



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

Country report Bulgaria

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1 Introduction

The development of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Bulgaria since 2010 includes several aspects. For example there has been a gradual increase in the engagement of social partners; and a growing number of single projects. Developments have also seen a change in the attitude of employers, who now have a more positive attitude and acceptance towards validation which is expressed in growing support for validation arrangements.

A significant aspect relates to the launch of an initiative for the development of a system for validation - the project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences'. Due to the added value of the project at national level (i.e. development of a systematic approach to validation), it is mentioned several times in this report.

With reference to the 2010 European inventory report, Bulgaria still does not have in place a uniform legal framework or national system, policy or strategy on validation which encompasses all educational sectors. It also does not have a national institutional framework with clear allocation of responsibilities and coordination between stakeholders. Additionally, there is still a need to define a framework for allocating the funds for validation, to establish an overall quality assurance framework as well as a more targeted approach regarding awareness raising and recruitment. At the current stage of development, there is also a lack of reliable data on flows of beneficiaries. Thus far, a general job profile for a validation professional has not been defined.

Originally, in Bulgaria, the majority of validation arrangements were implemented in the VET sector. This sector has not been given a priority, but there are some structural conditions (such as legal regulations) that facilitate the implementation of validation arrangements in VET more than in any other sector. For example, higher education institutions have academic autonomy and are self-governing, meaning that the introduction of common validation standards may be difficult and in practice rare.

Although the development of a system for validation focus on the VET sector (i.e. the project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences'), the methods and tools developed can be transferred to other educational sectors once they have been tested. Therefore, from a short-term point of view, validation in Bulgaria is developing from a sectoral perspective and from a long-term point of view – from a national perspective.

Generally, in Bulgaria, it seems that society is not yet ready to fully accept without reservation that non-traditional qualifications can be acquired through validation. There is also a reluctance to consider these equal to formally acquired qualifications. According to stakeholders involved in the development of validation, there are some sectoral differences. For example, in the VET sector the degree of understanding is high compared to other sectors due to the scale of implemented projects and related activities that help to raise awareness and dissemination.

In relation to the VET sector, the model of validation is characterised by a centralised or top-down approach, which intends to involve (as much as possible) all relevant social partners. The decentralised or bottom-up approach will be more useful in higher education, given the autonomy of Bulgarian universities.

With respect to validation, one of the issues is that the relationships between the different educational sectors are not strong enough which can be attributed to the lack of an overall legal and institutional framework for validation.

Current obstacles to further development of validation in Bulgaria can be summarised as follows¹.

¹ The obstacles are based on a survey carried out within the ValidAid project. The findings of the survey are published in Markov, M. And Vasileva, E. (2012): 'Validation of competences acquired at the workplace in Bulgaria', ValidAid 2010 – 2012, pp.43-44.

- Need for sufficient trained personnel who can carry out validation arrangements (i.e. formal educational providers need the necessary instruments, context and funding in order to start to perform validation procedures).
- Lack of cooperation and sufficient experience (in methods of cooperation) among stakeholders.
- A view that validation is time-consuming, difficult and complicated, and considerable effort to be implemented successfully.
- Lack of experience in organising information campaigns that support validation. This relates also to the low expectations of potential candidates regarding the real benefits of the validation process.
- Lack of a regulatory and legal framework for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This discourages potential candidates and educational and training institutions to take part in validation arrangements.
- Representatives of the private sector very often consider validation as the sole responsibility of the state and do not perceive their own place and duties in this process. Furthermore, the private sector is not always willing to share experience related to validation, as it is not sufficiently confident in its own achievements and tends to be suspicious of the experience of other companies.

In relation to future challenges, it should be noted that through the update of State Educational Standards (SERs) Bulgaria is gradually introducing the learning outcomes approach in curricula and assessment. The use of (units of) learning outcomes facilitates the implementation of the validation of non-formal and formal learning. Therefore, in the future, validation practitioners may have to take specialised training on learning outcomes-based assessment.

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

National legal framework

In Bulgaria, there is no uniform legal framework for validation encompassing all educational sectors. At this stage of development, article 40 of the Vocational Education and Training Act (VET Act) grants the opportunity to validate non-formal and informal learning to those who have qualified through specific training. They need to have passed practical training with a duration determined by the educating institution, or have trained for a professional qualification for at least six months (by ministries, municipalities, employer and employee representatives, individual employers or through individual work). The qualification is acquired after passing the national examinations in Theory and Practice of Profession.²

According to the 2010 European Inventory, the VET Act should have been amended as a result of recommendations produced in the project 'Promoting adults' vocational training and employability in Bulgaria' (2008-2009). These amendments have not yet been adopted.

