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European Inventory on Validation of Non- formal and Informal Learning 2010

Country Report: Finland

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

Finland has a relatively long tradition of practices related to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, and several political and legal initiatives have underlined the importance of this issue. Today, the legal framework for validation is fairly developed and education laws make validation the learner's subjective right in many fields of education (including upper secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education). Validation of informal and non-formal learning has been on the strategic policy agenda for a long time now and the developments related to the design and implementation of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) have given new impetus for work in this field.

In relation to the legal framework for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland¹, the Finnish education laws on general upper secondary education (*lukio*), Initial (upper secondary level) Vocational Education and Training (IVET) (*ammattillinen peruskoulutus*), vocational adult education (*ammattillinen aikuiskoulutus*), polytechnics (*ammattikorkeakoulut*) and universities (*yliopistot*) state that access to studies in these institutes may be granted even if an individual does not meet the standard entry requirements². In other words, individuals may be considered if they can demonstrate that their prior learning and experiences (gained within formal, informal or non-formal spheres) have provided them with the necessary knowledge and competences required for the successful completion of the qualification. At all these levels of education, the laws also make it possible for individuals to have their prior learning, regardless of how and when this learning has been acquired, assessed and recognised. Furthermore, the Act on Matriculation Examination (*Ylioppilastutkintolaki*) provides school principals with an opportunity to admit people directly to the final examination of the upper secondary school system - Matriculation Examinations³.

Only a small number of restrictions apply. In relation to vocational education, only up to 30% of students in any subject area can be selected on this basis⁴.

The same principles also apply to education and training provided by other administrations but the education authorities (e.g. those related to defence and border guard), although evidence suggests that in practice validation in these fields tends to be limited to recognition of prior formal learning.⁵

In relation to adult education, the competence-based qualification (CBQ) system offers an opportunity for adults to obtain basic (initial), further and specialist vocational qualifications based on the principle that full and partial competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the competences and knowledge have been acquired. The recognition of prior learning is at the very core of this system and in principle candidates can obtain such qualifications without any formal training at all. This means that there are no requirements to complete a certain amount of studies and the requirements are described in learning outcomes. The competence-based qualification system also offers by law and in practice each and every student an individualised study plan that takes into account their personal circumstances, including relevant learning acquired through informal

¹ Further information about the legal framework for validation can be found in the 2007 country report

² ECOTEC: Nevala, A-M (2009) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; Finland*. C3342 / December 2007. European Commission, DG EAC.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

⁵ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

and non-formal means for example at work or hobbies. Training providers are responsible for guiding candidates through this process.

The validation of informal and non-formal learning is more commonly used in the context of the competence-based qualification system than in other types of education. The reason is that the CBQ system has been built around the concept of validation and many learners are adults with relevant work experience. In practice, validation remains minimal in the context of general and vocational secondary education. Significant developments are taking place in the higher education (HE) sector where a national development programme is being implemented with a goal of training staff from universities and polytechnics in the validation concept and associated methods (see Chapter 1.5 for further information). This programme follows recommendations made by the Ministry of Education and Culture and consequently the rectors' councils for both universities and universities of applied sciences regarding the further development of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the HE sector (see Chapter for 1.4 for further information).

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

Finland does not have a national qualifications framework (NQF) in place yet but it is currently (December 2010) being discussed in the Finnish Parliament. The proposed "Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning" is expected to enter into force in 2011.

The preparatory process for the NQF begun in August 2008 when the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to prepare an NQF based on the description of learning outcomes⁶. This committee completed a proposal for the NQF in August 2009 and it led to a public consultation being carried out between August and October 2009.

The upcoming NQF is based on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and it has eight levels. The EQF level descriptors have been clarified and further developed based on a national perspective. Prior learning will primarily be incorporated into the qualifications in the national qualifications system and framework.⁷

The NQF development process has made a positive contribution to the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. First, it has led to new and intensified discussions about validation of prior learning in the country⁸. Second, the development of NQF has meant that learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences) have been defined for all levels. All qualifications specified in the Finnish legislation of the education authorities and other administrative sectors will be placed in the NQF based on the learning outcomes for each qualification.⁹ It is expected that the elaboration of learning outcomes for each level will make it easier than before to assess prior learning as it can be assessed against the learning outcomes described in the NQF.¹⁰

Third, possibilities to expand the NQF from a qualifications framework into a knowledge framework, which would open the framework for recognition of all prior learning, have also

⁶ The committee brought together higher education institutions, and other educational institutions, social partners, university and polytechnic rectors' councils, students organisations, Finnish Adult Education Association, National Board of Education (incl. ENIC/NARIC) and the Ministry of Education. Also ministries which have their own qualifications, such as defence or interior, participated.

⁷ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehyksen valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*.

Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

⁸ Interview, 2010

⁹ Blomqvist, C. (2010) Finland; Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications. in Madhu, S. & Duvekot, R. (2010) *Benchmarking national learning cultures on linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks*. UNESCO International Meeting "Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks: North-South collaborative research" UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany. 11 - 12 March 2010

¹⁰ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehyksen valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

been explored by the working group and future work in this field is expected¹¹. This is also illustrated by the fact that the name of NQF in Finnish refers to validation; 'Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen viitekehys' can be directly translated to 'The National Framework of Qualifications and other learning'¹².

So far, no common standards or requirements have been introduced for validation that would include all different levels of education¹³. In relation to the CBQ system, the National Board of Education has drafted national qualification requirements for each competence based qualification¹⁴. The documents specify the areas of assessment and standard/criteria for passing/failing. Such requirements are legally binding and therefore guide validation work carried out at the provider level by the tripartite assessment teams. In terms of HE, the laws and decrees regulate higher education and no standards exist as such. In 2009 the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences also issued recommendations on the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finnish higher education institutions (see section 1.4 for further information).

1.3 National institutional framework

Finland has no dedicated validation agency in charge of developing and co-ordinating validation in the country. The Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education are the two authorities leading work in this field. However, the Finnish system of validation in the field of adult education (QBC) is strongly based on tripartite collaboration. This means that the representatives of employers and employees are involved in validation from the local to the national level. Further information about the roles of different institutes and other partners can be found in the next section (1.4).

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

In accordance with the Decree on the Development Plan for Education and University Research (987/1998) the Government adopts a plan for the development of education and university research within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture every four years for both the year in question and for the following five calendar years. The current Development plan is for the period of 2007–2012¹⁵.

