



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report Austria

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1 Introduction

National developments towards a national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning have only started very recently (in 2013) and are strongly linked to both the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy (LLL: 2020, 2011) as well as to the NQF development. The Council Recommendation on validation as well as the implementation of the European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) also play an important role in this process. Steering groups and working groups have been set up for supporting coordination across sectors. Work towards the development of a national validation strategy including all sectors has only recently begun but this is a significant difference from the 2010 Inventory.

Until now, there is no uniform framework for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Austria. In the education and training system, different Acts and Regulations include mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions (general education, vocational education and training, and higher education) to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings (for example, in the context of 'external exams'). Many validation initiatives and arrangements are linked to the sector of adult education (in many cases in the context of second chance education) and some measures can also be identified in other fields (such as the labour market and the third sector). These initiatives were mainly developed in bottom-up processes with the involvement of relevant stakeholders (such as social partners).

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In Austria, there is no uniform legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The development of an explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning has started only recently. The role of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Austria up to now (in comparison to other EU members) may be explained by: a traditionally strong orientation of education and economic culture towards the initial vocational education and training (IVET) sector; the dual system, which already incorporates a high amount of informal workplace learning (and, thus, there is no need for additional procedures to recognise this form of learning); and the focus of the Austrian system towards occupational profiles and activity descriptions and on formally acquired qualifications as proof of abilities and competences. Additionally there is a relatively well-developed provision of second-chance education (Prokopp & Luomi-Messerer, 2010, 2).

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. Validation exists in many contexts but is lacking in coherence. The majority of the validation initiatives and arrangements are linked to the adult education sector. However, relevant arrangements can also be identified in vocational education and training (VET), higher education or in other fields (such as the labour market and the third sector). In Austria, there is no general individual right for individuals to access validation initiatives. The access requirements are defined for each initiative separately.

The Austrian validation initiatives can be clustered in three ideal types (based on Schneeberger et al. 2007; Lachmayr & Löffler, 2013a, 5-6):

- acquisition of certificates/qualifications from the formal education system (such as 'exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam', the 'acquisition of lower secondary school qualifications by adults' or other so called external exams;
- acquisition of certificates/qualifications without any equivalents in the formal education system (such as awarding of the professional engineering title *HTL-IngenieurIn*, the certificates issued by the Academy of Continuing Education in the adult education sector,

access conditions to regulated professions, and the certification of individuals [e.g. in IT or welding sectors]);

- procedures to identify and validate informal learning (such as reference frameworks for linguistic competence and ICT competences as well as competence identification by applying portfolio methods mainly in adult education and career guidance or in the third sector).

Initiatives for validating non-formal and informal learning in Austria can also be distinguished based on their purpose and target group, for example:

- gaining access - 'non-traditional' access paths to regular study programmes and courses at higher education institutions for learners without the upper secondary school leaving exam (such as higher education entrance examination, special VET diploma, admission to degree programmes at universities of applied science or to continuing vocational education and training programmes at higher education institutions based on relevant professional experience);
- shortening programmes - e.g. possibilities for skipping grades for pupils at a general education school or VET college who demonstrate relevant achievements, reduction of training times in qualified healthcare and nursing based on relevant professional experience, and shortening of degree programmes at universities of applied science based on the recognition of professional experience;
- making acquired competences visible for enhancing one's chances in the labour market or for career planning;
- defining salary structure based on the recognition of an individual's competence gained through professional experience (e.g. as part of the collective bargaining agreement for employees in non-university research).

Austria has no commonly shared definitions regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. The four stages or phases of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification) are not always clearly addressed. Depending on the initiative and in particular on the purpose of validation, certain phases are emphasised – for example:

- acquisition of qualifications/certificates/entitlements that are part of the formal education and training system and where the focus is on assessment and certification;
- acquisition of certificates without a corresponding qualification in the formal system - depending on the sector, all four stages or only some (such as documentation and assessment) are used;
- access to certain exams or higher education programmes (such as continuing HE courses at universities) requires relevant professional work experience - the focus might be on identification and documentation;
- exemption from courses at higher education (mainly Bachelor study programmes at universities of applied sciences) - the focus might be on identification, documentation and certification;
- guidance, supporting the process of self-reflection, recording individual development processes etc. (in the third sector) - the focus is more on identification and documentation.

Over the last few years, the issue of recording, validating and recognising competences gained outside formal learning contexts has been increasingly addressed in public debate and supra-regional political initiatives can be identified (cf. Schlögel 2009, 23; ibw 2007; Zürcher 2007). In recent years, policy discussions have covered measures to validate non-formal and informal learning, particularly in connection with the strategy for lifelong learning and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

In July 2011, four federal ministries (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry for Science and Research; Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) supported by the social partners and all key stakeholders, agreed on a joint strategy, Lifelong Learning 2020 (LLL: 2020, 2011). This was based on a set of guiding principles, benchmarks for 2020, and ten action strands, including concrete operational measures for LLL implementation. The development of a coherent approach towards validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a central element in this

strategy. Agreed measures include the establishment of a national validation strategy¹, the development and implementation of 'competence balance' schemes, the provision of training programmes for enhancing know-how regarding assessment of learning outcomes gained via non-formal and informal learning as well as the development of a cross-sectoral quality assurance system for assessment procedures (LLL: 2020, 2011, 46).

The implementation of the strategy is coordinated in the framework of the 'national platform 20:20' which is composed of representatives of different ministries, social partner organisations, federal states, Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) as well as higher education and adult education. The national government appointed a specific task force with representatives from the four ministries who had developed the strategy for strategically steering the implementation processes. The development of a national validation strategy will be based on status quo and needs analyses. Currently, analyses are carried out in three areas: low-qualified people, VET, and higher education. The results will be brought together in the second quarter of 2014, and a consultation process for developing the national validation strategy and the definition of relevant measures will follow.

The LLL: 2020 strategy can be understood as an important approach to strengthen the links between education, training, employment and social affairs, and ensuring a more flexible qualifications system. Furthermore, the LLL: 2020 strategy as well as the NQF policy paper (BMUKK & BMWF 2009) place high importance on general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes in the NQF (cf. 2.2).

Austrian social partners support the development of an NQF as a common reference for all qualification issues in Austria (Die Sozialpartner Österreich 2013, 11-12). The NQF is expected to make visible the relative value of qualifications gained within and outside the formal system. Furthermore, the importance of documenting and validating competences gained in non-formal and informal learning contexts is emphasised. The Austrian social partners suggest using the Council Recommendation on validation for establishing a common Austrian approach, to mainstream innovative initiatives developed in the dual VET system (such as 'You have skills/competences!' and 'Competence with a system' – cf. section 2.6) and to extend their application to other sectors of education and training.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is also addressed in initiatives in the youth learning area and in the adult learning area and in initiatives with a particular focus on migrants. The following provides some examples.

- The Austrian Youth Strategy (BMWFJ 2013, 53-55) suggests the implementation of a competence balance procedure for the documentation and recognition of informally acquired basic skills and key competences of young people. This approach should facilitate self-evaluation regarding knowledge and competences, personal development, and planning of education and training. Developments started in autumn 2012 and the piloting of the initiative called *WIK:1*² started in 2013.
- The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education³ aims at enabling adults who lack basic skills or who never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education. All courses provided within this framework include a clearing-period at the beginning for the identification of competences and the design of an individual development plan for those who finished compulsory schooling without a lower secondary qualification. Operative since 2012, courses are free of charge and consistent quality guidelines for courses in all parts of Austria have been implemented. ,.
- In 2012, the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Labour Social Affairs and Consumer Protection launched an information initiative for professional recognition

¹ There are some doubts whether this is an achievable aim: For example, representatives of the Chamber of Labour (AK) and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) see the introduction of arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018 at the latest (as suggested by the Recommendation on validation) as a conceivable option but they do not view complete and nationwide implementation as realistic in practice (Lachmayr & Löffler 2013a, 9).