Updated validation-related texts proposed in the draft Law for amendment in the end of 2013 concern:

- definition and stages of the validation procedure;
- which institutions will have the right to undertake "validation"
- types of certificates
- funding schemes

² Vocational Education and Training Act, State Gazette No. 68/30.07.1999, last amended SG No.97/2010

■ responsibilities of the public institutions and social partners regarding Validation.

Regarding compulsory education, the draft Law on Pre-school and School Education includes texts on validation of non-formal and informal learning.³ The draft Law was presented to the Parliament and is still pending approval.

Some aspects of validation, in terms of awarding credit units and access to higher education, are covered by the Higher Education Act (HE Act). According to the HE Act, credit units in each educational subject are formed from a schedule of lectures, practical exercises and tutorials, independent training work (in labs, libraries, course work, homework, etc.), results from examinations and other assessment methods, as the higher education institution defines. Credits could also be awarded for participation in practical training and for defended course work or diploma thesis, if such activities are included in the syllabus (Art. 44a, Paragraph 4).⁴ The HE Act also stipulates that following a decision of the Academic Board, higher schools may admit applicants without an entrance examination provided that the applicants have successfully passed the state matriculation exams (Art. 68, Paragraph 4).⁵

National system on validation

In Bulgaria, there is no national system for validation covering all educational sectors and all levels of learning. In relation to the VET sector, there have been single initiatives towards the development of a system for validation. One recent example is the project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences' (2013-2014), implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET), relevant ministries and social partners.⁶

The project involves: a system for validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences, a training programme for validation practitioners (and training of more than 1000 consultants), as well as a Manual for vocational gymnasiums (how to implement the validation procedure with all the necessary templates and documents), The Manual will be tested in more than 200 vocational gymnasiums⁸. The project is based on the previous project: 'Promoting adults' vocational training and employability in Bulgaria' (2008-2009), 'Validation of skills and knowledge for strengthening the positions of low-qualified employees in the labour market – ValidAid' (2010-2012), and 'Regional Strategies for Learning Validation and Education – ReSoLVE' (2012-2013).

National policy /strategy for validation

In Bulgaria a formal strategy/policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning does not exist with respect to all educational sectors. As stated in the 2010 European inventory report, validation and certification of the results of non-formal and informal learning are among the main priorities of the National Lifelong Strategy. A plan and programme for the development of the Validation system in VET are developed in the project "New opportunity for my future", which is implemented under the grant scheme BG051PO001-4.3.03 'Development of a system for validation of non-formally acquired knowledge, skills and competences' of the Ministry of Education..

³ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing the Bulgarian Qualifications Framework (BQF) to the EQF and QF-EHEA, p. 42.

⁴ In Bulgaria, higher education institutions (HEIs) have academic autonomy and are self-governing i.e. they are responsible for programme design and quality assurance of the education provided, Higher education act, State Gazette No. 112/27.12.1995, last amended SG No.101/2010.

⁵ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p. 43.

⁶ Partners include the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Ministry of Justice, Public Employment Agency, Bulgarian Industrial Association, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Confederation of Labour Podkrepa.

There are plans for the implementation of a broader programme in the period between 2015 and 2020, which focuses on VET and higher education.⁷

2.2 Skills audits

There are at least two measures implemented by the Public Employment Agency that are similar to skills audits: career orientation (provided as a mainstream service), and elaboration of individual plans (within specific projects/programmes).

The Information Consultancy Units of the Public Employment Agency provide career orientation open to all citizens. This includes initial consultation, facilitation, and matching of skills and competences of jobseekers with the requirements of current job vacancies, and providing information on retraining options. Jobseekers must fill in a registration form that describes their skills and competences, previous work experience, and job preferences.