The development plan is based on the objectives set for education and science policy in the Government Programme. The Ministry of Education and Culture implements the Development plan which is also the overarching strategic document for the recognition of prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal).

Competence-based qualifications (CBQs)

In relation to the CBQs, the Ministry also decides which qualifications are to be included in the qualifications structure. The qualifications structure is revised annually according to

¹¹ Blomqvist, C. (2010) Finland; Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications. in Madhu, S. & Duvekot, R. (2010) *Benchmarking national learning cultures on linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks*. UNESCO International Meeting "Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks: North-South collaborative research" UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany. 11 - 12 March 2010

¹² Interviews, 2010

¹³ Cedefop (2010) The Development of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe. Draft 31 May 2010.

¹⁴ The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the national core curriculum for each vocational qualification, determining the composition of studies and the objectives, core contents and assessment criteria of the study units. Preparation is carried out by tripartite expert groups and they are also discussed in education committees for each sector and qualification committees.

¹⁵ The latest Development Plan can be found:

<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2008/liitteet/opm11.pdf>

possible changes in working life and feedback obtained from social partners and other labour market actors¹⁶.

The requirements for the CBQs are specified and confirmed by the National Board of Education. The modules of the qualification, the vocational skills required for the qualification and the assessment criteria are determined by the requirements.¹⁷

Tripartite Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) are appointed by the National Board of Education and they bring together employers, employee representatives, teachers and, when applicable, representatives of the self-employed. In addition, the Committee can include independent experts. There are 152 qualification committees with about 1,000 members. The Qualification Committees direct and develop the competence-based qualification system, make contract with VET institutions on arranging the competence tests, confirm the assessment results and award certificates.

Providers of education (VET schools and other VET establishments) are responsible for arranging and supervising the competence tests. The assessment in competence tests shall focus on functioning at work. Providers of education also¹⁸:

- Organise preparatory training for the candidates (if necessary);
- Are responsible for guidance and advice related to studies and validation; and
- Are responsible for the individualisation process, which has been a legal requirement since 2007. All participants in the CBQ system have a right to have an individualised plan taking into account their personal circumstances and prior learning (gained through formal, informal or non-formal means). The plan covers the entrance to education, arrangements for the completion of the qualification and the acquisition of competences that are lacking.

Social partners (or individual employer and employee representatives) are involved in the planning and design of CBQ tests in co-operation with (training) organisations, the assessment of candidates and the provision of on-the-job-learning possibilities. Furthermore, they are involved in informing the needs of working life (businesses and employees) to education authorities and organisers.¹⁹

This means that the different aspects of validation are allocated in the following ways:

- Design of the procedure/approach: National Board of Education, Qualification Committees and VET providers
- Information promotion and raising awareness: National Board of Education, (social partners)
- Providing counselling and guidance: VET providers
- Undertaking assessment: VET providers together with employee and employer representatives and the candidate
- Quality assurance, evaluation and review: National Board of Education, tripartite Qualification Committees, VET providers, the Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the tripartite National Education and Training Committees²⁰

¹⁶ Karttunen, A. (2008) *Annual National Review (ANaR) on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNF-IFL) on the national context*. OBSERVAL.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Karttunen, A. (2008) *Annual National Review (ANaR) on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNF-IFL) on the national context*. OBSERVAL.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Further information about the stakeholders involved in the quality assurance, evaluation and review can be found in section 4.

Higher education

With regards to higher education, each HE institution has the autonomy to decide on the way in which they take forward validation as long as they follow the rules laid down in legislation for polytechnics and universities regarding recognition of prior learning. HE institutions are also expected to follow the recommendations laid down by the Ministry of Education and Culture and rectors councils regarding validation of informal and non-formal learning:

- In 2007, a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education reviewed practices in recognition of prior studies and learning in HE and put forward 25 recommendations for common national principles²¹. These recommendations are being taken forward in a form of working groups and projects.
- In 2009 the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences issued recommendations on the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finnish higher education institutions. The recommendations were prepared in cooperation with universities, polytechnics and labour market parties²².

The 2009 recommendations of the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences regarding validation of informal and non-formal learning

The recommendations include 21 recommendations regarding validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finnish universities and polytechnics (which call themselves universities of applied sciences). These recommendations include, for example, the following ones outlined below.

Examples of recommendations from the perspective of HEIs:

- Higher education institutions (HEIs) should continue the process of describing their courses and studies on the basis of learning outcomes as this process creates the basis for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.
- It is good to use a range of methods to assess prior learning of HE students and they should be discussed with a student as part of their individual study planning (*henkilökohtainen opintosuunnitelma*, HOPS) process by HOPS counsellors.
- Each HEI can design their validation assessment system but information about such practices should be made publicly available. Each HEI is in charge of disseminating information about practices and opportunities related to the validation of informal and non-formal learning so that all students and staff are aware of them.
- The validation practices should be tied into the quality assurance system of the HE institutions.
- Validation is aimed at existing rather than prospective students and it mainly takes place in the context of the individual study planning process (HOPS) by HOPS counsellors.

Examples of recommendations from the students' perspective:

- The validation of informal and non-formal learning is voluntary for all students but students have a right to request an assessment of their prior learning. It is the responsibility of the student to make such a request.
- HEIs should guide students through the validation process.
- Counsellors should explain during the HOPS process what kind of prior learning can be assessed.

²¹ Ministry of Education (2007) Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:4. Helsinki, Yliopistopaino 2007.

²² Finnish Council of University Rectors – Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (2009): *Oppimisesta osaamiseen: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*. Committee report 2009.

- Validation methods and standards should be public and explained to each participating students by the HEI.
- HEIs should monitor the implementation of validation methods and practices on an on-going basis.

Examples of general recommendations:

- There is a need to improve the skills and competences of HE personnel in validation systems and methods.

Source: Finnish Council of University Rectors – Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (2009): *Oppimisesta osaamiseen: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*. Committee report 2009.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Although national provisions for validation exist in Finland, a range of projects have been implemented to further develop validation, especially in the higher education sphere.

The largest development project is an ESF project for training personnel from HEIs in validation.

AHOT development project – higher education

AHOT project will run from March 2009 until December 2011. It follows another development project led by the HE sector in 2007 - 2009.