² BMWFJ & Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke 2013. For more information see section 2.6.

³ Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at

(*Berufsanerkennung*) targeted at migrants. A website⁴ provides information about the acceptance and recognition of vocational qualifications or professional experience acquired in other countries and counselling is offered in specific information centres.

2.2 Skills audits

In Austria, there are no systematic or nationally standardised measures for skills audits in place but there are several initiatives aimed at identifying and analysing an individual's competences, aptitudes and motivations in order to (re-)define a career pathway. Such procedures are mainly offered in adult learning institutions but also by the Public Employment Service or by freelanced guidance practitioners or coaches. Skills audits are not offered systematically and usually individuals have to pay for these procedures (however, in some cases funding is available – see section 2.7.2). These measures are often oriented towards career planning for specific target groups (cf. Zürcher, 2007; Preißer, 2007; Prokopp & Luomi-Messerer, 2006). 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 Competencies⁵; others have developed new methods. Some examples are presented below.

*Competence profile KOMPAZ*⁶

The centre for the recognition of competences at the Adult Education Centre Linz (*Volkshochschule Linz*) was founded in 2004 (funding organisations are the city of Linz and the Chamber of Labour Upper Austria). 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; Reumann, 2012). The CH-Q was established 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 is intended to encourage and support the process of self-reflection. Additionally, there is a possibility to attend a one-day assessment centre carried out by external assessors. Upon successful completion of the workshop series, participants receive the well-known CH-Q certificate for self-competence management (level 1). Since 2007, the CH-Q model for competence management is also applied by the Adult Education Centre of Burgenland (VHS Burgenland). This initiative is called '*Wissen, was ich kann – Knowing what I am capable of*⁶.

*'Potential analysis' offered at WIFI*⁷

Potential analysis are offered in the framework of the initiative 'Counselling and guidance for career and enterprises' at the Economic Promotion Institute (*Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut, WIFI*) of the Economic Chambers. The three steps of the analysis include:

- an initial consultation meeting (45 to 60 minutes) analyses the actual life situation and personal circumstances, and interests, experiences as well as professional success and plans are addressed;
- a testing procedure (four to five hours) aims at identifying strengths and areas for development;

⁴ Cf. <http://www.berufsanerkennung.at/>

⁵ Cf. www.kompetenzprofil.at

⁶ Cf. <http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/home/Kompetenzfeststellung.html>

⁷ Cf. <http://www.wifiwien.at/Default.aspx/Kurse/@/menuid/2152/>

- the subsequent appraisal session (60 to 90 minutes) is dedicated to reflection upon the results as well as to the identification of concrete training measures.

2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

The NQF in Austria was referenced to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) in 2012 (BMUKK & BMWF, 2012). However, only so called 'reference qualifications' and 'Bologna qualifications' were included in the framework and linked to the EQF. The actual inclusion of qualifications has not yet started. A political decision on the issue is due in the future. However, several important steps have been taken in preparation.

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 VET). 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).

Within the NQF, non-formal and informal learning contexts should be given the same value as the formal learning processes. The NQF development process is organised in three strands ('sectors of learning'): 1) the formal qualifications system (NQF Corridor 1); 2) qualifications acquired in non-formal learning (for example, in adult education institutions outside the formal education and training system – NQF Corridor 2); and 3) informal learning (NQF Corridor 3).

Draft procedures for allocating qualifications to NQF levels for both Corridor 1 and Corridor 2 have been prepared (Corridor 1 presented in the Austrian Referencing Report and Corridor 2 presented in national working groups) and are currently under further development based on the first results obtained from simulation projects in Corridor 1 and Corridor 2. This work is aimed at preparing smooth processes of including qualifications into the NQF that are transparent and practicable for qualifications acquired in the formal and the non-formal learning context. Work on informal learning started in autumn 2013 within the context of the Council Recommendation for validation and will form the core of the work within Corridor 3.

Throughout 2013, criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications from the non-formal learning context (adult education) to the Austrian NQF have been tested and simulated. In total 15 qualifications provided by various adult education institutions have been selected and analysed, focusing specifically on aspects related to plausibility of their learning outcomes, validity of the respective validation procedure, and quality of applications for allocation. Simulation was also used as a chance to test qualifications for 'NQF compatibility' as defined by criteria such as size and sustainability of qualifications. Results have shown that terminologies need further sharpening (e.g. qualification, qualification provider, etc.) and that many institutions awarding non-formal qualifications need further assistance in describing their qualifications in terms of learning outcomes in order to comply with NQF criteria. Results of this simulation will be used to elaborate procedures, documents, and criteria for allocating qualifications awarded outside the formal education system. Thus, the draft procedure for assigning qualifications from the non-formal learning context to NQF levels has not been finalised and will have to be refined after completion of this piloting phase.

Credit systems

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 & Nowak [eds], 2011, 16). European credit

transfer systems are only partly being implemented in Austria. The higher education 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. Until now, ECVET was only used as an instrument to support transnational mobility stays. Currently, a new strategy is being developed and a consultation process was launched at the beginning of October 2013. Results are expected for November 2013 and will be presented at a national ECVET conference. The strategy suggests that ECVET should not only be used for supporting mobility but also in the national lifelong learning context for facilitating permeability and validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences (BMUKK, 2013, 2). According to the consultation document, ECVET is, for example, expected to enhance possibilities for validating competences acquired in informal learning contexts in view of the apprenticeship or the master craftsperson examination and should provide an umbrella for initiatives and projects, such as 'YOU have competences!' and 'Competence with a system' (cf. section 2.6). A pilot project has also been commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture for exploring the use of ECVET in the non-formal learning context and on the interface between the non-formal and the formal learning contexts (for example, in the adult learning area or in second-chance education).

In Austria, modularised structures can currently only be found in some segments of the formal education system. For example, due to the Bologna process, study programmes at higher education institutions are delivered through a modular scheme. In the non-formal area modularisation is a basic principle. For example, since 2002, the master craftsperson examination (*Meisterprüfung*) has been structured in modules, whereas modularisation of apprenticeship training and the creation of modular vocational degrees are only now being implemented. 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. Since 2010⁸ the first apprenticeship occupations have been modularised (Lachmayer, 2012, 8). 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 and since autumn 2011 all schools for employees have been switched to a new modular system and thus have a flexible design (Lachmayer, 2012, 32). This gives participants the chance to provide evidence of acquired knowledge by sitting for a module examination without having taken part in lessons.