The elaboration of individual plans relates to different target groups with different needs, such as unemployed and employed people, disadvantaged groups, and long-term unemployed people. Typically, the measure is implemented within projects under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

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

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

The Council of Ministers decision No 96 of 2 February 2012 adopted the Bulgarian National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (BQF). In May 2013, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science drafted a report on Referencing the BQF to the EQF and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). According to the Draft Report, one of the aims of the BQF is to facilitate the validation and recognition of prior learning including non-formal and informal learning and work-place training.⁸ The BQF has been recently adopted and it is too early to assess its practical use for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The BQF is structured according to learning outcomes, described as knowledge, skills and competences for each qualification level. It is based on the detailed descriptions of the content and expected learning outcomes defined in the State Educational Requirements (SERs).⁹ The description of expected learning outcomes in SERs can facilitate validation procedures, particularly at the stage of assessment.¹⁰

Credit systems

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was adopted under the necessary legislation (Higher Education Act) and implemented in 2004.

In relation to VET, Bulgaria is on track to implement the European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as a part of the implementation of the National Lifelong Learning Strategy. This process is linked to the gradual update of SERs. The update is reflected in the use of learning outcomes oriented descriptions - earlier SERs were described in terms of content and learning objectives.

⁷ More details about the programme are available in Bulgarian at:
http://validirane.mon.bg/docs/metodology_Prilogenie_8_23-05-2013.pdf, 2013-12-10.

⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p. 13.

⁹ The State Educational Requirements cover the national education system (general and vocational education and training) and higher education

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p. 91.

A pilot Bulgarian-German project, 'EU-Integration of Southeast Europe II. EU Integration of economic and labour markets by TVET (2010-2014)',¹¹ developed units of learning outcomes for several professions i.e. electrical technician, gas technician, and baker-pastry-cook. This resulted in the elaboration of proposals for updated SERs for the above-mentioned professions. The proposals represent a draft model of new VET Standards, designed in line with the principles and characteristics of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and ECVET. The draft model provides the basis for the creation of modular training programmes (based on learning outcomes) and the application of mechanisms and procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

With regard to the linking of validation to other systems, there is no legal framework that regulates the way validation is linked to different educational sectors. Although there are some good practices (for example, recognition of learning outcomes of secondary vocational schools by higher education institutions), the transfer of learning outcomes (units of learning outcomes including credits, crediting/assessing learning outcomes, recognition and validation of learning outcomes) is at a preparatory phase.¹²

As there is no legal framework that regulates the way that validation is linked to the different educational sectors, statements refer to the implementation of specific projects. For example, in relation to the project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', the expectation is that the majority of beneficiaries will be able to validate one or more competences of a qualification (partial qualification) and only a few of them will be able to validate all competences (full qualification).

In relation to higher education, the HE Act stipulates that validation can be used for exemption from a part of a course (through acquisition of credit units) as well as for access to higher education (see section 1). However, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) operate validation autonomously and in relation to their internal (educational) standards. In general, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not a mass practice among Bulgarian higher education institutions.¹³

Standards

In Bulgaria there are educational and training standards (SERs) used in formal education and training and they are the same as the standards that support the delivery of validation. Assessment and evaluation standards defined in SERs apply also to validation arrangements and are used in the same way.

2.4 National institutional framework

There is no national institution responsible for validation across all educational sectors and there is no uniform legal framework. Therefore, it is not clear which institution(s) will administer and methodologically ensure the validation procedures in different sectors. In relation to compulsory education, this may be the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science; in relation to VET, it may be the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET is defined as the responsible body in the last draft for amendments of VET law). NAVET is a suitable institution to carry out the Validation system because it works with tripartite based structures (management board and 17 expert commissions with representatives of the state, trade unions and business). In accordance with the most recent surveys no new structures are needed for the implementation of the validation system.

Regarding higher education, it is difficult to say given the autonomy of Bulgarian universities.

¹¹ The project is coordinated by GIZ, Germany, with the financial support of the German Federal Ministry on Economic Cooperation and Development, <https://gc21.giz.de/ibt/gc21/area=portal/style=myso/paint=myso/en/usr/modules/gc21/ws-FLEX-SEE/info/ibt/Component4/index.sxhtml>, 2013-10-30.

¹² Cedefop (2013): 'Monitoring ECVET Implementation strategies in Europe'. Working paper 18, p.68.

¹³ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p. 43.

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

2.5.1 Please describe the allocation of responsibilities (at national, regional, local, social partner, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

As already mentioned, there is no uniform legal framework for validation and the allocation of responsibilities in the different sectors is still not clear. Nevertheless, the System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences draft for amendments of VET law proposes a model for the allocation of their responsibilities. The table below provides an overview of tasks and responsibilities at national level.

