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

Thematic report: multi-level governance

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In partnership with

CEDEFOP
European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

A project carried out by

ICF
INTERNATIONAL

European Commission

Education and Culture

A report submitted by ICF Consulting Services

Date: September 2014

Job Number: J30259844

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Multi-level Governance

This thematic report forms part of the 2014 update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (the European Inventory). The updated European Inventory is made up of the following outputs, which together form a 'snapshot' of the state of play in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning (validation) in Europe:

■ Country updates covering 33 European countries[1];
■ 2 case studies providing examples of validation 'in practice';
■ Eight thematic reports (of which this report is one); and
■ A final synthesis report identifying overall findings from the project.

The thematic reports are intended to provide more detail in relation to a number of subjects of central interest to policy makers and practitioners. Using the 2014 country updates and case studies, as well as the results of an online survey carried out between 3 October 2013 and 11 November 2013 and other literature relating to the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning, these reports aim to identify and analyse key issues and trends, as well as examples of good practice and lessons learned in relation to a specific aspect of validation. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation.

This thematic report will focus on the structures and models that are in place to govern validation policies in the different countries of Europe. The report begins with an overview of the different contexts for the governance of validation that exists across countries, highlighting for example where structures / models are in place to govern validation within a national policy or strategy or where validation falls within a national policy framework.

We will explore how the responsibilities for validation are distributed amongst the different stakeholders and what their respective roles are in relation to validation. The report will also consider the use of different mechanisms to support the engagement of and coordination with different stakeholders. We will explore whether existing arrangements for coordination appear to be working well and in which contexts.

The report is structured as follows:

■ Section 1: Broad institutional framework for validation;

■ Section 2: Allocation of roles and responsibilities;

■ Section 3: Engaging different actors in validation policy formulation and implementation;

■ Section 4: Facilitating coordination between different stakeholders.

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[1] There are 36 country updates in total, as two reports have been prepared for Belgium and three for the UK, in order to take account of the devolved responsibility for education and training policy in these countries.

1   The institutional framework for validation

This first section of the report reflects on the institutional framework for validation in order to provide an overview of the general national contexts and approaches to validation. As an introductory remark, is important to note from the offset that institutional frameworks largely depend on legal frameworks: the absence of one shapes the institutional structures by allowing them to develop according to need. The 2014 country updates show that legal frameworks take different forms. As illustrated in Table 1.1, in three countries validation is framed by a single legal framework, in the majority of countries (20 in fact) multiple frameworks covering different sectors of education and training exist. In some countries a legal framework relating to other initiatives has elements relating to validation. Finally, in a few countries, there is no legal framework in place covering validation.

Table 1.1   Existence of legal frameworks for validation

Single legal framework for validation	Multiple frameworks in place covering different sectors
FR, MT, TR	AT, BE (Flanders & Wallonia), BG, CH, CZ, DK, FI, ES, EE, DE, IT, LT, LV, LU, NL, NO, PL, SE, SI
IS (Adult education), IE, HU (HE, Adult education), PT (HE and non-HE), RO, SK	CY, EL, HR, LI, UK (E&NI, Wales, Scotland)
Legal framework for other initiatives also covers validation	**No legal framework covering validation**

Source: ICFI

The 2014 Inventory explores the extent to which validation strategies have been developed. As illustrated in Table 1.2, in total, three countries have comprehensive national strategies[2] in place. Eleven countries have national strategies, but where some elements are missing and thirteen countries are in the process of developing a strategy. In total, nine countries do not have a national strategy for validation in place, representing a decrease in the number of countries that reported not having a national strategy from 17 countries in 2010 to nine countries in 2014.

Table 1.2   National (or where relevant regional) strategy for validation

Comprehensive strategy in place	Strategy in place but some elements missing
FI, FR, ES	CZ, DK, EE, IT, IS, LU, LV, NO, NL, PL, RO
AT, BE-Flanders, CH, CY, DE, EL, LI, LT, MT, PT, SI, SK,TR	BE-Wallonia, BG, HR, HU, IE, SE, UK- E&NI, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Strategy is in development	**No strategy in place/ in development**

Source: ICFI

As illustrated in Table 1.3, relatively few countries reviewed have a single organisation in place at the national level in charge of overseeing validation.