In Austria, 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). External exams are theoretically possible in all authorised Austrian education and training institutions for both general education and VET.⁹ Validation is also used to obtain exemptions and shorten programmes (e.g. there are possibilities for skipping grades for pupils at a general education school or VET college who demonstrate relevant achievements, training time can be reduced in qualified healthcare and nursing based on relevant professional experience, and degree programmes at universities of applied science can be shortened based on the recognition of professional experience). Validation can be used to gain access to higher education programmes in an alternative way (e.g. non-traditional access paths to regular study programmes and courses at higher education institutions for learners without the upper secondary school leaving exam). This can include higher education entrance examinations, special VET diplomas, admissions to degree programmes at universities of applied science or to continuing HE courses at higher education institutions based on relevant professional experience. However, these non-traditional pathways are only used to a limited extent. For example, in 2010/11, only 6 % of new under-graduates in higher education gained access via a non-traditional route, such as passing the higher education entrance examination, special VET diploma or the upper secondary school leaving exam as external candidate (cf. Unger et al. 2012, 59).

⁸ Based on the Vocational Training Act (*BAG, Berufsausbildungsgesetz*) amendment in 2006.

⁹ Based on the School Education Act and the Regulation for external exams.

Standards

There are no specific standards in place to support validation. For the acquisition of certificates/qualifications of the formal education system (such as 'exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam', the 'acquisition of lower secondary school qualifications by adults' or other so called external exams), the same education and training standards used in formal education and training are taken into account in the assessment process. 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 Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie*, *wba*¹⁰) or the competence identification procedure offered by *KOMPAZ* – see Section 2.6), others are more or less oriented towards the procedures and standards used in the formal educational system.

2.4 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 2.5). 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.

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

2.5.1 Allocation of responsibilities according to the different aspects of validation

The previously listed 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 design of the legal, economic, and social framework conditions in Austria. Educational institutions organise or provide preparatory courses for exams; 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, 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 as well as commissioning evaluations, whilst counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions.

In terms of strategy development for the higher education sector, Universities Austria (*Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz*, *UNIKO*), which represents the Austrian public universities, plays an important role. For example, they commissioned a study on validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (Spiel et al. 2009) and have prepared position papers on related issues (*Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz*, 2009 and 2010).

¹⁰ www.wba.or.at

Since current validation measures in Austria are closely linked to the lifelong learning strategy and the NQF implementation, the stakeholder groups responsible for these initiatives also need to be mentioned here:

- the coordinating platform for the LLL: 2020 strategy - the task force that is strategically steering its implementation processes and working groups focusing on specific strategic objectives (see Section 2.1);
- the NQF steering group and the working group focussing on NQF Corridor 2 (see Section 2.3).

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers:

The main role of formal education and training sector providers in validation is undertaking assessment and issuing certificates (in the framework of their quality assurance system). As mentioned above, almost all qualifications (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) may 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.

- Some examples from general education and VET

- Acquisition of *Hauptschule* qualifications in second-chance education (general 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). The external exam has to be taken in front of an examination committee (usually composed of teachers). Preparation takes place at different locations, at schools or adult learning institutions.

- Exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination ("*Außerordentlicher Zugang zur Lehrabschlussprüfung*"; VET): 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. 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. The regulations are the same as for those who have completed an entire apprenticeship: The examination has to take place in front of a board of examiners (examination committee), which, in addition to the chairperson, is made up of legally established stakeholders (social partners: employer and employee representatives). They have to be professional experts in the respective apprenticeship occupations and at least the chairperson has to be an authorized apprenticeship trainer. Adult-education institutions offer preparation courses for candidates without formal training.

- Recognition of prior learning for exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination: The revised Vocational Training Act of 2011¹¹ offers the possibility for granting exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination for candidates in second-chance education that can provide evidence of relevant professional experience.

- *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung* (general education and VET) and special VET diploma (VET): 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.

- Some examples from higher education

¹¹ BGBl. I - Ausgegeben am 29. Dezember 2011 - Nr. 148

Universities are autonomous institutions but will take part in the development of validation procedures as laid down, for example, in performance agreements concluded between universities and the federal government (BMUKK & BMWF, 2012, 76).

- Admission to universities of applied sciences without *Reifeprüfung* and shortening of study period: 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. Based on the recognition of prior learning, study periods can also be shortened or exemptions from individual courses can be granted. The respective institution decides the amount of courses or semesters to be accredited and the evidence that must be provided.

- Access to continuing higher education courses without *Reifeprüfung*: Access can be granted to people whom have relevant vocational training and long-term practice based on the regulation of each individual course. The respective institution decides the evidence that must be provided.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

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. Markowitsch & 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 (cf. Markowitsch & Jonach 2006).

Several pilot projects mainly in adult learning institutions experiment with recognition of individual competencies. Some examples that are closely linked to social partner organisations are described here (see also initiatives presented in 2.2). 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*¹² within the framework of a European Social Fund (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 project 'YOU have competences!' (DU kannst was!)¹³. 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 a 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). The initiative has been integrated into the 'pact for jobs and qualifications' in Upper Austria. Since 2012, this initiative has also been provided in the province of Burgenland.¹⁴

A quite new (since 2007) but already well known initiative is the Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie, wba*¹⁵): The wba in the sector of adult education is an approach 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

¹² Cf. www.bifo.at/text/qualibox

¹³ Cf. www.dukannstwas.at

¹⁴ Cf. <http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/home/Kompetenzanerkennung.html>

¹⁵ Cf. www.wba.or.at

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 60 ECTS¹⁶) 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 higher education and to enhance the professionalisation of adult learning (cf. Steiner, 2010; Heilinger, 2012). Since 2013, the curricula have been described in terms of learning outcomes. They provide detailed insights on required competences for adult educators and put particular emphasis on vocation specific competences. The revision of the curricula also aims at making the wba certificates suitable for NQF inclusion (Reisinger-Wagner, 2011)¹⁷.

Third sector organisations

The third sector is 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. Some third-sector institutions have also developed approaches for validating competences gained in voluntary activities. Examples are given below.

- In 2005, the Austrian Volunteer Passport¹⁸ was introduced, providing certification of competences and qualifications obtained through volunteering that can be documented and properly demonstrated in the passport. It was developed by the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in cooperation with a personnel-consulting agency. It enables volunteers to use them to complement their job applications.¹⁹ Organisations working with volunteers can commission the Austrian Volunteer Passport at the Austrian Council for Volunteering. The following information has been provided 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, competences and attitudes (such as social competences and ability to cope with stress, commitment, willingness to accept responsibility, motivation, self-discipline, persuasiveness, leadership and management competences) as well as all relevant professional competences (such as language competences, IT competences).²⁰
- The competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (*Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke*²¹) is a folder aiming to systematically document skills and competences acquired by volunteers. It covers a short description of voluntary activities and a personal competence profile (including: professional competences such as methodical, pedagogical, and management competences; social and communicative competences such as working in teams and counselling competences; personal competences such as ability to cope with stress, ability to empathise and role model experience). It also includes an action plan for measures such as new orientations or goals in volunteering, and planning of further education and training, personal development and job applications etc. 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; BMASK, 2009, 84).

¹⁶ Until 2013: 30 ECTS.

¹⁷ The wba certificates are linked to NQF Corridor 2, cf. section 2.3

¹⁸ Cf. <http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/index.php?id=CH0891>

¹⁹ According to a survey, 42% of respondents indicate that documentation of voluntary activities can enhance the chances of job applicants at their company. Cf. <http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/index.php?id=CH0591>

²⁰ Cf. ICF International 2011, 23-24; BMASK 2009, 83-84

²¹ Cf. www.kompetenz-portfolio.at

These instruments for documenting competences gained in voluntary activities can also be used by youth organisations. Another instrument used in this field is the Youthpass (cf. Section 2.6). An example of a specific approach related to this sector was developed in the province of Styria.