Organisation	Responsibilities related to validation
Ministry of Education, Youth and Science	Creates and improves conditions for validation; prepares draft laws on validation procedures; develops guidelines, monitors and provides quality assurance of the validation system; raises awareness, etc.
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	Agrees together with MEYS and the social partners on the main rules of the validation methodology; provides information on the needs of validation related to unemployed people; raises awareness, etc.
Public Employment Agency	Provides necessary information, orientation and consultation to unemployed people related to possibilities for validation; guides and supports potential candidates, etc.
NAVET	Supports institutions that provide validation of vocational knowledge, skills and competencies Education and Training
Employers' organizations	Inform and raise awareness of employers and citizens for the validation of non-formal knowledge, skills and competences
Trade unions	Inform their members regarding opportunities and requirements to validate their non-formal acquired knowledge skills and competences

Source: http://validirane.mon.bg/docs/Methodology_MOMN_23-05-2013_cor1_v3.pdf, pp.19-23

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers:

Formal education and training providers should play a main role in the validation of non-formal and informal learning as they already carry out validation procedures (for example they provide consultations; identify the competences which can be validated; develop portfolios for candidate; organise tests, theoretical and practical exams; undertake training; provide certification).

In relation to VET, formal education and training providers include vocational schools, vocational secondary schools, art schools, sports schools, vocational colleges (according to Art.9 of the VET Act), Centres for Vocational Training, and Centres for Vocational Guidance licensed by NAVET.¹⁴ The Centres for Vocational Training (CVTs) are responsible for the provision of documents for professional qualification as a result of the validation of non-formal and Informal learning (Art. 40, VET Act). The analysis of data provided by the CVTs shows that in Bulgaria validation procedures still have limited use.¹⁵

¹⁴ In addition, ministries, municipalities, HEIs, employers' and workers' organisations as well as individual employers may also provide training for the acquisition of a professional qualification.

¹⁵ http://validirane.mon.bg/docs/Methodology_MOMN_23-05-2013_cor1_v3.pdf, pp. 15. 2013-12-10

HEIs are entitled to decide which results and exams taken in previous forms of study will be recognised upon applying for a certain cycle of study. However, as mentioned earlier, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not a mass practice among Bulgarian higher education institutions.¹⁶

Compared to the 2010 European inventory report, coordination with social partners and guidance practitioners is gradually increasing as a result of the growing number of projects in which they are involved.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

The project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences' involves social partners such as the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA), Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Confederation of Labour Podkrepa. The role of the social partners is to promote and raise awareness about the issue of validation as well as guide potential candidates to institutions carrying out validation procedures. The project coordinator expects that after the end of the project, the social partners will continue to carry out these activities.

The needs analysis¹⁷ carried out in the project shows that the private sector actors represent an important group of interested parties in the development of a validation system. Employer and employee organisations and trade unions participate in the elaboration, updating and agreement of SERs for VET qualifications, as well as in the development, updating and agreement of the List of Professions for VET. They are involved in the organisation and conduct of examinations for the acquisition of a vocational qualification, and appoint their representatives in the managing board and expert commissions of NAVET.

A few private companies (typically multinational ones) have their own processes for validation" (mainly for the validation of competences acquired in the workplace). Validation initiatives usually take place as single projects related to particular sectors or target groups. Generally, the private sector is not always willing to share experience related to validation, as it is not always confident in its own achievements and tends to be suspicious of the experience of other companies.

The ValidAid project provides an example of where the private sector collaborates with formal educational institutions.

Third sector organisations

The situation described in the 2010 European inventory report has not changed. Currently there is no system for the recognition of skills and competences acquired by volunteers. Some non-governmental organisations, youth organisations, municipal structures and institutions implement projects that focus on the management of volunteers and volunteering activities. Volunteers have the chance to gain, for example, communication, social, and multicultural competences and receive a certificate for non-formal training. The certificate describes the knowledge, skills, competences, and experience acquired as well as personal and professional qualities demonstrated¹⁸.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p. 43.

¹⁷ Baseline analysis of the interests and needs of users and stakeholders for the establishment of a system for identification and validation of formal and informal knowledge, skills and competences (2013)

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2013): Draft Report on Referencing, p.41.