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[2] Our understanding of what 'comprehensive national strategy' means as presented in the country fiche, is a national strategy or policy for validation that is in line with the national qualifications framework and where arrangements cover all education sectors, with good connections between them. A comprehensive national strategy also means that there are also good connections between validation in the public, private and third sector and there are concrete measures in place to favour take-up of validation and to ensure the quality of validation procedures.

Table 1.3   Institutional framework for validation

No single coordination body	AT, BE-Flanders, BE-Wallonia, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, IT, LI, LT, LV, LU, NO, PL, SE, SI, TR
A single (or main) coordinating body	CH, CZ, EL, FR, IS, MT, NL, RO, SK, PT
No single coordination body or clear national institutional framework	BG, DE, HR, HU, IE, UK-ENI, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales

Source: ICFI

In most countries, the responsibility for validation is attributed to several national organisations (including ministries) and the allocation of roles and responsibilities across institutions involved varies. In other countries, there is no clear institutional framework in place for validation; various bodies often take different approaches to the development and implementation of validation across the different sectors. The development of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) across Member States has the potential to enhance opportunities for validation.

Evidence from the 2014 country updates suggests that if one or various national-level organisations typically play a role in coordinating arrangements or encouraging the development of validation, the actual implementation of validation procedures is typically carried out in a decentralised manner. The way in which validation is 'steered' from the national level varies across the countries reviewed; in some cases this is done through the development of NQFs and strategies for lifelong learning for example, as evidenced in section 1.3 below.

1.2   Validation in countries with some type of institutional framework in place, but no single coordinating organisation

As a preliminary remark, under this one category there is considerable diversity in terms of type and structure of the institutional framework for validation. The examples that follow demonstrate diversity in terms of the existence (on lack of) legal framework, national bodies/agencies, awarding organisations, stakeholders that have varying roles in terms of how they shape and define arrangements for validation in a given country.

Most countries reviewed in the 2014 Inventory fall into this category where some type of institutional framework is in place, though no single coordinating organisation takes lead responsibility for validation. In the majority of countries, the development of validation by the different national bodies is based on a legal framework and/or is guided by national policies (national qualification frameworks, lifelong learning strategies or quality assurance frameworks). This is also the case in countries that have multiple frameworks for validation in place covering different sectors, rather than a single framework.

In these countries, the responsibility is shared across a number of different ministries, or across ministries and other national authorities, making validation a transversal competence. In Austria for example, respective procedures/measures involve different institutions and actors across sectors with different roles and responsibilities. A number of different ministries have some involvement and include the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. National developments towards a national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning are relatively recent in Austria (starting in 2013) and are linked to both the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy (LLL: 2020, 2011) as well as to the development of the NQF.

In Lithuania, different ministries and national organisations assume roles and responsibilities across different sectors. For example, in the VET sector, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre under the Ministry of Education and Science are responsible for validation. In the HE sector, key roles are played by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and in the youth sector, the Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible (amongst other policy areas) for promoting the development of adult non formal education and the State Service of Education Quality supervises validation as one of the tasks executed by educational institutions.

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education in the VET field are the two authorities leading work in this field (but HEIs decide on their procedures and organisation independently). Laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately; validation procedures are embedded in formal qualification structures in VET and in HE.

In Luxembourg, there is no one single institution in charge of validation, both the Ministry responsible for National Education and of Higher Education are in charge of overseeing the implementation of validation procedures; validation builds on a history of long-standing cooperation and dialogue between stakeholders and is based on a clear legal framework.

In Norway, the Agency for Lifelong Learning (Vox) maintains an overview at national level for the approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning for adults, while the Directorate for Education and Training supervises validation in primary, lower and upper secondary education. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) supervises education above upper secondary level. Validation is high on the national policy agenda as part of overarching lifelong learning policies; however a sectorial perspective has prevailed in the development of validation tools and regulations. Each sector of education has therefore developed schemes for validation of non-formal and informal learning according to their specific needs and precondition, but the national government and its underlying administrations provide guidelines for all educational sectors.

A national coordination ensured by several ministerial bodies or agencies and decentralised implementation is a characteristic of validation arrangements in various countries. For example in Denmark, the different bodies with responsibility for aspects of validation include the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, the National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning and the Danish Evaluation Institute. Though legislation and the formal framework have been set nationally, implementation is decentralised at the provider level.