- Since 2010, the Provincial Youth Department in Styria has issued the certificate EHREN.WERT.VOLL (Worth. To be. Cherished)²² for making competences acquired in voluntary activities in children and youth work visible. The certificate is issued based on the competence portfolio developed by the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Graz.²³

Another initiative needs to be mentioned that might be relevant in this context in the future.

- The initiative *aufZAQ*²⁴ in Austria and South Tirol since 2003 provides certification for training courses in the area of youth work (non-formal learning). Thus, *aufZAQ* is a quality assurance initiative for training provisions in this field. A certification process for persons who are active in youth work is also currently under discussion.

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

There are now overall coordination arrangements or platforms for validation activities in place. As mentioned above, validation activities exist in many contexts, but they lack coherence. Coordination has only started recently in the context of the NQF implementation and the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy (LLL: 2020) (cf. section 2.1).

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

1. Please provide brief examples of national, regional, local or EU funded initiatives in relation to validation that have taken place within the past three years, which you consider to be good practice or innovative.

- Awarding of the professional title engineer (*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'. Currently, learning outcomes (standards) are being defined and the procedure for issuing this professional title is being revised.

- Non-traditional access to higher education programmes (without completion of the school-based upper secondary certificate):

Traditionally, access to higher education in Austria is granted based on completion of the school-based upper secondary certificate called 'Matura' or 'Reifeprüfung' (school-leaving certificates of Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges or Secondary Academic Schools). Non-traditional access is granted based on specific exams.

- *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung*: External candidates can sit for the *Reifeprüfung* exam (upper secondary school leaving exam providing direct access to higher education) 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 in the desired field of study. The *SBP*

²² Cf. http://www.ehrenwertvoll.at/_lccms/_/00014/Zertifikat.htm?VER=101119150508&LANG=ger&MID=9

²³ Cf. portfolio.uni-graz.at

²⁴ The office of *aufZAQ* is based in the office of the Austrian National Youth Council. Cf. www.aufzaq.at

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.

- *Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP; special VET diploma)*: This exam provides general access to higher education 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 at 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); a 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. These partial exams can be taken jointly on one date or separately. Adult learning institutions offer specific preparation courses. Credits for the BRP 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/BRP), during their apprenticeship, apprentices can attend preparation courses for the BRP (for free) 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 (cf. 2.5.2).

- Access to continuing HE courses at universities without *Reifeprüfung*: Access can be granted to people who have relevant vocational training and long-term practice (cf. 2.5.2).

■ Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie, wba*)

Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie, wba*):

wba is an institution for the recognition and accreditation of adult educators in Austria. wba sets standards and strengthens the professionalisation of adult education because it enables those taking part in its certification process to gain a qualification widely recognised within the profession. Practical experience in the field of adult education is a prerequisite for a certification by the Academy. wba acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance as far as the acquisition of skills identified as missing is concerned. Adult educators can submit competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proof. These supporting documents are assessed based on the wba-curriculum and then acknowledged. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. wba graduates receive a recognised wba certificate or wba diploma. wba does not offer further education programmes itself but accredits suitable further education programmes offered by various adult education institutes throughout Austria.

wba is not only an innovative project but rather unique within Austria's adult education with regard to the following two aspects:

- it is supported by all ten major adult education umbrella organisations (the so-called *KEBÖ*-institutions);
- it recognises formally acquired competences as well as competences that have been obtained in non-formal or informal ways.

The recognition process can be divided into three stages:

1. Status-quo-evaluation (*Standortbestimmung*) (including online portfolio)
2. wba-certificate Certified Adult Educator
3. wba diploma Graduate Adult Educator

wba enables a transparency between adult education and university education and continuing education. University study courses for which wba graduates get their wba diplomas acknowledged include the university study course, Adult Education/Continuing Education, and the study course, Educational Management

These postgraduate study courses represent a milestone in the professionalisation of adult education. The target group are wba graduates with a diploma and people with a university degree who work in adult education and bring along at least three years of professional experience in this area.

The *wba* curricula have been recently revised for making them more suitable for NQF inclusion; they are now written in terms of learning outcomes.

Duration/sustainability:

wba was implemented in the adult education sector in 2007 and is considered as a successful initiative in Austria and beyond. For example, it received the Validation Prize 2013, an award given in three categories to the most innovative and promising initiatives in the area of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in all sectors and levels of education in Europe in the context of the Observal-Net project.

Quality assurance:

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 the certificate ISO 9001:2008 of Quality Austria confirms these, as well as the professional quality management of the wba.

Stakeholder involvement:

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 specialist branches.

The evaluators in the certification workshop are experienced professionals in adult education, educational management, teaching/training, and library and information management.

Evidence of results:

Number of beneficiaries (as of 07.08.2013 -

http://wba.or.at/ueber_uns/Zahlen_Daten_Fakten.php):

- 1095 Status-quo-evaluations
- 633 wba certificates
- 152 wba diploma

Evaluation:

A kind of internal evaluation was carried out during the revision of the wba curricula in 2010-2011. As a result, more ECTS have been allocated to the wba certificate and the wba diploma.

Further information:

<http://wba.or.at>

Reisinger, Karin/Steiner, Petra (2014): Zwischen gemeinsamen Standards und flexiblen Bildungswegen. Die Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich als Modell eines offenen Berufsabschlusses. In: Magazin erwachsenenbildung.at. Das Fachmedium für Forschung, Praxis und Diskurs. Ausgabe 21, 2014. Wien.

Kerstin Linn (2013): Ein Kompetenzprofil für Bildungsmanager/innen in privatwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen. Magisterarbeit von (Sozialwissenschaften, Medien und Sport. Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

erwachsenenbildung.at vom 13.03.2013

Lernergebnisorientierte Curricula der Weiterbildungsakademie (wba). Online:

http://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten_details.php?nid=6664.

CEDEFOP (2013): Trainers in continuing VET: emerging competence profile. Online

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4126_en.pdf

Heilingner, Anneliese (2012): Professionalisierung mit Kompetenz steuern am Beispiel der Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich. In: Gruber, Elke/Wiesner, Gisela (Hrsg.):

Erwachsenenpädagogische Kompetenzen stärken. Bielefeld, S. 59–81

Reisinger, Karin & Wagner, Giselheid (2011). Die lernergebnisorientierte Beschreibung der wba-Curricula. Ein Praxisbericht aus der Weiterbildungsakademie. In: Magazin erwachsenenbildung.at. Das Fachmedium für Forschung, Praxis und Diskurs. Ausgabe 14, 2011. Wien. Internet: <http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at/magazin/11-14/meb11-14.pdf>

Steiner, Petra (2010): Die Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich (wba). Erfahrungen und Zugänge zu Beratung und Kompetenzanerkennung für ErwachsenenbildnerInnen. In: MAGAZIN erwachsenenbildung.at. Das Fachmedium für Forschung, Praxis und Diskurs. Ausgabe 9, 2010. Wien. Online: http://erwachsenenbildung.at/magazin/10_09/meb10-9_14_steiner.pdf