Another initiative relates to the CISESK project (2008-2010), which developed a tool for assessing and certifying non-formal and informal learning deriving from 'Voluntary Civil Service experiences'.¹⁹

The examples described do not provide further information on the use of the project outcomes (e.g. Certificates, a tool) for real validation purposes. They can be considered as single initiatives rather than a systematic approach.

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

As already mentioned, there is no uniform institutional framework for validation in Bulgaria. The project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', proposes a model for a more consolidated framework including all relevant stakeholders (see section 2.5.1.). Since the project is not completed, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of coordination arrangements.

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

1. Good practice example

Validation of self-acquired learning and credits transfer in web design and computer animation - CREATE project

Brief description of project/initiative (scale)

The target sector of the project is VET in ICT/Multimedia. Learners eligible to take part include young people (16-25) and youth with special needs (early school leavers), and long-term unemployed people who have acquired knowledge, skills and competences informally in web design and computer animation and wish to validate it.

Informal learning assessment methods used are interactive tests, such as multiple choice ('true and false', 'matching drag and drop'), e-Portfolio, and simulation (e-games).

Project outcomes include:

- development of outcome-based modules in web-design and computer animation for the validation of informal learning (the allocation of ECVET is a part of the validation process);
- development of a toolkit for the validation of informal learning;
- elaboration of a report on the allocation of ECVET points to the modules;
- elaboration of a manual for VET practitioners describing how the products can be used.

In relation to the national context, the tools developed by the CREATE project are innovative due to the use of ECVET points for validation purposes. The project has the potential to become a good practice example if we consider the usability of its outcomes. From an individual perspective the project addresses the needs of a broader target group (youth, early school leavers, long-term unemployed people), and from a structural perspective it corresponds to the current skills demand (i.e. in Bulgaria many people work in the area of ICT, in particular web design and computer animation). Furthermore, the project demonstrates the importance of cross-sectoral partnership and previous experience of the partners in working together in similar EU projects.

Duration/sustainability

The project is being implemented between 2012 and 2013. It is a Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation project (funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme). The funding is for a one-off pilot project.

Quality assurance

The project uses some internal quality assurance mechanisms. For example, partners have

¹⁹ <http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4670#.UmEwyRCIptw>, 2013-10-30

expertise in the fields of web-design and computer animation, which is important for the identification of modules of learning outcomes. The validation of competences is performed by accredited institutions, which may be private training providers, i.e. Student Computer Art Society (SCAS), state institutions - the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET), or NGOs – National Student Information and Career Centre (NSICC).

Stakeholder involvement

As mentioned earlier, the partnership is of a cross sectoral nature and consists of five partners from three European countries including the Bulgarian state agency for VET (NAVET), a semi-state German educational institution (DEKRA), a Bulgarian developer of innovative training content (SCAS), an Irish private company and curricula developer in ICT (FIT), and the Bulgarian Centre for Vocational Guidance (NSICC).

Evidence of results

The toolkit for validation has been operational for several months now but it is too early to provide any evidence on the number of beneficiaries or cases of validation. The inflow of people using the tools will be monitored through their registration on the project website.

Evaluation

The project is not yet completed and therefore internal /external evaluation is not available.

Further information: <http://www.create-validate.org>

Links of relevant reports:

'Self-acquired learning validation model':

http://www.create-validate.org/images/pdf/model_for_validation_en.pdf

'Guidelines for allocation of ECVET points to the units of learning outcomes, developed for qualifications computer animation and web design',

http://www.create-validate.org/images/pdf/guidelines_allocation_ecvet_points_en.pdf

2. Initiatives focused on specific (disadvantaged) target groups:

- **Low-qualified people** - for example, the ValidAid project²⁰,
- **Early-school leavers** – targeted by the CREATE project,
- **Employed and unemployed people** – addressed by the ReSoLVE project,
- **Migrants** – addressed by the VALEU project ('Validation of Immigrants' Vocational Skill and Competences in Tourism and Services as an Integration Warrant in the EU²¹).

3. Use of European Europass and Youthpass tools to document non-formal and informal learning

In Bulgaria, Europass and YouthPass have limited use for the documentation of non-formal and informal learning. The Europass CV is mainly used by state institutions; it is recognised by employers but not especially important. Europass Mobility is known by educational institutions implementing projects on mobility. However, among employers it is usually unknown. Europass Certificate Supplement is mostly unknown and used in exceptional cases. Europass Language Passport is used by public institutions, educational providers and institutions offering courses in foreign languages. Europass Diploma Supplement is not used; under the HE Act, higher education institutions are required to issue it, but in practice, they do not do so.