AHOT is aimed at teachers, lecturers, guidance counsellors, planners, directors and other staff from HEIs. The representatives of social partner organisations and labour market administration are also eligible to take part. The goal is to ensure that HEIs receive support and training in validation methods and practices, and a range of training courses, seminars and conferences are organised as part of the project.

Different working groups have also been established for seven different faculties/fields of education. These working groups allow universities and universities of applied sciences to get together to discuss and define specific rules for validation in their sector.

It is co-funded by ESF together with the regional agency for Pirkanmaa region, University of Turku and the school of vocational teacher education at the HAAGA-HELIA university of applied sciences.

The project is unique in that it is supported by rectors' councils for both universities and universities of applied sciences, national authorities and HE student's associations.

So far staff from each HEI in the country has participated in the project. It is estimated that so far somewhere between 5-10% of relevant HE staff have been trained through the project.

For further information, please see: <http://www.ahot.utu.fi/>

Several individual polytechnics and universities have also implemented projects with a view to putting a validation scheme in place.

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

The competence-based qualification system is modular and it is possible for individuals to complete full or partial CBQs through the validation of informal and non-formal learning. As stated above, VET providers are legally obliged to create an individual plan for each and every student that takes into account prior learning (whether it is acquired through formal, non-formal or informal means).

All studies for school based initial vocational qualifications are also modularised (units) and the objectives of study units are described as learning outcomes. In other words, the IVET system is a credit based system built on continuing assessment of learning outcomes. One

year of full-time study equals 40 credits and one vocational study programme at upper-secondary level consist of 120 credits (three years)²³. One credit is equal to 40 hours of students' average workload. Legal provisions ensure that it is in principle possible for individuals to obtain credits through the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Overall, the modularity of the VET qualifications increases flexibility and options and makes it easier to get credit for earlier studies and competence. The modular structure also makes it easier to supplement the qualifications²⁴.

In higher education, credits have been used since 1970s and a fully ECTS-equivalent system of credits (*opintopiste*) was introduced in 2005. Study courses are quantified according to the work load. One year of studies is equivalent to 1,600 hours of student work on the average and is defined as 60 credits. The credit system complies with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Legal provisions ensure that it is in principle possible for individuals to obtain credits through the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

1.7 Funding framework

In principle, no funding has been earmarked in the national budget for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. However, as previously explained, the CBQ system has been running since 1994; it is funded from public sources and built around the principle of validation. Several ESF funded projects have also been utilised to develop tailored validation procedures for immigrants (see chapter 3.4. for further information).

In the field of higher education, the HEIs have the responsibility to develop and carry out validation from their mainstream budget. In other words, there is no specific budget line for validation, though national development projects have been implemented since 2007 to provide training for personnel from HEIs. The current AHOT project has a value of nearly one million euros between 2009 and 2011 (EUR 935,000)²⁵. This is seen a very large HE sector specific development project in the country.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Competence-based qualification system

Validation is benefitting a growing number of adults. First, the number of adults taking part in the competence-based qualification system has increased continuously since it was first introduced in 1994. The number of beneficiaries has increased from around 5,000 adults in 1997 to over 65,000 in 2008 (see Table 1 below). This means that there has been an eleven-fold increase in the number of beneficiaries over this 10+ year period. In recent years, the number of participants has increased at an annual rate of around 2% to 20%.

Table 1: Number of participants in the competence-based qualification system, 1997-2008

Year	Total number of participants		Full qualifications obtained	Partial qualifications obtained
	Number	Δ % change	Number	Number
1997	5,967	-	4237	
1998	12,923	116.6%	8,328	
1999	20,778	60.8%	12,971	

²³ The 120 credits are divided as follows: (1) 90 credits of vocational studies including at least 20 credits of relevant on-the-job training. This consists of basic and field-specific study units (compulsory), specialising study units (partly optional) and other optional units (decided by each VET provider). (2) 20 credits of general, core studies, which are common to all VET students (languages, mathematics, science, etc.). (3) 10 credits of free-choice studies.

²⁴ National Board of Education (2009) Finland. VET in Europe – Country Report. Cedefop / Refernet Finland.

²⁵ Interview, 2010

2000	31,957	53.8%	18,077	10,679
2001	37,019	15.8%	20,709	9,953
2002	40,628	9.7%	23,383	10,138
2003	43,090	6.1%	24,485	9,960
2004	51,564	19.7%	28,144	13,770
2005	58,541	13.5%	29,223	13,429
2006	62,506	6.8%	29,799	13,692
2007	63,637	1.8%	31,985	14,787
2008	65,267	2.6%	32,344	16,094

Source: GHK on the basis of information from the Finnish National Statistics Office, 1997-2009 (accessed through the database of the Finnish Board of Education http://www.oph.fi/tietopalvelut/tilastotiedot/muita_koulutustilastoja/aikuisten_ammattilliset_nayttotutkinnot)

Second, there is also evidence to suggest that a growing number of adults are making use of the validation procedures. Only a small percentage (up to 5%) of students in the competence-based qualification system used to obtain their qualification without *any* formal learning at all. The share has increased in recent years to over 5%, with some suggesting even up to 10%.²⁶

The above mentioned share of beneficiaries however only refers to the share of participants who obtain a full qualification without taking part in *any* formal learning at all; they demonstrate that they hold the required skills and competences in competence-based tests (see Chapter 5.1 for further information about assessment methods).

However, a significantly higher share of adults benefit from validation so, that the skills and competences they already possess are identified, documented and recognised as part(s) of the qualification. There are no statistics on the number or share of participants benefiting from validation in this way but it has been estimated that *the majority of learners benefit from validation*. The level of expertise of the certificate holder is the same irrespective of whether validation of prior learning is used or not.

Having said that, all (100%) of candidates of competence based qualifications are exposed to the concept of validation and are encouraged to have their prior experiences validated. This is down to the legal requirement for VET providers to provide an individual plan for each and every learner. The legal provision on the individualisation of competence-based studies (*henkilökohtaistamismääräys*) came into force in 2007. In practice this means that VET providers are obliged to consider the prior learning of all candidates and design an individual plan that takes such learning into consideration. Typically this means that a teachers/guidance counsellor 'sits down' with each and every learner at the start of their studies assessing the prior learning of participants and create a unique study / assessment plan for each learner. Although the law came into force 2007, in reality VET providers have followed this practice already since the 1990s.