- Recognition of work experience or work experience and further education as access requirements to regulated professions, professional positions (*Berufspositionen*) or exams without or in addition to formal education
 - 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 and additional training and/or relevant professional experience is needed.
 - Since 2002, the master craftsperson examination (*Meisterprüfung*) has been 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 and it no longer needs evidence of formal training or work experience.
 - To be able to take the civil engineering examination (*Ziviltechnikerprüfung*)²⁵, which is laid down in the Austrian Civil Engineers' Act (*Ziviltechnikergesetz*), candidates need to prove a degree from a relevant study programme at a university or university of applied sciences plus three years' professional experience.
 - To be able to take the specialist exam for certified financial accountants (*Bilanzbuchhalterprüfung*), which is laid down in the Austrian Financial Accounting Act (*Bilanzbuchhaltungsgesetz*), people need to prove at least three years of specialist activity in the field of accounting. Credits can be obtained for previous qualifications.
- QUALI-QIBB: Based on the concepts developed in the EU project VET-CERT²⁶, the training programme 'certified quality process management for 'QIBB'²⁷ (zum/zur zertifizierten Qualitätsprozessmanager/in für QIBB) has been piloted (starting in autumn 2013) in cooperation between Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET (ARQA-VET) and the University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria. The training programme comprises 12 ECTS and based on validation of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) recognition and exemption can be granted by the head of the training programme.
- Postgraduate university course, *Bildungs- und Berufsberatung*²⁸ (educational and vocational guidance) offered at the Danube University Krems: The course, offered since 2011, aims at certifying the competence level of people with professional experience in educational and vocational guidance but without formally recognised qualifications. Additionally, further training modules are offered for enhancing competences and

²⁵ Civil engineers carry out the planning, consultancy and preparation of expert opinions for specific specialist areas (such as construction and surveying, geology, etc.) (cf. Tritscher-Archan 2012, 27).

²⁶ Cf. <http://www.vet-cert.at>

²⁷ Cf. <http://www.arqa-vet.at/quali-qibb/quali-qibb/>; QIBB is the Austrian quality initiative in VET.

²⁸ Cf. <http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/bbb>

receiving an academic degree. Awards are issued on two levels, an Academic Expert (60 ECTS; includes the award of the European Career Guidance Certificate) and a Master of Arts (90 ECTS). The assessment methods include an online-test (for assessing competences related to the professional field - 15 ECTS) and an assessment centre (assessing counselling and guidance competences as well as social and self-competences - 30 ECTS) and are developed to assess formally as well as informally acquired knowledge, skills, and competences.

- Competence balance for people who have completed the civilian service²⁹: In October 2013, a new regulation for civilian service³⁰ was put into force. According to this regulation, a 'standardised competence balance' has to be issued at the end of a completed civilian service. This is supported by the development of a common document and guidelines for completing it.³¹ This document is composed of three sections for recording any training programmes attended during the civilian service, practical activities carried out and knowledge, skills and competences gained. This standardised documentation should facilitate the recognition of competences gained during civilian service as further learning.
- Competence portfolio of the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer (University of Graz)³²: Based on the competence portfolio model developed by the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer, since 2008 the University offers workshops and individual coaching (primarily for students, but for other groups as well) where participants learn to identify, reflect on and communicate their skills and competences. Competence portfolio coaches support workshop participants in reconstructing their daily activities and reflecting on the different learning opportunities they provide. They also provide support in how to document and formulate the competences acquired in these environments and how to describe the transfer of competences between the environments. The model focuses on self-reflection and awareness of one's own skills and competences. It is used for various target groups and occupational fields and has been applied by different institutions such as the Higher vocational and general education schools (for example, the Academic gymnasium in Graz provided a full-day workshop in the course 'careers guidance' for pupils between 16-18 years old; the Career Service Centre at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz (i.e. the Centre has provided regular workshops for students and graduates of the university since the school year 2010/2011), the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (for example, the University has held a guest lecture, introducing the model to teachers of health professionals), the Federal State Government of Styria (more details are available in section 2.5.2), and the Department of Business Education and Development at the University of Graz, which has anchored the competence portfolio in the curricula of its Master's programme in Business Education.
- *WIK:I*³³: In the youth sector (initiated by the BMWFJ), a new approach for documenting and recognising informally gained competences of young people was developed in 2012/2013 and piloted in the second half of 2013: the *WIK:I* („*Was ich kann durch informelles Lernen*“/“What I am able to do based on informal learning”) competence portfolio. It is a personal document that is developed in a guided process which comprises three phases: 1. collecting and analysing relevant activities (activities from the daily life, such as family life or hobbies, voluntary activities or extra-curricular activities), 2. identifying and describing competences gained in these activities, 3. formulating aims and planning their realisation. The *WIK:I* competence portfolio is usually developed in

²⁹ Cf. Zivildienst-Kompetenzbilanz-Verordnung 2013

³⁰ Austrian male citizens must serve six months in the army or nine months in civilian service.

³¹ The document and the guidelines are available here:
<http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/zivildienst/formulare/organisationen.aspx>

³² Cf. portfolio.uni-graz.at ; <http://www.observal-net.eu/content/austria-case-study-2013-competence-portfolio-model-university-graz>

³³ BMWFJ & Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke 2013

two half-day workshops with eight to twelve participants and two workshop leaders or portfolio tutors. Based on the competence portfolio, an individual *WIK:I* competence certificate can be issued. The competence certificate is developed together with (and also signed by) a portfolio tutor and is a shortened version of the competence portfolio that can be used for specific job applications. Main aim of this initiative is to support the self-reflection process of young people, to enhance their ability to describe their competences and to explain how they have acquired them. In the pilot phase, two training courses for 'certified *WIK:I* portfolio tutors' were organised and currently an evaluation of the pilotphase is conducted. An Austrian-wide implementation is planned for the second half of 2014.

2. Initiatives focused on specific (disadvantaged) target groups, such as the low-qualified/early school leavers, the unemployed, those at risk of unemployment, migrants, those seeking a higher education qualification etc.

Several initiatives are focused on disadvantaged target groups:

- Acquisition of *Hauptschule* qualifications by adults (second chance education) (cf. 2.5.2);
- Exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination (LAP) (cf. 2.5.2);
- Recognition of prior learning for exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination (cf. 2.5.2):
- *Kompetenzerweiterung durch Kompetenzerfassung* (KOMKOM³⁴ – Expanding competences based on competence identification): The project, initiated in 2012, financed by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, and co-financed by the University of Klagenfurt, is targeted towards low-qualified people who want to achieve a qualification that could be linked to NQF level 1. The project aims at the development of a flexible instrument for identifying and recording competences that can be used by social integration enterprises (*soziale Integrationsunternehmen*). The instrument must be suitable to the different requirements of these enterprises (different fields for learning and working). So far, a set of learning outcomes and assessment indicators are defined for the 'initial technical qualification' (*Technisch-handwerkliche Grundqualifikation*)³⁵. These learning outcomes are related to professional and methodical competences, social and communicative competences and personal competences. In April 2013, the project was extended by a further 15 months. In this phase, the instrument will be tested and learning outcomes for an 'initial technical qualification' will be defined related to NQF level 2 with a particular focus on compatibility and connectivity with training programmes belonging to the formal system. Furthermore, specific software will be developed for facilitating a structured identification and recording of competences.
- You have skills/competences (*Du kannst was!!*)

You have skills/competences (*Du kannst was!!*):

The 'You have skills/competences' 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 as well as in the province of Burgenland.

The target group of the project is persons with low qualifications and immigrants: semi-skilled workers who want to improve their skills and secure employment through the acquirement of an apprenticeship certificate. Participation is voluntary. In Upper Austria, participants can obtain certificates for the final apprenticeship examination in one of eleven fields and in Burgenland six occupations were chosen. The occupations were chosen in cooperation with the regional Labour Market Services (*AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice*). For example, in Burgenland, the six occupations selected (metalworker, bricklayers, carpenter, cook, retail salesperson, and IT-technician) are those in which the number of semi-skilled workers in Burgenland is above the average.