Sweden also has a highly decentralised national structure for validation, promoted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and with regard to adult education, the Swedish National Agency for Education. Each of the national agencies involved is autonomous within their responsibilities; the implementation of validation is decentralised at regional and local level and embedded in the municipal adult education system and public employment services.

From a national perspective, validation practices are relatively recent in Turkey and the development of a validation system is in progress. The VQA is the responsible organisation at national level for validation-related activities, working together with a range of public, private and third sector stakeholders. In addition to this, the National Ministry of Education, specifically, the Lifelong Learning Directorate General has carried out projects supporting the development of the validation system in Turkey. In the last three years, occupational standards, a national qualifications framework and national qualifications for occupational sectors have been prepared at the national level with a view to supporting the development of a validation system.

In Cyprus, although there is no comprehensive system or framework of validation, the need for the development of such a system is recognised. Significantly, in 2013, the cabinet of Ministers approved the establishment[3] of an interdepartmental Committee tasked to develop a comprehensive action plan for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.

Some countries (such as Belgium, Germany and Spain) are characterised by the multiple coordination for validation for reasons of regional autonomy.

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[3] Decision No 74.676, 11/2/2013, proposal submitted by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In Belgium-Wallonia, validation is divided into different systems involving the French-Speaking Government and the Walloon and Brussels Regions, each of them with its own institutional framework. It is reported that there is clear political will from national government to enhance cooperation between the different systems.

In Spain, both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Employment are responsible for the national system of validation, due to the existence of two parallel VET systems (initial VET and national subsystem of vocational training for employment (administered jointly by the Ministry of Employment and the Autonomous Communities).

1.3 Validation in countries where a single or main organisation is responsible for overseeing and coordinating validation policies

In a number of countries, validation is coordinated by a single actor at the national level, though there are no cases where this organisation is exclusively dedicated to promoting validation exclusively, but is in charge of broader lifelong learning or further education, VET or guidance for example.

In a number of countries, there is a ministerial lead for validation. In the Czech Republic for instance, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is in charge of the overall framework and methodology for validation. The Ministry is charged with coordinating with several other ministries who govern the practice concerning qualifications that are within their respective responsibilities. As the single organisation responsible for overseeing validation, the Ministry is also in charge of coordination between stakeholders, social partners and employers and has adopted different coordinating mechanisms to facilitate its success.

In Slovakia, the Ministry of Education is the main initiator of the overall approach for validation and responsible for the coordination of new developments, this includes the preparation of specific legislation on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in 2015 and intentions to create regional networks of accredited institutions for validation.

A ministerial lead is also present in Iceland - through a service contract with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has the responsibility for developing a national validation strategy in cooperation with key stakeholders.

The 2014 country updates also gathered evidence of the changing nature of institutional arrangements for validation, as in some countries existing structures have been awarded new tasks, or new structures were created to coordinate validation.

Examples of recent developments in the governance arrangements for validation are outlined in the box below. In some instances, the institutions responsible for validation represent one or few educational sectors, thus by default facilitating coherence.

Developments concerning main institutions that are responsible for validation since 2010

In the **Netherlands**, the Kenniscentrum is the main institution responsible for validation. Since June 2012 a national tripartite covenant, signed by the Ministry of Education, the trade unions and the employers' organisations broadened the tasks allocated to the Kenniscentrum. As well as its quality assurance role, the new covenant sets out objectives relating to promoting the use of validation, to implement validation as a labour market and guidance tool and to incorporate sector standards in the validation process. The covenant offers a national framework for the further design and implementation of validation. Both government and social partners take responsibility for the development of EVC.

The organisational landscape has also changed in **Malta**, with the creation of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) in 2012. The NCFHE is charged with delivering a programme of activities in support of validation. This includes the

introduction of a validation system and an accompanying campaign to raise awareness at a national level, on validation processes and associated legislation[4]. Further activity includes the drafting of National Guidelines for the validation of informal and non-formal learning, working with the developing Sector Skills Committee and Sector Skills Unit stakeholders to develop National Occupational Standards in identified areas, and organising a National Conference on validation as well as producing relevant materials such as information leaflets on the validation process. In addition, changes made to the Education Act, which were formalised in 2012[5] contained three Legal Notices: quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes; on validation of informal and non-formal learning; and on strengthening the legal basis of the Malta Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards[6].