This legal development is important given that a high share of learners within the CBQ system is adults with a significant amount of work experience. As stated before, the competence based qualification system consists of three different types of qualifications: initial, further and specialist VET qualifications. The requirements of further and specialist vocational qualifications require three and five years of relevant work experience, respectively. This means that most candidates are likely to have relevant experience that is worth having assessed. It has also been estimated that practically all adult students

²⁶ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

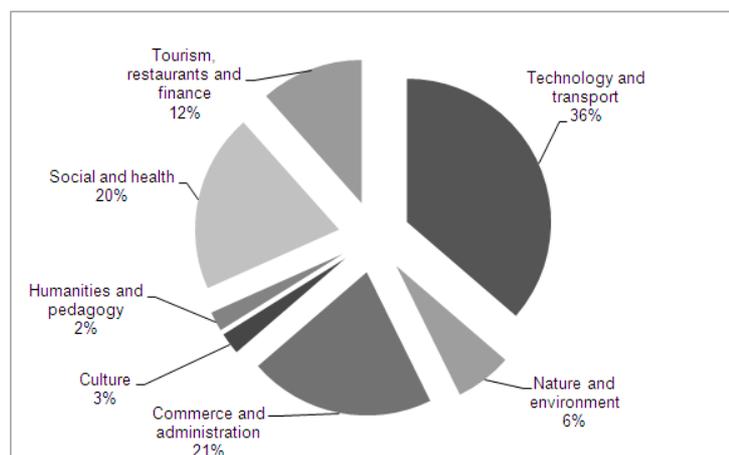
studying towards an IVET qualification have their study time shortened as a result of passing some elements of the qualification just by demonstrating their prior learning in competence based skills tests²⁷.

But it is also important to bear in mind that formal learning is highly regarded in Finnish society and many learners want to take part in formal studies even if they were encouraged by their teachers and guidance professionals to go through the process of validation²⁸.

As statistics are not collected on validation, it is not possible to comment on whether women or men utilise the validation possibilities more. However it is possible to say that in 2008, just over half of participants in the competence based qualification system (55%) were women. Apart from the first two years, women have always made up a greater majority of the beneficiaries. They constituted 56-57% of all beneficiaries between 2001 and 2005. Women display a higher completion rate too.

No information is available on the take up of validation in different sectors. But just over a third of competence-based qualifications (36%) are taken in the field of technology and transport (36%) (see Figure 1 below). This is followed by commerce and administration (21%) and social and health (20%).

Figure 1: Study fields – competence-based qualification system, 2006



Source: Finnish National Statistics Office, 2006, accessed through the database of the Finnish Board of Education. *Näyttötutkintoon valmistavan koulutuksen opiskelijat koulutusalan ja rahoitusmuodon mukaan 2006.*

As shown below, validation in other levels and forms of education remains minimal.

General upper secondary education (*lukio*)

In relation to general upper secondary level education, most individuals who utilise the legal provision to have their prior learning assessed and recognised are immigrants and Finnish nationals who have lived abroad and then returned to live in Finland. Some school leavers, who have chosen to return to the education system, have also benefited from this²⁹. However, overall, the recognition of prior *formal* learning remains more common at this level of education than validation of informal or non-formal learning³⁰. Furthermore, only a handful of people are admitted to these Matriculation Examinations without completion of necessary studies, and this is mostly in the case of foreign language examinations³¹.

²⁷ Interview, 2010

²⁸ Interview, 2010

²⁹ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ECOTEC: Nevala, A-M (2009) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; Finland*. C3342 / December 2007. European Commission, DG EAC.

School-based vocational upper secondary education (*ammattillinen peruskoulutus*)

Vocational upper secondary schools accept a greater number of candidates without standard entry qualifications than general upper secondary schools (*lukio*). This means that IVET establishments are more likely to utilise validation methods to accept individuals on their courses than general upper secondary schools. Approximately 4% of people starting IVET each year are chosen through the 'flexible student selection' that allows individuals to demonstrate their competences and experience in the field in which they are aiming to study, while the legislation permits up to 30% of students in any subject area to be selected on this basis³². In 2001, this came to 1,698 students and in 2002 some 1,770 students entering basic vocational education despite not meeting the standard entry requirements³³.

There is evidence that validation is utilised more by medium and large VET establishments than small providers. Furthermore, so far, a significant number of beneficiaries have been those who hold other relevant qualifications: they have had their prior formal learning recognised. The use of validation to recognise learning gained through other means, for through work experience, has been more minimal. Consequently, the uptake of validation has been more common in the field of general, core studies (e.g. language, mathematics, etc.) rather than specific vocational studies.³⁴ Having said that there are also more and more examples of young people having been able to have their IT skills validated without participating in the related courses as they have gained so much experience in that field through their hobbies³⁵.

As indicated above, nearly all adults studying within the competence based qualification system towards IVET qualifications utilise validation to shorten their study time. However, validation is less commonly used by young people, simply for not having much relevant experience outside the formal education system.

Higher education

HEIs are not required to report whether their students have been admitted onto or passed a course through typical methods or through the demonstration of prior formal, non-formal or informal learning. In a similar manner, certificates do not specify either whether the individual have had their prior learning recognised. This is because all HE students are seen as equal; it should not matter whether they have gained an access or passed courses through traditional methods or by demonstrating their prior learning.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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

See Section 1.4.

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

Validation is closely linked to the guidance provisions of education and training providers, but not on guidance networks or institutions as such. In the context of CBQ system, (guidance) professionals are in charge of designing individual plans for all learners; this involves discussing and exploring the possibilities for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

³² Lankinen, T. (2004) Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen koulutusjärjestelmässä. Opetusministeriö.

³³ TAYH database, quoted in ECOTEC: Nevala, A-M (2009) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; Finland*. C3342 / December 2007. European Commission, DG EAC.

³⁴ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

³⁵ Interview, 2010

In a similar manner, the validation of informal and non-formal learning in HE is tied into the career and study planning process known as HOPS (*henkilökohtainen opintosuunnitelma* - individual study plan). HOPS is carried out by professionals in charge of assisting students to plan and design their own studies. An individual plan is designed for each and every student.

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

In comparison to many other European countries, the involvement of the private sector in the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland is very practical and strong. For example, their engagement in the competence-based qualification system stretches from national to local level and from strategic work to being involved in assessments. To be more specific, they are involved in:

- Assessing competence tests: Employee and employer representatives, together with a qualified assessor, make up the tripartite assessment team.
- Quality assurance and supervision of competence-based tests: Social partners take part in Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) that are tripartite committees set up by the Finnish National Board of Education to oversee the organisation and supervision of competence-based tests.
- Planning and development of VET: Social partners take part in the National Education and Training Committees that operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the planning and development of vocational education (including curricula development).
- Provision of workplace learning opportunities for VET students (IVET, CBQ and polytechnics).