³⁴ Cf. <http://www.komkom.at>

³⁵ Cf. http://www.komkom.at/download/Technisch-handwerkliche_Grundqualifikation-levelneutral_NUR-LL_v5_ohneScores.pdf

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 opportunities and requirements of the process and can decide if they want to take part.
3. Personal portfolios are created with a 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.

At the beginning of the initiative, the recognition of prior learning for exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination was only possible based on a specific 'permission' from the responsible ministry. This is now regulated by law within the revised Vocational Training Act of 2011 (cf. 2.5.2).

Duration/sustainability:

The project was initiated in 2005 and in 2007 the provincial government approved the project proposal. The initiative has been integrated into the 'pact on jobs and qualification'. Since 2012, it has also been offered in the province of Burgenland and other provinces have also started to implement this approach..

Evaluation:

The University of Linz carried out a continuous external evaluation of the project in Upper Austria. However, there is currently no evidence of results available.

Further information:

Upper Austria:

- <http://www.dukannstwas.at/>
- Bauer, Fritz (2008): DU kannst was! Perspektiven des oberösterreichischen Pilotprojekts zur Anerkennung informell und non-formal erworbener Kompetenzen für den Beruf. Online: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/16313/nqr_konf08_bauer.pdf
- Bauer, Fritz (2008): Anerkennung informell und non-formal erworbener Kompetenzen für den Beruf. Perspektiven des oberösterreichischen Pilotprojekts „DU kannst was!“ WISO 31. Jg. (2008), Nr. 1, 146-160
- Bauer, Fritz (2012): Du kannst was. Newsletter Erwachsenenbildung Oberösterreich, 10. Ausgabe, März 2012

Burgenland:

- <http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/home/Kompetenzanerkennung.html>

■ Competence with System (*Kompetenz mit System*)

Competence with System (*Kompetenz mit System*):

'Competence with System' (*Kompetenz mit System, KmS*) is a model that puts occupational training offered by the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) in the context of qualifications belonging to

the formal system. KmS aims to make it possible for jobseekers to acquire the competences necessary for passing the final apprenticeship exam based on exceptional admission by attending several courses offered by the AMS. KmS is formed by competence matrices that describe the targeted competence level of AMS training provision and that reproduce all the contents of the legally specified apprenticeship profiles. The competence matrices are structured with competence areas and for each competence area three steps of competence development are defined (each higher step includes also the previous ones). The third step represents the level of the apprenticeship qualification. The courses offered by the AMS are designed based on the three levels of the matrix.

The courses target jobseekers of all ages whose maximum educational attainment is compulsory schooling. Every course is completed with a competence check and based on this competence check a certificate is issued. The certificate shows, based on the matrix, which competences the participants have already acquired. Every course builds on the previous one, and the scheme is also suited to 'lateral entrants' – people who have already acquired professional experience or dropped out from a related apprenticeship can gain access to the course related to the second and third level based on an evaluation of their already acquired competences. Integration of these exceptional admissions to the apprentice-leave exam (LAP) into the NQF poses no problems via the respective final apprenticeship certificate. Assignment of partial qualifications, such as those acquired as part of 'inclusive vocational training', still needs clarification in Austria.

Duration/sustainability:

The project was launched in 2010.

Stakeholder involvement: Research and consulting institutes (Prospect, öibf, ibw) jointly developed the KmS model. The AMS finance the project and the AMS offer training courses.

Further information:

Project description – Prospect:

http://www.pro-spect.at/projekte/projekt_KMS2.php

Weber, Friederike; Putz, Sabine; Stockhammer, Hilde (2011): Kompetenz mit System. Lernergebnisorientierte AMS Schulungen als Schritte zur Qualifikation Lehrabschluss. In: Magazin erwachsenenbildung.at. Das Fachmedium für Forschung, Praxis und Diskurs. Ausgabe 14, 2011. Wien. Online:

<http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at/magazin/1114/meb1114.pdf>

Some initiatives are specifically targeted towards migrants (but they are also addressed in initiatives related to low-qualified people described above). Some examples include:

■ Join in a Job!³⁶

The initiative Join in a Job! was developed as part of an EQUAL project and further developed as part of a Leonardo da Vinci project (2008-2010; 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.

■ CH-Q method offered at the Migrare - Centre for Migrants in Upper Austria³⁷

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 can take part in the programme (cf. Kovacs, 2010).

3. To what extent are the European Europass and Youthpass tools used in your country to document non-formal and informal learning?

³⁶ Cf. <http://www.hafelekar.at/en/eu-projects/11-eu-projekte/213-join-in-a-job-en>

³⁷ Cf. <http://www.migrare.at/cms1/index.php/angbote-kompetenzzentrum/kompetenzprofil>

Europass instruments are well known in Austria, in particular the Europass CV. The number of Europass CVs created online by citizens residing in Austria is continuously increasing: for example, in 2011, 69 415 CVs were completed and in 2012, 98 591. In March 2012, already 42 748 CVs were completed.³⁸ However, the usability of the CV needs to be improved (cf. Jugend in Aktion Österreichische Agentur & Nationalagentur für Lebenslanges Lernen, 2012).

In Austria, the number of Youthpass certificates issued is slightly increasing, from 912 in 2010 to 1 186 in 2011, 1 190 in 2012, and (so far) 1 511 in 2013 (as of September 2013). The Youthpass can only be issued to participants in projects within the programme Youth in Action and it is only used to a very limited extent to support validation initiatives (cf. Tanzer, 2011).

A joint conference of the National Agencies for the programmes Youth in Action and Lifelong Learning in November 2012 expressed a desire for a common European Portfolio that provides the possibility to document learning experiences gained in formal, non-formal and informal contexts and which is designed to ensure maximum user-friendliness (Jugend in Aktion Österreichische Agentur & Nationalagentur für Lebenslanges Lernen, 2012).

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

There is no national funding framework for validation in Austria. The funding for validation activities depends on the respective measure, procedure, or project. For example, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture 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 in order to bridge courses for parents on maternity leave (ibw, 2007, 61). In several cases, the Public Employment Service Austria also bears the costs. The development of new methods in pilot projects and research is or has been 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 set up their own initiatives.

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

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. There are various options for subsidies related to second chance education or unemployed people. For example, in some provinces, people can receive financial support from the authorities, chambers of labour or chambers of commerce. Cost-free opportunities are available at schools for employed persons and are offered in the framework of the initiative *Lehre mit Matura*. Since 2012, the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education³⁹ has provided funding for courses targeted to adults who lack basic skills or did not graduate from a lower secondary school. In addition to the training of the various subjects, these programmes include a clearing-period at the beginning for the identification of competences and the design of an individual development plan. Participation in these programmes is free of charge for learners. Funding is based on success in order to

³⁸ Cf. http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/resources/statistics?locale=de_AT

³⁹ Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at

contribute to the reduction of the drop out-rate. The total costs are only then refunded to the institutions if participants achieve their graduation successfully.

Some examples of costs are provided in the rest of this section.

The exceptional admission to the apprenticeship-leave exam requires an exam fee from approximately EUR 125 to EUR 150. Costs vary as the duration and work involved in the exam organisation vary between apprenticeship occupations.