Changes have also taken place in **Romania**, where the National Authority for Qualifications is now responsible for coordinating the validation of adult's professional skills acquired in non-formal learning contexts. The Law of National Education no.1/2011 provides a focus on the validation of formal and non-formal learning and lifelong learning counselling at all levels of education. There are currently low levels of engagement and coordination between stakeholders is low.

In **Greece**, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) was formed in 2011. Under the Ministry of Education, EOPPEP is the competent institution for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Significant changes were also observed in **Switzerland**, As from 2013, a new phase of validation commenced starting with the reorganisation of the educational policies management bodies that led to the creation of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI).

Other countries show that arrangements can feature ministerial responsibility at an overarching level, although operational arrangements are taken forward by other organisations. In France for example, the general institutional framework for validation (VAE) is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue. Whilst the legal framework sets general parameters, in practice the design and implementation of specific rules and procedures are the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications including different ministries, chambers of commerce, and chambers of trade.

In Portugal, the national institution responsible for validation is the ANQEP - a public institution supervised by the Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security, the Ministry for Education and Science and in conjunction with the Ministry of Economy. Due to the autonomy of universities and polytechnics, no single national institution with overall responsibility for validation in HE exists, though the Ministry of Education and Science coordinates the general policy of higher education. There is a specific legislative framework that allows institutions to develop practices of validation on non-formal and informal learning. It is expected that a centralised approach regarding compulsory education and VET will continue, which will include validation processes at a national level.

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[4] NCFHE activities for 2013 are set out under the VINFL section of the website:
http://www.ncfhe.org.mt/content/home-validation-of-informal-and-non-formal-learning-vinfl/6291470/

[5] Legal Notice 296/2012, Government of Malta, (2012), Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Regulations, 2012, L.N. 295 of 2012, EDUCATION ACT (CAP. 327) 2012.

[6] See Legal Notice 294. Malta Ministry of Education and Labour. Education Act.
http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23719&l=1 [accessed 5.12.2012].

1.4 Validation in countries with no single organisation with responsibility for overseeing validation or clear national institutional framework

In the rest of countries reviewed, validation practices exist, even if there is no single organisation with responsibility for validation or a clear national institutional framework in place. Some key bodies have validation policies, but these are not coordinated. The different countries of the UK, Ireland and Germany fall into this category.

In England and Northern Ireland, Ofqual has responsibility for the Qualification and Credit Framework whilst awarding bodies are responsible for establishing opportunities for recognition of prior learning. In relation to HE, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has published a Quality Code with reference to recognition of prior learning. In the UK-Wales, validation is developed from both a national and sectoral perspective, with the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (led by the Welsh Government) providing an overarching means of recognising learning, and sectoral initiatives focusing on providing guidance and frameworks for validation. The 'model' of validation used in Scotland is to provide some guidance from a centralised perspective (from the SCQF and the Quality Assurance Agency, QAA Scotland, as well as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which now has its own policy on recognition of prior learning), but individual learning providers choose how to implement it.

In Ireland, there is no dedicated single national infrastructure, policy or strategy for recognition of prior learning as yet; different sectors employ their own approaches within their own capacity and many different stakeholders are involved. The National Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority (QQI) established in July 2012, assumes specific responsibility to devise policies under which providers of education and training may provide recognition of prior learning in an agreed quality assurance framework. In addition, the QQI has advanced a Comprehensive Policy Development Programme, and is consulting and reflecting on the development of a number of different policy areas, including RPL[7].

In Germany, whilst there is currently no overall national approach, legal framework or standardised system for validation, validation takes place across different sectors where the competent authorities – e.g. chambers of commerce and industry have an important role to play. Within the formal system of education, which already contains elements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, bottom-up and top-down approaches complement each other. Due to the allocation of responsibilities within the educational system, there is still a variety of approaches.

Other countries reviewed as part of the 2014 Inventory can be grouped as a cluster of countries whose framework for validation is still under development.

For example, Bulgaria does not have a legal framework or national system, policy or strategy on validation which encompasses all educational sectors, nor a national institutional framework with clear allocation of responsibilities and coordination between stakeholders or an overall quality assurance framework. Nevertheless, some validation practices exist in the VET sector and in the higher education sector (within the context of a decentralised approach, given the autonomy of Bulgarian universities). A key issue is that the relationships between the different educational sectors are not strong enough, coupled with the lack of an overall legal and institutional framework for validation.