A growing number of companies are also making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system by encouraging their employees to have the learning they have acquired at work and in other parts of life (in formal, informal or non-formal settings) validated³⁶. The CBQ system is particularly appealing for them as it is based on the needs of the working life. Furthermore, the basic idea behind the system is that adults with previous work (paid or unpaid) and/or study experience should only study those areas of study programmes that provide them with skills that they do not as yet command. It therefore enables employees to shorten their study time by having their prior experience validated. This reduces costs (time and training costs) for the company and its employees.

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

The situation regarding validation in the third sector is mixed. There is resistance from certain segments of the third sector to get involved in validation as the majority of their customers are involved in the activities of their organisation as a hobby and therefore do not wish to be assessed for that.³⁷ On the other hand, the third sector arranges a range of courses, which rely on validation methods. These include the European Computer Driving Licence tests and some language proficiency tests. These test results are nationally accepted as a standard and are valid at any level.³⁸

One of the earliest efforts to promote the validation of non-formal learning in Finland was the creation of Recreational Activity Study Book in 1996³⁹. It was developed by the Youth

³⁶ ECOTEC (2009) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; Finland*. C3342 / December 2007. European Commission, DG EAC.

³⁷ Karttunen, A. (2008) *Annual National Review (ANaR) on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNF-IFL) on the national context*. OBSERVAL.

³⁸ Karttunen, A. (2008) *Annual National Review (ANaR) on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNF-IFL) on the national context*. OBSERVAL.

³⁹ ECOTEC (2009) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; Finland*. C3342 / December 2007. European Commission, DG EAC.

Academy and it offers young people a chance to identify and record the competences they have developed during their voluntary engagements. It is aimed at all young people above 13 years of age who are involved in recreational and voluntary activities. The system does not measure the young person's competences and does not aim for formal accreditation, but it serves young people as a tool for making all the experiences and learning outside formal schooling visible when applying for a job or further education. Over 80,000 Recreational activity study books have been distributed to date and around 5,000 young people take up this activity each year. In 2009, the activity book was introduced as a web-based tool (see example below).

SKENE-X (www.skene-x.net)

SKENE-X is an internet-based tool kit to support own projects of 13-19-year-olds. SKENE-X includes an electronic and updated version of the Youth Academy's 'Recreational Activity Study Book'. SKENE-X's target group is all active 13-19-year-olds and their adult tutors/teachers. The service is provided by the Youth Academy, the Guides and Scouts of Finland, the Swedish Study Center and the Young Finland Association. The development has been funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Young people can ask their tutors to give an assessment of their activity. This is done electronically and the assessment is saved in the young person's individual "Study Book" which can also be printed as a CV of recreational activities. No standards are used for assessment but rather young people and tutors are encouraged to discuss what has been learned via SKENE-X's email service. The assessors are the young people's adult tutors/teachers. Any adult can be a tutor by registering on the system as an adult tutor. When validating an entry in the "study book", the tutor gives her/his name, title and name of the organisation she/he is representing (if any). The system is based on trust.

The Beta version of SKENE-X was opened in November 2009. The funding of the Ministry of Education and Culture will last until the end of 2010 (and also expected for 2010). After that SKENE-X is supposed to be funded by cooperation with companies by selling them marketing places.

The practice works well when young people, their tutors and different organisations (associations etc) get to know it and use it. A challenge is to get known widely enough and have enough users, and to get the society around to appreciate young people's own projects. Also it is a challenge to keep with the technical developments in social media.

Source: Information provided by Ms. Minna Ahola, minna.ahola@nuortenakatemia.fi

2.5 Costs to organisations

No information is available on the cost of validation to organisations.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

The validation of informal and non-formal is not advertised in Finland as such. Instead, the public authorities and the social partners are actively involved in raising awareness about the competence-based qualification system in which validation is embedded as a central feature. For example, a dedicated website <http://www.nayttotutkinnot.fi/> provides information from the qualification system itself, to good practice examples and assessment methods and offers information on the benefits of acquiring such qualifications.

So far the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the field of higher education has focussed more on current students and therefore it has not been active advertised to prospective students. The systematic application of methods for the validation of informal and non-formal learning is also in its very early stages in this sector; HEIs are in the process of improving guidance and increasing staff competences in the methods related to

the validation of formal, informal and non-formal learning. Student guidebooks of most HE institutions will refer to validation opportunities from the academic year 2010-2011⁴⁰.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

Competence-based qualification system (QBC)

VET providers are in charge of the provision of guidance and support for individuals. As stated earlier, it is the responsibility of the providers to prepare an individual plan for each and every student. Such planning takes into consideration personal circumstances and prior learning of the candidates and requires effective student counselling.

Some online tools, such as <http://www.osaan.fi> allow validation candidates to assess their competences in different competence-based qualifications.

Providers are in charge of supporting candidates with special needs. For example, dyslexia needs to be taken into consideration in the study and assessment planning process. Assessments can be focussed on practical skills demonstrations in case the candidate has difficulties in writing in Finnish or Swedish.⁴¹

The national qualification requirements are available on-line for anyone to view. This offers students an opportunity to plan and influence their own learning. Providers own curricula for preparatory training are also made available to students.

Higher education

As mentioned earlier, in the field of higher education, validation of informal and non-formal learning is tied into the career and study planning process known as HOPS⁴². HOPS is carried out by professionals in charge of assisting students to plan and design their individual study plans.

3.3 Costs to individuals

Validation does not cost anything to individuals in Finland; validation is carried out free of charge. This applies to students at all levels of education from general to vocational and higher education.

However, all participants in the QBC system are eligible paying a fee of EUR 50 per qualification whether they study all courses or only take part in competence tests and thereby have their prior learning validated. The EUR 50 fee includes competence tests for *all* parts of the qualification. The fee is seen as a low one as all other costs are paid by the public authorities and this is the only fee for students. Therefore it is not seen as a barrier to learning or validation in Finland

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Typically, the validation of prior learning of migrants has been addressed through a range of ESF funded projects. For example, ISOK is an Eastern Finnish co-operation project, which is coordinated by Savo Vocational College in North Savo region. The main purpose of the project is to promote and develop efficient validation procedures among immigrants and offer training to trainers and guidance counsellors, who are involved in validation. In some cases regional employment offices have bought specific places for immigrants to take part in the QBC system but these are rare.