Costs for the *Berufsreifepfung (BRP)*, are distinguished between those for preparation courses and exam fees. On average, approximately EUR 450 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 2 600 and EUR 2 800.⁴⁰ 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 has already been 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 have to be paid for each exam separately. For example, in Vienna, for each exam candidates currently have to pay EUR 14.30.⁴¹

Exam fees for the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* are about EUR 100 to EUR 150. 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 bridging 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 195⁴² (there are various possibilities to get funding, such as from the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria). The costs for the 'potential analyses' offered at WIFI are between EUR 150 and EUR 500 (depending on the province).

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.

2.7.3 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. Some examples are presented below:

- apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) in second-chance education (exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination) – 6 982 in 2012 (approximately 15 % of all apprenticeship-leave exams in Austria (Dornmayer & Nowak, 2013, 75);
- Admission to university programmes without taking the *Reifepfung* exam - in 2012, Austrian universities newly enrolled 157 students (0.35 % of all newly enrolled students) with the *ExternistInnenreifepfung* as an entrance qualification, 87 (0.19 %) with the

⁴⁰ For example, the total fees for preparation courses at the VHS Favoriten are between EUR 2,664 and EUR 2,800. Exam fees are for mathematics and English € 85, for Deutsch € 105 and for selected vocational field EUR 155. (cf. https://www.vhs.at/2bw_brp_lehrgaenge.html).

⁴¹ Cf. <http://www.wien.gv.at/amtshelfer/kultur/stadtschulrat/ausbildung/externistenpruefung-nachtraeglicher-positiver-abschluss.html>

⁴² These are the costs for four workshops. Additional costs accrue for optional activities: evaluation of the portfolio and summarizing the results by trainers (EUR 50) and issue of the CH-Q level 1 certificate (EUR 35).

Studienberechtigungsprüfung and 1 000 (2.24 %) with the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (Source: Statistics Austria⁴³);

- admission to degree programmes at universities of applied sciences without taking the *Reifeprüfung* exam in the traditional form - in 2012, Austrian universities of applied sciences newly enrolled 84 students (0.5 % of all newly enrolled students) with the *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung* as an entrance qualification, 285 (1.7 %) with the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*, 1 1 023 (6.1 %) with the *Berufsreifeprüfung* and 604 (3.6 %) without any *Reifeprüfung* exam (Source: Statistics Austria⁴⁴);
- Wba - up to August 2013, 1 095 status-quo evaluations were carried out by the Academy of Continuing Education and the academy has issued 633 wba certificates and 152 wba diplomas;⁴⁵
- *Ehren.Wert.Voll* - in 2010 and 2011 the Provincial Youth Department in Styria issued *Ehren.Wert.Voll* certificates to 30 volunteers (for each year) and in 2012 to 32 volunteers (Dzhengozova & Lengauer, 2013).

2.7.4 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.

In a dissertation (Prokopp, 2009), interviews people responsible for two initiatives that involved validating non-formal and informal learning and which 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 reported 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.

An evaluation of the competence profile of KOMPAZ showed that 63 % of people who were unemployed before participating in the programme were successful in finding a job after completion. They were more self-confident, developed their learning strategies, and could actively use their informally acquired knowledge and competences for improved profiling within a 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 (Auer et al. 2007).

Process-accompanying evaluation has been carried out for the *Weiterbildungsakademie* (wba) (Brünner et al. 2012). In general, the evaluation shows very positive results and high satisfaction of participants. Participants highlight the importance of the guidance and support provided by wba-employees. Critical remarks are related to the fact that, although the wba-certificates and –diplomas are of higher qualifying, they do not necessarily lead to better opportunities for career advancement or to higher salaries (Reisinger & Steiner 2014, 7).

⁴³ Cf. <http://statcube.at/superwebguest/login.do?quest=quest&db=def1507>

⁴⁴ Cf. <http://statcube.at/superwebguest/login.do?quest=quest&db=def1512>

⁴⁵ Cf. http://wba.or.at/ueber_uns/Zahlen_Daten_Fakten.php

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Information is provided primarily by those institutions offering the preparation courses for the different measures or by those institutions offering the validation or 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. Relevant information is available on websites - for example:

- The website of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture provides information about second-chance education (such as acquisition of *Hauptschule* qualifications by adults, *ExternistInnenreifeprüfung*, *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* and *Berufsreifeprüfung*).
- The website www.erwachsenenbildung.at, provided by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, presents comprehensive information on Austrian adult learning and second-chance education offers, including possibilities for the validation and recognition of informally developed competences.
- The website of the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education⁴⁶ provides information about accreditation of programmes and courses provided within this framework.
- The website of the initiative for professional recognition (*Berufsanerkennung*)⁴⁷ targeted at migrants provides information about the acceptance and recognition of vocational qualifications or professional experience acquired in other countries as well as about counselling offers.
- The website of the Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth⁴⁸ informs the public about apprenticeship training as well as the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination. This website also gives detailed information about the awarding of the *Ingenieur* title.

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

In Austria, there is no overall information, advice or guidance network related to validation of nonformal or informal learning. As noted above, counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions or by those institutions offering the validation or portfolio processes. In the following, three initiatives that provide guidance during validation procedures are presented:

- Competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (*Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke*)

The competence portfolio is a folder that documents an individual's skills gained through voluntary work. A two-hour (approx.) discussion on competences with a certified portfolio facilitator (*Portfolio Begleiter*) makes up the core of the portfolio preparation. The discussion is evaluated jointly in several steps, and then the participant completes the portfolio.

- Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance⁴⁹

The sub-project Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance is part of the project on Educational Guidance in Vienna (*Bildungsberatung in Wien*). 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' 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.

⁴⁶ Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at

⁴⁷ Cf. <http://www.berufsanerkennung.at/>

⁴⁸ Cf. www.bmwfj.gv.at

⁴⁹ Cf. <http://msplhs15.bon.at/~admin87/ring/kompetenzentwicklung/projekt5.php>

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 sensitise 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; one is a very rough 'competence sketch' that results from the first counselling session, and the other is a 'competence profile' that is a more elaborated and better formulated 'competence sketch'.

■ The competence portfolio of the Adult Education Centre Linz

This contains information about an individual's core competencies. 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 competencies 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 competencies used, or gained, to complete them. Individuals also carry out a self-assessment of their competencies.

- Personal profile - the abilities highlighted in the stages above are reduced to core competencies. The individual has the choice of which competencies to select.

Once the portfolio is complete, the coaches are responsible for highlighting the individual's core competencies and for assessing the extent to which the indicators that have been set to define social and communication competencies 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 assess the behaviour of the participants in view of six dimensions of social competence, which are ability to work with others, teamwork, ability to reflect, ability to resolve conflicts, self-awareness, and communication skills.

3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The website, www.erwachsenenbildung.at (provided by the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture), serves as an online-platform for everybody who deals with adult education or further education as a learner, teacher, or someone working in organisation and administration. For example, it provides information on initiatives related to validation of non-formal and informal learning relevant for adult educators and guidance practitioners.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Cf. <http://erwachsenenbildung.at/bildungsinfo/kompetenznachweis/kompetenzanerkennung.php>;
http://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/nqr/nqr_und_erwachsenenbildung/informell_erworbene_kompetenzen.php

In 2009, the Austrian Public Employment Service funded the development of a manual including methods for 'competence balances' and 'portfolio analyses' (Mosberger & Kasper, 2009).