Similarly, in Hungary there is no nationwide validation system based on uniform principles and procedures, although some aspects of validation are evident in the legal arrangements in VET and HE and in the adult training sector. Furthermore, it is reported that stakeholders and the private sector are far removed from validation. Difficulties associated with identifying actors responsible for validation development at national level together with a lack of financial resources at institutional level, pose significant challenges for the development and implementation of validation.

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[7] http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Consultation/Green%20Papers/Green%20Paper%20-%20Section%204.7.pdf

In Croatia, whilst there is no formal system of validation, there is a tradition of validation at sectoral level. Since 2010, significant steps forward in terms of setting up the legal framework and in fulfilling the pre-requisites for the national recognition and validation system have been undertaken.

1.5 The role of National Qualification Frameworks in steering validation

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the **European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (23 April 2008)** invited Member States to promote validation in accordance with the agreed common European principles. Member States are referencing their qualifications systems to the European Qualification Framework levels and at the time of reporting, 20 Member States have done so to date[8]. In this referencing process, Criterion 3[9] invites Member States to report on how validated outcomes form non-formal and informal learning are included in the national qualifications system.

According to the 2014 country updates, all countries reviewed reported that linking validation systems to the development of the national qualifications framework (NQF) is under discussion or already established. The process of developing and establishing a NQF against which validation procedures can be referenced is an important step towards embedding a wider validation infrastructure.

The 2014 Inventory has identified a number of countries where it is reported that the development of the NQF contributes to promote validation or is expected to do so. In Slovenia for instance, the development of the Slovenian Qualification Framework is considered as a first step towards centralising validation. In Austria, as noted above, validation measures are also closely linked to the lifelong learning strategy and the NQF implementation with notable involvement from stakeholder groups. Through a coordinating platform for the Lifelong Learning Strategy this includes a task force that is strategically steering its implementation processes, working groups focusing on specific strategic objectives; an NQF steering group and its working group focussing on NQF developments.

In Germany also, the implementation of the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR)[10] in 2013 is intended to support the greater use of validation. In the first instance only formally acquired competences are considered, it is expected that non-formal and informally acquired competences will be considered at a later stage of the process. To support this intention 11 recommendations for including non-formal and informal competences into the DQR have been established.

This kind of development is also seen to be taking place along sectoral lines, as is the case in Latvia, where the development of the NQFL-HS has formalised the responsibility of the higher educational institutions for all validation approaches (comprising the whole process of validation) regarding higher education as well as further education. Similarly, in Cyprus, the implementation of the NQF, which is in its final stages of development is intended to promote the use of ECVET and facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to formal education and training.

In Croatia, in 2013, the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) Act came into force. The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is a substantial part of the Act and will be further developed in the new Ordinance on recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, in a number other countries the development and implementation of an NQF or the linkage with validation is still taking place. For example in Switzerland, the NQF is being elaborated and expected to be introduced in 2014, though the

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[8] See http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/european-qualifications-framework/european-qualifications-framework.aspx for details of specific countries.

[9] Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF; Criterion 3: The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

[10] see http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de/

detailed definition of a complete validation framework is expected to take several years. In Belgium-Flanders, the country update reports a willingness to create a single framework linking the validation processes to the Flemish Qualifications Structure (VKS/NQF). In time, it is expected that the NQF will serve as the reference to develop procedures for validation.

In Poland, the introduction of validation has been seen as a key element of the development of the Polish Qualifications Framework. However, the existing legal framework does not include the definition of validation. As part of the development phase of the qualifications framework, Poland adopted a uniform definition of validation.

2 Allocation of roles and responsibilities

The majority of countries included in the Inventory report clear allocation of responsibilities with regard to validation. In certain countries, it is reported that roles and responsibilities are clear because they are defined by the legal framework and/or set out in guidelines (e.g. in Latvia, Sweden or Finland). As discussed above, different forms of coordination exist. In some countries, validation is coordinated by a single actor, and in other countries devolved forms of coordination exist, where regional authorities or sectorial bodies assure stakeholder involvement without a strong steer from national level, for example the Chambers of Commerce in the German regions. The size of the country seems to be a relevant factor to take into account: in small countries, such as Luxembourg and Malta, their small size is reported to facilitate coordination and clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities amongst stakeholders.