²⁰ <http://www.validaid.eu>

²¹ <http://www.bcnew.valeu.org>

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

In Bulgaria there is still no national framework explicitly allocating funds for validation. So far, validation arrangements have taken place within programmes and projects, financed by public funds and co-financed by the European Social Fund.

The Draft Law for amendment and supplement of the VET Act mentioned some funding mechanism and there is the opportunity for programmes and projects to use resources from the EU structural funds.²²

The Law on Employment Promotion (LEP)²³ provides subsidies for funding of active labour market policies including professional training of employed and unemployed people. These subsidies may also be used for validation purposes. However, the LEP should undertake to define the related duties and responsibilities of central and regional employment agencies.

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

The cost of documentation, assessment and recognition of non-formally acquired competences are required to be paid by the citizens themselves. In addition these costs can be met by programmes and projects financed by EU structural funds

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

NAVET requires that Centres for Vocational Training (CVTs) present data on the number of documents they have issued as a result of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Art. 40 of VET Act). The number of documents for 2009-2011 is presented in the table below. Of note is that the Agency does not verify the reliability of the data collected by the CVTs.

	2009	2010	2011
Number of certificates for professional qualification issued by CVTs according to Art. 40 of VET Act	691	502	1 172

Source: Cedefop, ReferNet 2011: 49

Data is not collected centrally for higher education. There may be some data available for single projects.

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no information available regarding the benefits to individuals. One of the reasons may be because most of the projects do not include follow-up activities (i.e. tracking of individual pathways and seeking to answer the question: what happens to beneficiaries after the implementation of the measure).

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

There is no uniform national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and therefore statements refer to validation arrangements implemented within specific projects.

²² Draft Law for amendment and supplement of the VET Act, Art.40, Paragraph 4 and 5

²³ Law on Employment Promotion, SG No.15 of 15.02.2013, in force from 01.01.2014

The project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', has two main recruitment channels: through companies identified by the social partners, and through the labour offices of the Public Employment Agency (EA). In the first case, the target group includes employees. The companies employ consultants who inform employees about the possibilities for validation, the relevant steps and proceedings, and the names of VET course providers. In the second case, the target group includes mostly unemployed people. The content of consultation is identical in both cases.

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

Guidance and consultation which is offered to employees who are interested in validation procedures is considered to be a responsibility of employers, the Public Employment Agency, social partners, and information centres. However, it has not been possible to determine within the scope of the research for this country update, how often this happens in practice. Within the project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', the role of VET schools has become more prominent – for example, there are consultants (typically teachers working at the VET school) who support candidates during the identification of competences for validation, evidence collection and development of a portfolio. At the next stage, assessors (a different practitioner from the consultants but also teachers) advise candidates how to prepare for the examination and or assessment. It is possible that the same consultant supports a candidate during all three stages of validation - identification, documentation, and assessment.

E-guidance is particularly relevant for validation related to ICT professions. For example, the CREATE project ('Validation of self-acquired learning and credits transfer in web design and computer animation') has developed E-based tools for validation. In order to use the tools a candidate has to register on-line and pass through a process of E-guidance.²⁴

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

Some measures include the publication of guidelines for practitioners, for example, the draft 'Manual for vocational schools for validating non-formal and informal learning', created in the project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences'²⁵. The draft Manual describes the tasks of guidance practitioners related to validation arrangements.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In Bulgaria, there is no overall quality assurance framework for the validation of formal and non-formal learning. As stated in the 2010 European Inventory Report, a quality assurance framework for VET is in the process of being set up. All the procedures, Manuals and other documentation and rules are in the process of being developed to guarantee the quality of the process. The involvement of the social partners should be seen as step forward for in order to achieve transparency and quality.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

Since a quality assurance framework for VET is in the process of being set up, single projects make use of internal mechanisms for quality assurance. However, on a system level, these mechanisms are not transparent and complete.