The platform for Austrian educational guidance practitioners (bib-wiki⁵¹) presents information on guidance related issues, including validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In Austria, different ministries and sections 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 many procedures and initiatives for validating non-formally or informally acquired competences 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 the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

QA in GE and VET schools

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 set out below (Tritscher-Archan, 2010, 61pp):

-SQA and Q.I.S.: Within the framework of the national Q.I.S.-project (Quality in Schools⁵² (Q.I.S.) project, 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. In 2012, the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) launched the initiative 'SQA – Schulqualität Allgemeinbildung' (school quality in general education) which has become statutory in the school year 2013/2014⁵³. SQA is aimed at ensuring the best learning conditions for school pupils through improving teaching quality and quality assurance mechanisms. Between 2012 and 2016, the focus is on directing teaching and learning towards an increasingly individualised and competence-based approach. SQA provides instruments and tools for planning and implementation.

- QIBB: Quality development efforts in VET schools and colleges have been supported by the VET Quality Initiative⁵⁴ (QIBB) since 2005/2006. QIBB is the first Austrian initiative in which all levels of the school-based VET 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 relatively high in the full-time school sector. In 2007, the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training⁵⁵ (ARQA-VET) was set up and is used as a contact point and service facility for all questions associated with the theme of quality in VET. It supports the General Directorate II for Vocational Education and Training of the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture in the implementation of QIBB and the national and European activities of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA-VET).

⁵¹ Cf. <http://www.bibwiki.at>

⁵² Cf. www.qis.at

⁵³ <http://www.sqa.at/>

⁵⁴ Cf. www.qibb.at

⁵⁵ Cf. www.arqa-vet.at

- Introduction of educational standards: 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 affected on a legal basis starting from January 2009 on. The development of educational standards for the VET sector was started some time later in 2004/2005.⁵⁶ - Reforming *Matura*: The reform of the higher education entrance examination (*Matura or Reifeprüfung*) is also regarded as a way of enhancing quality⁵⁷. From the 2014/2015 school year, the standardised, competence-oriented Reifeprüfung exam will be introduced, with which uniform high quality standards will be set for all graduates. The new competence-oriented form of the Reife- und Diplomprüfung examination for VET colleges will be introduced in the 2015/2016 academic year. The new regulations will also apply for the external exams (*ExternistInnenreifeprüfung* and the *Berufsreifeprüfung*) and will provide a higher degree of standardisation.

QA in higher education

In higher education, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria⁵⁸) was established in 2012 as part of a fundamental reorganisation of the system of external quality assurance in Austria. The legal basis for establishing AQ Austria is the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education that entered into force on 1 March 2012.

The procedures are audits of the quality management systems in the case of public universities, programme accreditation for newly established study programmes of universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) and private universities and institutional accreditation for newly established universities of applied sciences and private universities. Both forms of accreditation are also in use for reaccreditation after certain periods.

Austrian public universities are free to choose among the independent and international accepted agencies for quality assurance for their audits. University of applied sciences and private universities are obliged by law to undergo the accreditations with the national agency. AQ Austria conducts an evaluation to verify whether the filed application for institutional accreditation and programme accreditation provides reliable, transparent and well-founded evidence of ensuring compliance with the educational mission of the institution concerned.

QA in adult education

Preparatory courses for taking external exams, the *Berufsreifeprüfung* or the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* 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 implemented in the field of adult education. For example, general international quality assurance standards are used as well as specific criteria and processes (developed at province levels or by individual providers). Many training providers have already undergone quality assurance tests (e.g. according to ISO Standards or the European Foundation for Quality Management - EFQM). 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 started in January 2011. The *Ö-Cert*⁵⁹ is a quality label that is attuned to adult education providers and is developed and recognised nationwide in Austria. It aims at 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.

QA for training courses offered in the area of youth work

⁵⁶ Cf. <http://www.bildungsstandards.berufsbildendeschulen.at/>

⁵⁷ Cf. <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.xml>

⁵⁸ Cf. www.aq.ac.at

⁵⁹ Cf. <http://oe-cert.at>

Training courses offered in the area of youth work can apply for *aufZAQ*-certification.⁶⁰ Training courses have been certified as qualified further education since the beginning of 2003. In this way, *aufZAQ* increases the value and acknowledgement of non-formal educational provisions in Austria and South Tirol.

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 observed by 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 higher education - *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 LA – via the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*) and hence has a legally binding framework at the national level. The exam must be overseen by 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*), and the Higher Education Entrance Act (*Studienberechtigungs-gesetz*) and the School Organisation Act (*Schulorganisationsgesetz*). 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 bridging courses preparing for the SBP at universities. Before recognising the equivalence of bridging 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 bridging 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).

4.3 Evaluation framework

No overall framework exists for the 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 4.5. (for example, *Triebel*, 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 in the labour market are commissioned by the responsible ministry (*Klimmer et al.* 1999; 2006; 2009).

⁶⁰ Cf. www.aufzaq.at

5 Validation methods

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 must 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 or her occupation and whether he or she is able to perform properly the tasks characteristic of the apprenticeship trade.

In many cases, the portfolio method is used in the initiatives developed at adult learning institutes. In this context, supported self-assessment is usually the chosen method - with a strong focus on developing the ability of self-reflection. The 'You have skills/competences' initiative also uses portfolios. These portfolios are created with a focus on competences relevant for the chosen profession and will be compared to those in the job profiles and examination regulations of the corresponding apprenticeship qualification. However, in many cases the portfolio method alone seems not to be sufficient for establishing trust in one's competences, in particular in relation to professional competences. Thus, the 'You have skills/competences' initiative, for example, also uses 'performance checks' (practical assessments including profession-specific tasks).

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.

The postgraduate university course, educational and vocational guidance, (*Bildungs- und Berufsberatung*⁶¹) offered at the Danube University Krems uses an online-test (for assessing competences related to the professional field) and an assessment centre (assessing counselling and guidance competences as well as social and self-competences).

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

	Identification	Documentation	Assesment
Debate	x		
Declarative methods	x		
Interview	X		
Observation	X		
Portfolio method	X	X	
Presentation			X
Simulation and evidence extracted from work		X	X
Tests and examinations			X
on-line test			X
assessment-centre			

⁶¹ Cf. <http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/bbb>

	Identification	Documentation	Assesment
certification workshop			X

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.

In Austria, some challenges are identified regarding the implementation of the four-stage model as suggested by the Council Recommendation (cf. Lachmayr & Löffler, 2013a, 10-11). For example, it will not always be possible to identify non-formally and informally acquired competences merely through 'dialogue', since practice-oriented competences will have to be demonstrated in different ways. In order to document an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning, it will be necessary to develop standardised descriptions to ensure comparability.

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

There is no specific profile of validation practitioners in Austria. Depending on the specific measures, the practitioners are teachers, experienced professionals, and 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.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

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 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 that 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 four training modules, have developed an extensive competence portfolio for themselves and have created an additional five 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).

6.3 Qualifications requirements

Cf. 6.2

7 References

7.1 Literature

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7.2 Interviewees/Contacts

- Ibw
- Bundesjugendvertretung

7.2.1 Validation Practitioners

- Project: 'Weiterbildungsakademie' (wba)
- AMS (Austrian Employment Service)
- Project: 'KOMPAZ', 'Du kannst was!'

7.2.2 Quality Assurance

- Ministry: BMUKK
- Ministry: BMWFJ
- Researcher