Table 2.1   Allocation of responsibilities amongst stakeholders

Clear and/or efficient allocation of responsibilities amongst stakeholders	Allocation of responsibilities is not clear or efficient
BE (Flanders & Wallonia), CY, CZ, DE, DK, EL, FI, FR, IS, IE, IT, LI, LV, LU, NO, NL, PT (HE) SE, TR, UK (Scotland)	AT, BG, HR, EE, ES, HU, LT, PL, RO, SI, UK (Northern Ireland)

– Note: insufficient information to assess SK, UK Wales and in outside HE in PT.

The following sub-sections consider a range of different factors that potentially influence clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities. It draws on some specific examples of countries with clear allocation of responsibilities and countries where the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders are considered not so clear.

2.1   Factors influencing clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities

The relative clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities can also be explained by a number of different, sometimes inter-related factors. These include for example:

2.1.1   Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders defined in the legal framework

In some cases, the respective roles of stakeholders are defined by the legal framework or are set out in national guidelines (e.g. in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway). In Finland, legislation and policies are detailed and determine the roles and involvement of different stakeholders. As a result, national coordination is considered highly effective, brining transparency to the validation procedures. It is reported that all stakeholders understand their role and responsibilities, thus increasing the quality of the validation procedures in general. In the Czech Republic, in relation to vocational qualifications in the NSK (national qualifications register) the overall approach set out in the legislative framework describes the division of competences amongst the different institutions and types of bodies involved.

In Sweden, guidelines for quality assurance and documentation of validation processes[11] include a description of the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders regarding validation, processes and methods. They are applicable to adult education, higher vocational education, higher education, folk high schools (civic education), and the different sectors of the labour market. In Iceland, stakeholder engagement is described in a brochure developed for stakeholders entitled 'Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Education and Training Service Centre'.

2.1.2 Roles are specified for different levels of governance (State and regions)

In certain countries, roles and responsibilities are allocated to different levels of governance. In the majority of cases this provides clarity in the allocation of roles, though not necessarily to the same degree in all countries.

In Spain, legislation adopted in 2009 provides clarity over roles in responsibilities in relation to the assessment and accreditation of professional competences. An inter-ministerial commission was created in 2011 between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and includes representatives from both Ministries, including representatives from the public employment service. Autonomous communities have a clear role to play in the implementation of validation supported by local administrations, chambers and social partners for example.

Similarly, in France, as mentioned above, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue is responsible for validation. Specific rules and practices for the implementation of the VAE procedures are under the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications included in the RNCP. Responsibilities are clearly shared across the range of stakeholders: the State (laws, coordination of general orientations, evaluation) and regions (general information, financing counselling and guidance, evaluation). More broadly, information, promotion, and raising awareness are the joint responsibility of different stakeholders and takes place at different levels (national - inter-ministry and ministry levels, regional level, provider level, sectoral level and company level).

In Germany, in the absence of a national approach, legal framework or standardised system for validation, there is neither a central institution nor a standardised institutional framework. However, there is a distinctive appreciation of the different roles and responsibilities of social partners (employers, employees), Federal institutions, and the Länder. The relationship between the partners is equal and based on the principle of consensus, especially in the VET sector. In the higher education sector, roles and responsibilities are also clear. The parameters for the access to higher education for qualified workers are defined by the Länder and; the procedures and requirements are defined by the universities.

Sub-national arrangements are also in place in Italy. Legislation adopted in 2013 defines the role of various bodies at national level with clear allocation of responsibilities assigned to the various ministries involved. This includes the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Economic Development. Whilst these roles and responsibilities are clear at national level, it is reported that roles and responsibilities are less clear at regional level despite the fact that legislation entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities to develop opportunities to validate learning.

2.1.3 Size of the country

The allocation of roles and responsibilities in small countries is usually clear and this facilitates coordination effectively. This is the case in Malta, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. In Malta for instance, the relatively small geographical area and the well-established networks of stakeholders have resulted in a well-defined allocation of responsibilities between partner organisations. The NCFHE regulates the bodies responsible for validating learning outcomes/occupational standards. Both the NCFHE and Sector Skills Committee have responsibility for promoting the benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Similarly, in Luxembourg, the small size of the country and the well-established

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[11] (*Kriterier och riktlinjer för validering av reell kompetens*[11]).

networks of stakeholders have resulted in a well-defined allocation of responsibilities between the different key actors in education sectors. In the higher education sector, a clear set of responsibilities fall to the Ministry of Higher Education who is responsible for overseeing validation processes. Individual providers play a major role in validation procedures in VAE and specific institutions have clear roles and responsibilities with regards to validation, this includes the University of Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre.