Learning gained by young people taking part in Youth Workshops can also be validated by education and training providers if the young people choose to take up studies in the formal education system after participating in Workshops.

⁴⁰ Interview, 2010

⁴¹ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁴² Halttunen, T. And Pyykkö, R. (2010). Oivalla osaaminen. Turun yliopisto.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Ensuring access to systems that allow validation of informal and non-formal learning is important to making lifelong learning reality for all individuals.⁴³ Therefore, the main rationale for the development of validation in Finland lies in the fact that validation can make it easier for all individuals (especially those who have no or few formal qualifications) to access formal learning opportunities. Validation can also shorten study times, which can reduce costs for individuals and the society.⁴⁴ Validation can also motivate more people to take up learning as they can have learning they have gained through work, hobbies or other non-formal means recognised.⁴⁵

However, no studies have been carried out to measure the benefits of validation to individuals as such. The clearest evidence of the impact of validation of informal and non-formal learning on individuals can be seen from the learner numbers on the QBC system:

- The number of adults involved in the CBQ system has grown every year since it was first introduced in 1994 (demonstrated by section 1.8).
- The number of individuals obtaining full CBQs without undertaking *any* formal learning has increased; they make up 5-10% of beneficiaries today.
- Today, all participants in the QBC are exposed to validation as all providers are obliged to consider the prior learning (learning acquired in formal, non-formal and informal environments) of all candidates and design an individual plan that takes such learning into consideration.

A study carried out in 2003 on validation of learning gained within the liberal adult education system looked into the benefits of validation to individuals⁴⁶. Over 40% of all the providers of non-formal learning stated that studies in their institutes give 'application points' for individuals who wish to continue studies in the formal education system (in many formal education institutes the demand exceeds the supply, thus the candidates have to go through an application process, based for example on a point system and/or tests). In addition, a small minority of respondents reported that completion of certain courses guarantees a direct admission either to entry examinations or to the course itself. With regards to the latter, most of these cases are based on a systematic cooperation between providers of non-formal training and formal educational establishments.

With regards to the validation of non-formal learning leading to recognition, an overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they were aware of formal educational establishments which provided full or partial course exemptions for those who had successfully completed courses through non-formal learning. Usually this occurs in the field of handicrafts, IT, arts, religious studies and languages.

⁴³ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*.

Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

⁴⁴ Ibid and AHOT website <http://www.ahot.utu.fi/kasitteisto/korkeakouluille/>

⁴⁵ Opetusministeriö; Tutkintojen tuottaman ja muun osaamisen kuvaamiseen perustuvan kansallisen viitekehysten valmistelutyöryhmä (NQF-työryhmä) (2009). *Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys*.

Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.

⁴⁶ Määttä, J (2003) *Tunnusta ja tunnista opittu! Vapaan sivistystyön opitun tunnustaminen formaalissa oppilaitoksissa*; Selvitys muodoista, käytännöistä, yhteistyösuhteista ja ongelmista.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

VET (including QBC)

The Educational Evaluation Council⁴⁷ is a leading independent specialist organisation for educational evaluation and development. The Council's task is to evaluate education and learning, to contribute to the development of external evaluation, and to co-operate with international stakeholders. Evaluation serves the needs of the Ministry of Education and Culture, education providers, and schools. The Council works as an expert network.

However, in Finland there is no national quality assurance body for validation of informal and non-formal learning as such. For the validation of non-formal and informal learning the decentralisation of education means that individual providers are given a great deal of freedom to apply the legislative framework.

In order to ensure the quality of the assessment system and an appropriate match with the demands of the labour market, co-operation with key labour market players is essential and has been at the heart of all activities since the development of the system. In fact, tripartite bodies are involved in quality assurance in VET (initial VET and the competence-based qualification system). Quality assurance has been devolved:

- To local level in the case of upper secondary VET qualifications (QA led by providers and multi-stakeholder steering committees attached to VET providers).
- To tripartite qualification committees in the case of competence-based qualifications.

Recent developments, like the creation of a national system of evaluating learning outcomes of skills demonstrations (IVET) bring some synergy into assessment of quality of VET provisions (also in relation to validation). The government has also re-enforced in their recent communications their commitment to develop monitoring of self-evaluations of VET providers, further enhance performance based financing of VET providers and continue awarding quality prizes for best performing VET providers. European wide developments in this field are also influencing quality assurance in Finland. And it has been suggested that NQF has the potential to become an internal quality assurance system for learning.

International quality systems such as ISO/CEN have not influenced quality assurance of validation processes in Finland⁴⁸.

Higher education

As stated above, each HEI has the freedom to implement their own system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. The 2009 recommendations of the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences state that 'the validation practices should be tied into the quality assurance system of the HE institutions'⁴⁹.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is an independent expert body assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to evaluation⁵⁰. The Council members represent universities, universities of

⁴⁷ For further information, see: www.edev.fi

⁴⁸ Interview, National Board of Education

⁴⁹ Finnish Council of University Rectors – Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (2009): *Oppimisesta osaamiseen: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*. Committee report 2009.

⁵⁰ For further information, see: www.kka.fi

applied sciences, students and working life. FINHEEC audits the quality assurance systems of all Finnish Higher Education Institutions.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

This section discusses quality assurance systems and procedures in the context of competence-based qualification system (QBC).

As stated above, the tripartite model is at the core of the quality assurance processes related to the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. Provisions and operating methods for the qualification system have been designed together with social partners; new competence-based qualifications are approved, qualifications requirements are prepared, qualification committees are set up and the quality of competence test performances are assured, invariably and on all occasions, on a tripartite basis.

