfolios) are often offered at adult education providers. Various approaches for quality assurance have been taken during the last: General international quality assurance standards are used and specific criteria and processes for the Provinces and individual providers have been developed to evaluate courses using participant questionnaires and instructions on self-assessment for trainers and training providers. Many training providers have already undergone quality assurance tests (e.g. according to ISO Standards or the EFQM - European Foundation for Quality Management). Some associations have developed their own quality assurance measures and also specific quality labels have been developed. An overall framework of quality for Adult Education in Austria will start in January 2011. The “Ö-Cert” will acknowledge nine quality-management-systems and quality assurance procedures. The aim is mutual recognition of quality measures by the regional governments and the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture to provide transparency for customers/learners and to improve quality of adult education, including procedures of recognition of non-formal and informal learning provided by these institutions.

### 4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

The external exams at formal education institutions employ the same quality assurance procedures as for traditional exams (for example, they are also under the supervision of the relevant educational authorities, the assessment methods and procedures as well as the assessors are the same as in the formal pathway.).

For example, to obtain the *Hauptschule* qualification in second-chance education, an external exam has to be taken in front of an examination committee at a lower secondary school in the respective school district. External candidates can sit for the *Reifeprüfung* exam (upper secondary school leaving exam providing direct access to HE - *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung*) at the corresponding schools (upper-secondary academic schools or VET colleges) or at specially set-up examination centres.

Recognition of previous vocational knowledge and skills for the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) is regulated – similarly to the procedure for admission to the regular LAP – via the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*) and hence has a legally binding framework at the national level. The exam must be taken before exam committees, which must be set up by the apprenticeship offices and are composed of professional experts. In addition, the apprenticeship offices of the economic chambers are integrated into the quality assurance process as a major institutional authority.
Both the Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP) and the Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP) are regulated by law (via the Federal Berufsreifeprüfung Act [Bundesgesetz über die Berufsreifeprüfung], on one hand, and the Higher Education Entrance Act [Studienberechtigungsgesetz] and the School Organisation Act [Schulorganisationsgesetz], on the other hand). These laws also contain elements of quality assurance (such as the regulation of the recognition of programmes serving as preparation for the BRP). The competent ministry, in accordance with legal regulations for university programmes, recognises bridge courses preparing for the SBP at universities. Before recognising the equivalency of bridge courses organised by adult learning institutions, two specialist boards hold hearings to examine if the case has met relevant requirements, as stipulated by the UniStG. Adult learning institutions offering bridge courses are obliged to submit an annual report that provides information about the number of previous qualifications of programme participants and includes the outcomes of evaluation procedures on the quality of teaching (cf. ibw 2007, 68). The practitioners of portfolio methods are trainers at adult education providers and usually undergo the respective special training (See Section 6).

4.3 Evaluation framework

No overall framework exists for evaluation of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Evaluation is carried out in different ways and with different frequency (if at all) for the different measures, projects or initiatives. Some evaluation studies are presented in Section 3.5. (for example, Triebl 2005; Auer et al. 2007) They are carried out by independent experts or by researchers from universities and are usually commissioned by the institution providing the validation measure or by the responsible ministry. For example, studies on the Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP), preparatory courses, graduates and their positions at the labour market are commissioned by the bm:ukk (Klimmer et al. 1999; 2006; 2009).

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

Many procedures and initiatives for validating non-formally or informally acquired knowledge belong to the formal education system and/or aim at a formal education and training qualification (“external examinations”). Therefore, the assessment methods used in this context are usually the same as those used in the formal system. Relevant exams are also held at education and training institutions authorised by law.

The most commonly used methods in the context of external examinations are written tests and oral exams. The apprenticeship-leave exam – also in the case of exceptional admission to the exam – consists of a practical and a theoretical examination. The examinees will have to furnish evidence of their practical know-how and job-related skills. This exam tests whether the apprentice has acquired the practical skills and qualifications relevant to his occupation and whether he or she is able to properly perform the tasks characteristic to the apprenticeship trade.

In many cases, the portfolio method is used in the initiatives developed at adult learning institutes (see Section 1.5). In this context supported self-assessment is usually the chosen method - with a strong focus on developing the ability of self-reflection.

For example, the competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke - www.kompetenz-portfolio.at) is a folder aiming to systematically document skills and competences acquired by volunteers. It covers the following aspects: a short description of voluntary activities; a personal competence profile; and an action plan for measures, such as new orientations or goals in volunteering; planning of further education and training, personal development, job applications in the labour market, etc. A two-hour (approx.) talk on competences with a certified portfolio facilitator makes up the core of the
portfolio preparation. The talk is evaluated jointly in several steps, and then the participant completes the portfolio. From a pedagogical perspective, portfolio preparation is a supported self-assessment activity. Following preparation of the portfolio, the individual has the option to prepare a competence certificate for job applications with the portfolio facilitator (cf. Kellner 2009). A similar method is employed, for example, by the competence portfolio of the Adult Education centre Linz (see Section 3.2).

A further method used by the wba is a three-day-assessment, the so-called „certification workshop“, where candidates who want to be awarded a wba-certificate have to show their professional competences and personal and social skills.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of methods used

The fact that many methods of recognition relate to the formal system brings the advantage, that the certificates reach a high level of acceptance in the labour market. The fact, that preparation courses for these exams normally take place at adult education institutes seems to lower the barriers for people with negative previous experiences of formal education and training.

As regards portfolio methods it has shown that this kind of reflection and investigation empowers people and also helps them to get jobs or chose appropriate further education.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

Depending on the specific measures, the practitioners are teachers, experienced professionals, members of the respective authorities, ministries or social partners. As the assessment is often carried out by a commission, usually members of most of the above mentioned groups are involved.

There is no specific training for validation practitioners in the context of external exams: Since the same assessment procedures are used, their professional training and experience is considered as sufficient. For example, teachers at VET schools and colleges must have a degree from a university or from a university college of teacher education; all teachers at VET schools and colleges – with the exception of teachers for general education subjects – are obliged to furnish proof of completion of several years of professional experience in the world of business.

The practitioners of portfolio methods are trainers at adult-education institutes. They have to prove expertise in the field of adult education and undergo the respective special training.

For example, the platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke) offers a training course which leads to a certificate. Portfolio tutors are adult education trainers, working on a voluntary or professional basis, who have gained the certificate in "Development of competence and portfolio tutoring". To gain the certificate, the tutor-to-be needs to have participated successfully in 4 training modules, have developed an extensive competence portfolio for themselves and have created an additional 5 practice portfolios. During this process they are professionally supported, the timeframe is flexible. Portfolio tutors have both methodological knowledge (of how to create a competence portfolio and the ability to pass on information about it) and contextual knowledge (knowledge about volunteering and associated human resources policy).
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- Pädagogische Hochschule Wien (University of Education Vienna)