In Liechtenstein, roles and responsibilities are clear and work well given the small size of the country where both the Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling (the ABB) together with employers are considered important stakeholders in the validation process.

2.1.4 Networks in place concerning validation

In a number of countries networks have been established to support links between different stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities are typically clear and considered to facilitate coordination. In the UK-Scotland for instance there are two validation (RPL) networks at national level as presented in the box below.

RPL networks in Scotland

The **SCQF RPL network** was established by the SCQF Partnership (this itself is comprised of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); Colleges Scotland; The SQA; and Universities Scotland. The SCQF RPL network is made up of representatives from across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government. Its aim is to share practice and help increase understanding, awareness and use of RPL across all stakeholders to encourage take up by learners. The network's programme of work is based on activities to support the use of RPL within formal education and training, in the workplace, in the community and in relation to careers guidance.

In the HE sector, there is also a **QAA Scotland / Universities Scotland HEI RPL network**, which is coordinated by QAA Scotland. The HEI RPL network is also involved in the European RPL Network.

On the basis of these two networks, there are opportunities for learning to be shared amongst stakeholders across the sectors of learning, work and the third sector. Furthermore, the ongoing activity to maintain interest in RPL and strengthen the support materials available to providers should help to ensure that Scotland's devolved approach to RPL (where responsibility for implementation lies with the learning providers) continues to develop. In the Higher Education sector, the National RPL Framework is likely to strengthen future developments even further.

In Iceland, a formal network of career counsellors has been established and works towards the development of adult guidance through cooperation between the Lifelong Learning Centres and the Education and Training Service. Career counselling provided in validation projects is an integral part of the Icelandic validation model. In other countries plans are in place to develop new networks to support validation. This can be seen in the case of Portugal and Malta.

Emerging networks

In **Portugal**, legislation adopted in 2011 led to the established the National Agency for Qualification and VET and creation of a new network of centres in charge of validation procedures (CQEP) in March 2013. The new network will focus its activities on the information, counselling and guidance of young people and adults who seek improvement of their qualifications, through training or through the development of validation processes. The new CQEP network will have a key role to play in supporting stakeholder collaboration, partly through connecting training providers to enterprises and development information sessions for employers. As the new network will serve a wide range of target groups, offering guidance services from 15 years of age, and validation process for those between 18-23 years of age, effective collaboration with key stakeholders/services will be essential to ensure the individual needs in terms of requirements/opportunities for validation are identified and met. In addition to CQEP centres located within schools, a group of CQEP centres will function in both the private sector (though typically training enterprises and private education establishments) and in the third sector.

The **Maltese** Government Directorate for Lifelong Learning is charged with drafting a Lifelong Learning Strategy, as well as implementing the EU Agenda for Adult Learning in Malta (2012-14)12. As part of this work, one of the roles of the NCFHE will be to facilitate network of stakeholders in Adult Learning for Basic Skills including three subgroups: one for public entities, one for private work sector and the third one for adult learning providers (formal, informal and non-formal).

2.1.5   Stakeholder agreements

A review of the countries covered by the 2014 Inventory reveals that there only few examples of collective agreements in place. For instance, in the Netherlands, the validation process is transparent and clearly outlines the allocation of responsibilities amongst stakeholders. The government focuses on the quality of Validation of Prior Learning (EVC) and the EVC system and shares many tasks with the social partners. Social partners stimulate the use of EVC through collective labour agreements. Since the late 1990s, many sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry, education, public services, and the care sector), have set up initiatives regarding EVC at their (sector) level. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and accredited EVC-providers are involved in setting up EVC procedures.

As reported in the 2010 Inventory, in the Flemish community of Belgium, social partner involvement in drawing up priority for work experience certificates was established in the Flemish employment agreement for 2005-2006, in a formal agreement made between the Flemish Government and the social partners "The Competence Agenda (2007-2010)". All sectoral social partners signed an agreement with the Flemish Community on topics relating to education, training and the labour market and are all, in some way, involved in promoting work experience certificates in their sector.

A further example can be seen in Norway where the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), the employers' association and interest organisation for municipalities, counties and local public enterprises in Norway, has established a national agreement with the trade union for municipality employees regarding the use of a validation tool to support wage negotiations. The application of this agreement in one particular municipality (Halden) was described in detail in the 2010 country report for Norway and is summarised and updated in the box below.