With reference to the quality assurance in the context of the assessment procedure, validation is based on a tripartite model of assessment. Three individuals are always involved in the validation procedure: an employer representative, an employee representative and a representative of the training provider. This has been introduced as a way of ensuring the quality of the assessment⁵¹. For example, a VET teacher does not necessarily have the latest knowledge of the developments or work processes in a given industry, whereas the employer / employee assessors are acting professionals of their sector.⁵² However, a VET teacher (who needs to be a qualified assessor – see section 6 for further information) monitors the testing procedure and the legal aspects of it. This tripartite model also ensures the objectivity and fairness of the assessment from the candidate's viewpoint.⁵³

The qualified assessor is responsible for overseeing that in the competence test situation the requirements of the qualification are met and that the candidate is being treated fairly.⁵⁴ S/he is also responsible for guiding the test situation and explaining the legal framework and the rights of appeal etc. to the candidate.⁵⁵ The sectoral employer / employee representatives are responsible for the assessment of the actual skills and competences as well as the working procedures. Both however need to look at the competence tests from their own perspective. The employee assessor evaluates how the candidate copes with the task. The employer representative evaluates how the candidate copes in relation to what he/she as a manager would like from a colleague performing the task.⁵⁶

The candidate is also asked to make his/her own evaluation of his/her performance. This feeds into the assessment process of the tripartite assessment team. Together the three assessors then draw up conclusions whether the candidate has been successful in the competence-based tests or whether s/he needs to retake some parts of the test. Together the three assessors write a document that describes the candidate's strengths and also suggest areas of professional development if the need occurs.⁵⁷

The assessment decision is then sent over to the Qualification Committee that assures the quality of the procedure and awards the qualification certificate if the process has been acceptable.⁵⁸ The Qualification Committee has the final say in whether the qualification has been completed successfully. The candidate has 14 days time to ask the Qualification Committee to review their decision.

⁵¹ Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁵² Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07.

Opetushallitus.

⁵⁷ Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) are responsible for:

- developing and supervising the competence-based qualification system;
- agreeing with VET providers on the organisation of competence-based tests;
- confirming the assessment results of competence-based tests and awarding qualifications; and
- deciding on the review of the assessment (on application).

The Committees are tripartite committees set up by the National Board of Education that bring together employers, employee representatives, teachers and, when applicable, representatives of self-employed people in the industry. In addition, the Committee can include independent experts. There are 152 qualification committees with about 1,000 members. Qualification Committees are appointed for a maximum of three years and there are up to nine members in one Committee. Appointed members must have a good understanding of the industry and the competence-based qualification system and be available to take part in the activities of the Committee.

Majority of the Committee members must be representatives from working life (either employer or employee) and must include an equal number of employee and employer representatives. Bilingual committees must have representatives from both language groups (FI and SW). On the basis of Gender Equality Law (609/1986) the gender ratio must be at least 40/60 (unless exceptional circumstances can be verified).

The number of qualifications a committee is responsible for varies usually between 1 to 10 qualifications.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

In relation to validation in the context of Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET), the most common method of assessing formal, informal and non-formal learning is skills demonstrations. Vocational skills demonstrations were introduced as the principal way of assessment in IVET in August 2006. This means that if an individual wishes to have his/her prior experience validated, their skills and competences are assessed through practical, skills demonstrations, which are observed by the assessor(s). Assessment is conducted by a teachers or a teacher together with an on-the-job instructor, workplace instructor or demonstration supervisor⁵⁹. It is expected that the skills demonstrations help to secure and strengthen the quality of IVET, unify the student assessment throughout the country and improve the transition from school to work⁶⁰.

With regards to validation methods in the context of competence-based qualifications where the uptake of validation is much more significant, a range of assessment methods can be and are used. However, competence-based qualifications are 'qualifications of working life', which seek to demonstrate that an individual has the necessary vocational skills to carry out specific tasks/jobs/assignments. For this reason the focus is on practical assessment methods such as observations which allow assessors to observe the participant carrying out tasks/assignments that are based on real life working practices / work situations⁶¹. This is normally combined with interactive methods, such as interviewing the participant while they are working / carrying out the task they have been asked to perform or after they have

⁵⁹ ReferNet Finland (2009). *Finland: VET in Europe – Country Report*. Refernet, Cedefop.

⁶⁰ ReferNet Finland (2009). *Finland: VET in Europe – Country Report*. Refernet, Cedefop.

⁶¹ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

completed the task. In fact, it is normal to use a number of different assessment methods. The participants are also asked to evaluate their own performance.

Written tests are sometimes used in the context of CQBs. They are only utilised if they are an essential part of a task/job or a compulsory requirement for the qualification. Instead, if information is required on the theoretical understanding of the candidate, the candidate can be asked theoretical questions while they are carrying out their competence tests, or after he/she have completed the assignment. Participants may be asked to take part in group exercises when it is necessary to test team work and collaboration skills. Simulations are used when actual working practices cannot be demonstrated through 'real-life' tasks.⁶²

Portfolios and other written material that document relevant learning, knowledge, skills and competences can be used as a supportive document but competence-based qualifications cannot be obtained with portfolios only.⁶³ Performance assessments can be given by co-workers and customers and they can be included in the portfolio together with other documentation that serves as an evidence of skills and prior learning⁶⁴.

The assessment ends with a discussion between the candidate and all the three representatives of the assessment team. The candidate is expected to give his/her assessment of his/her own performance. This is followed by an assessment of the employee and employer representatives. The qualified assessor is the last person to give his/her opinion about the performance.

Assessment methods vary from one sector and qualification to another.⁶⁵

Higher education

Validation methods can include, for example, written and oral exams, portfolios, skills diaries, interviews and descriptions of relevant work experiences. More diverse methods are used today than ever before, and there is a trend of moving away from written exams as a way of demonstrating prior learning (especially prior informal and non-formal learning).

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

Practical assessment methods are seen to be a good way of assessing whether individuals hold the skills and competences necessary to do the job in question.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

This section discusses the profile and qualification background of validation practitioners involved in the competence-based qualifications as it is the field of education in which validation is most commonly used.

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

As mentioned earlier, validation is based on a tripartite model of assessment. Three individuals are always involved in the validation procedure: an employer representative, an employee representative and a representative of the training provider. The following provides a brief summary of their profiles⁶⁶:

⁶² Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁶³ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁶⁴ Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁶⁵ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁶⁶ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

- An employee representative must be in a position in which he/she carries out similar tasks/assignments/activities to those that the person undergoing validation is expected to do.
- An employer representative must be in charge of such tasks/assignments in his/her role but he/she does not necessarily need to be in a managerial position. Instead, he/she can be in charge of the activities in a different way, for example, by acting as an expert, advisor, planner, designer or trainer and thereby being in charge of the tasks/assignments the person undergoing validation is expected to carry out.
- A representative of the VET institute must be a qualified assessor who is very familiar with the tasks/activities the person undergoing validation is expected to do.