²⁴ <http://create-validate.org>

²⁵ http://validirane.mon.bg/docs/narachnik_validirane-26-06-2013-proekt.pdf, 2013-10-30, [in Bulgarian]

A recent example is the draft 'Manual for vocational schools for validating non-formal and informal learning'. It defines the following quality assurance measures²⁶:

- organisation and management of the process of validation (including needs analysis on the demand for validation, clear allocation of roles and responsibilities of the actors involved, access to information for all, facilitation of the validation proceedings, and elaboration of a candidate's individual plan);
- ensuring quality of the evidence-based documentation;
- selection of appropriate assessment methods based on comparison between State Educational Standards (SERs) and the candidate's documentation;
- training of competent evaluators, etc.

4.3 Evaluation framework

As stated in the 2010 European Inventory Report, an evaluation framework does not exist at present.

5 Validation methods

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

The table below provides an overview of the most commonly used methods in relation to the VET sector. There is no available information for other sectors.

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods ²⁷	X	X	
Interview	X		
Observation ²⁸	X		
Portfolio method		X	
Presentation			
Simulation and evidence extracted from work		X [evidence extracted from work, work book ²⁹]	
Tests and examinations			X
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify			

²⁶ Manual for vocational schools for validating non-formal and informal learning, http://validirane.mon.bg/docs/narachnik_validirane-26-06-2013-proekt.pdf, 2013-10-30

²⁷ See for example: Self-assessment form and Supervisor assessment form, ValidAid project: <http://www.validaid.eu/images/validaidkit/methodstools.pdf>

²⁸ See for example: Observation form for validation candidate, ValidAid project, see <http://www.validaid.eu/images/validaidkit/methodstools.pdf>

²⁹ According to the Bulgarian Labour Code, the work book is issued upon a worker's first day of employment, follows the worker throughout all successive employment, and contains personal data including education, qualifications of the worker, job position and responsibilities, day of assignment and termination of the contract, agreed salary, etc. The work book is returned to the worker on the day the employment relationship terminates. (Bulgarian Labour Code, Art. 347-349, last amended 15.02.2013).

The most effective methods are indicated in the table. In relation to VET, the assessment methods for validation are the same as those applied in the formal education system, i.e. if a candidate wants to validate a full vocational qualification, he or she has to pass the state examination in Theory of Profession and Practice of Profession.

The selection of assessment methods depends also on the characteristics of the occupational field. For example, for the Validaid project, the developed methods and tools for the evaluation of less qualified employees are applicable to specific work positions in the relevant sectors³⁰. In the CREATE project, assessment included interactive, ePortfolio and simulation (e-games).³¹ (For more details of this project, see the more detailed case study prepared for the 2014 Inventory update).

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Bulgaria does not have a national institutional framework for validation and there is no general profile of a validation professional. Depending on the scope of the measure (in terms of educational sector and occupational fields covered), the practitioners are typically people with pedagogical and academic experience (teachers) and/or specialists within a specific occupational field.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Training and support provided to practitioners may be compulsory depending on the specific aims of the project. Since projects have limited duration, they usually provide initial training in the form of a one-off measure.

In the project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', more than 1000 consultants and practitioners have to pass a five-day compulsory training course. Learning outcomes of the training include:

- ability to work with state educational requirements in relation to the assessment of a candidate's potential for validation;
- ability to support a candidate in the selection of a relevant occupation in which his/her knowledge, skills, and competences can be validated;
- ability to guide a candidate on how to collect and prepare evidenced-based documentation for the validation;
- ability to verify the legitimacy of the documents and assess the acquired knowledge skills and competences;
- ability to elaborate a candidate's individual validation plan.³²

At the end of the training, participants receive a certificate indicating the duration and the content of training. However, this is not a normatively regulated document.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

As stated earlier, there is no general profile of a validation professional in Bulgaria and therefore there are no mandatory qualification requirements. However, such requirements may be defined within specific projects as a part of internal quality assurance measures. In relation to the project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', assessors and/or examiners are VET teachers/trainers who should have a university degree. Furthermore, assessors as well as consultants are required to have a

³⁰ <http://www.validaid.eu/images/validaidkit/methodstools.pdf>

³¹ <http://create-validate.org>

³² Manual for vocational schools for validating non-formal and informal learning

professional qualification related to the field in which validation is provided. For the Validaid project, a training course was developed for assessors (evaluators) and co-assessors with at least five years of professional and pedagogic (academic) experience in one of the following sectors: trade, banking or IT and communications³³.

7 References

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³³ <http://www.validaid.eu/images/validaidkit/assessors.pdf>

7.1 Organisations consulted

- NAVET
- SCAS
- Discussion with stakeholders including representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science at the CREATE final conference