A number of *generic requirements* are placed on assessors (please see sections 6.2 and 6.3 for information on specific requirements such as qualifications). First, assessors must be motivated about being involved in the assessment process and they are expected to be able and willing to take time to prepare themselves for each assessment and provide feedback. Second, in order to be accepted as an assessor, assessors must have ensured that their own skills and competences regarding their profession are up-to-date (i.e. they are aware of legal changes affecting their profession). Third, assessors must be able to accept and tolerate people from different backgrounds and their different working practices/methods to carry out the tasks in question. Fourth, assessors must not have a relationship with the person undergoing validation that could have an impact (positive or negative) on the assessment. A decision about potential conflict of interest is made on a case-by-case basis⁶⁷.

Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) are in charge of approving validation practitioners. As mentioned above, the tripartite committees are set up by the Finnish National Board of Education to bring together employers, employee representatives, teachers and, when applicable, representatives of self-employed people in the industry.

The person undergoing the validation procedure is also asked to assess his/her own performance during and after the process. His/her own assessment of the performance is also taken into consideration in the final assessment, which is however decided by the tripartite assessment team.

Performance assessments can also be given by other relevant individuals, such as customers, and their assessments can be included in the competence portfolio as well as other documentation that serves as an evidence of skills and prior learning⁶⁸.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners

As shown above, validation practitioners come from three different parts of working life as validation / assessment teams consist of an employee representative, an employer representative and a representative of a training provider.

The representatives of training providers have to be qualified assessors and they must hold a qualification as a Specialist in Competence-based Qualifications (*Näyttötutkintomestari*)⁶⁹. Further information about the initial and continuing training opportunities for qualified assessors is provided in the next section (6.3).

It is the responsibility of the training provider to ensure that the other two validation practitioners (employee and employer representatives) also have a good, thorough

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Karttunen, A. (2009). OBSERVAL – a case study on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Finland.

⁶⁹ Ibid,

understanding of the assessment process.⁷⁰ Three main methods are used by the providers to prepare the assessors for the validation / assessment process⁷¹:

- Training providers organise training courses / days for prospective assessors. Such courses are being run across the country in VET institutes, workplaces and even as online courses.
- Employee and employer assessors are familiarised with the assessment procedures before the assessment by a qualified assessor from the provider takes place.
- Combination of both methods stated above.

The purpose of the preparation is to ensure that the assessors⁷²:

- Have a comprehensive understanding of the competence-based qualification system
- Have a good knowledge of the qualification requirements
- Understand what kinds of skills and competences are expected of the person with a relevant qualification
- Understand what is being assessed and how
- Know the assessment scale (pass vs fail or grade)
- Know what the tripartite assessment method means and how the final decision is made
- Understand the basic principles of the assessment process in question (e.g. is the assessment based on practical tasks only or it is part of other assessment tools such as portfolio; how and what kind of feedback needs to be provided).

It is the responsibility of the providers to ensure that they have a sufficient number of trained assessors. Training/familiarisation opportunities should be available to prospective assessors on a regular and systematic basis. Providers are also in charge of ensuring that assessors can access continuing training when it is needed and that their knowledge and skills associated with the qualification system and assessment methods and procedures are up-to-date⁷³.

Assessors and other validation practitioners have access to a range of online tools and website that can support their work. For example, <http://www.osaan.fi>, is a tool administered by the National Board of Education, which allows individuals (potential candidates, assessors, guidance professionals and others) to assess and compare competences in different competence-based qualifications.

Teachers, trainers and guidance professionals also have a new opportunity to learn about validation through a new web-based training programme known as AOTT - Aiemmin opitun tunnistamisen verkkokurssi ohjaajille ja opettajille (Validation and valuation of prior learning expert -training programme). This was developed by the Savo Vocational College (and has now been purchased by the national authorities) as there are still thousands of advisors/counsellors and teachers who have no assessor's qualification or who completed their qualification before the new legislation coming into force in 2007 (see below for further information).

⁷⁰ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

⁷³ Turun AKK, Amiedu (2007). Näyttötutkintojen arviointi. Liite 12. Näyttävä-projekti 2006 – 2007. Päivitetty 1.11.07. Opetushallitus.

Validation and valuation of prior learning expert - training programme

The aim and purpose of the Validation and valuation of prior learning expert -training programme is to improve the abilities of teachers, trainers and guidance counsellors, who are involved in validation, to give high quality guidance and counselling, further develop validation processes and systems and to help understand validation as an individual, independent process. The aim is to provide the participants a holistic overview of the process both from a European as well as national viewpoint.

The training programme consists of four compulsory and two optional modules, of which one has to be chosen.

Compulsory modules provide an introduction to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, associated terminology and the development of current validation systems in Finland and in Europe. It also introduces learners to the European tools such as EQF, NQF and ECVET. It also deals with the quality of validation procedures and methods, including the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal training and provides in-depth information on validation in Finland.

Optional modules include: The competences of assessors and the competences of advisors. See Case Study or one of the website below for further information.

Sources: Anni Karttunen, Savo Vocational College

<http://moodle.sakky.fi/course/view.php?id=563>

http://www.isok.fi/materiaali/esitykset/Validation_expert_training_programme.pdf

6.3 Qualifications requirements

To be qualified as an assessor, VET teachers must hold a Specialist Qualification in Competence-based Qualifications (*Näyttötutkintomestari*). Training for the qualification lasts about one year⁷⁴ and five Finnish polytechnics offer the qualification⁷⁵. It is a national qualification, which is recognised by the National Board of Education. It comprises of three compulsory courses and two elective subjects of which students must choose one⁷⁶. Compulsory courses include:

- Principles of the competence-based qualification system.
- Organisation of competence-based qualifications, and planning and individualisation of assessments.
- Organisation of assessments and evaluation of vocational skills.

Elective subjects include management of the competence-based qualification system and development of the quality of competence-based qualifications.

The curriculum for the qualification can be found in: http://www.oph.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/oph/embeds/46863_Ntutk_mestK.pdf (available in Finnish only).

Continuing training opportunities are also available for qualified assessors⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ [Nayttotutkinnot.fi](http://www.nayttotutkinnot.fi) portal – information about the Specialist qualification for assessors (Näyttötutkintomestari) <http://www.nayttotutkinnot.fi/ntm-koulutus.htm> [cited 28 June 2010]

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Further information about such training opportunities can be found in: <http://www.alvar.fi/koulutus.htm>

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