Validation to support wage negotiations, Municipality of Halden, Norway

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) have established a national agreement with the trade union for municipality employees regarding the use of a validation tool to support wage negotiations. This agreement, which was established in May 2008, is compulsory for each employer member of KS and has been applied in the Municipality of Halden to the benefit of around 300-400 employees.

Since April 2009, Halden Municipality has used an electronic 'inventory' tool for employees to record their learning and achievements – both formal and non-formal learning. The municipality works with the trade unions FO and Bibliotekarforbundet in the application of this project, as well as KS and the trade union for municipality employees.

In 2011 a new electronic tool was introduced. The information recorded in the tool can be used to support wage negotiations during the employee evaluation process. Employees who provide evidence of participation in one year of full-time formal learning are entitled to a wage increase of NOK 22 000 (EUR 2720), while those who provide evidence of non-formal learning are entitled to a wage increase of NOK 5 500 (EUR 680).

Based on the experience of the relatively few countries identified as part of the 2014 Inventory, the link between validation practices and collective bargaining in general remains fairly tenuous.

2.1.6 The respective role of stakeholders is linked to their representation in different committees

The fact that stakeholders are represented in different boards/committees that have been developed to support validation facilitates clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities and coordination between stakeholders. This is the focus of section four so will not be discussed in detail here but rather elaborated on in greater depth below.

2.2 Challenges and barriers that influence clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities

A number of countries covered by the 2014 Inventory report challenges and barriers that influence clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities and thus, the level of engagement and cooperation between stakeholders. These include:

2.2.1 The lack of overall coordination

In a number of countries, there is a distinct lack of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation or where overall coordination/cooperation is weak and needs to be improved. For instance, In Austria, whilst the level of stakeholder engagement in validation is reported to be high and the roles and responsibilities of the respective stakeholders are clear; cooperation between stakeholders is considered weak. It is important to note however that the development of the validation system in Austria is at a very early stage. In time such cooperation may develop as stakeholders begin to operate in their different committees. Furthermore, as previously noted, it is expected that the development of the NQF and implementation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Austria will provide greater clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibility and coherence across stakeholders.

A lack of overall coordination amongst stakeholders in noted in a number of countries including Lithuania, Hungary and in Romania. In Romania, weak coordination is seen as a key factor restricting the take-up of validation opportunities - establishing greater links between PES, assessment centres and the formal education system is considered necessary as Romania continues to develop its validation system. In Slovenia, the Ministry for Education, Science and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities are responsible for validation policy and implementation. In practice however, the validation process does not include coordination and cooperation between stakeholders. The application of validation is devolved to the awarding organisation / learning provider and as a result there is considerable differentiation in the approaches taken to validation, both between different providers and within providers themselves. In Lithuania, though the validation system is relatively recent and still in development, there is no tradition of validation. Take-up remains low and coordination between different sectors in relation to validation arrangements remains a key challenge. There is limited involvement of institutions that offer validation opportunities (e.g. universities, accredited certification authorities) in developing concrete measures that would favour take-up.

In Estonia, the legal framework for validation is sector specific and more advanced in the HE sector. There is no overall national policy for validation and each sector is responsible for its own development and implementation. Although the HE sector has been leading the implementation of validation, stakeholders so far have not been included in the process and cooperation and overall coordination between stakeholders is limited. Estonia exemplifies a general tendency typically common in post-Soviet countries that are now members of the EU. Estonia in particular, has experienced the fragmented provision of adult learning rooted in an institutional framework that is located within an indeterminate state together with a rapid marketisation of the educational system, notably in higher education. As Saar et al (2013) argue, the governance mechanisms accruing from this mixture of institutional influences have led to low coordination of formal and informal learning and slow progress in the use of recognition of prior learning.

2.2.2 The existence of different competing systems and multiple institutions responsible for 'regulated professions'

In Poland there are two competing systems (education and craft), multiple institutions responsible for 'regulated professions' and multiple non-public organisations, cover sectoral qualifications, often similar to qualifications covered by other systems. A key issue observed in Poland is that it remains the case that the Polish learning culture continues to be dominated by learning in a formal context, where formal qualifications verified on the basis of examinations are still preferred. As a consequence, the underestimated value of practical, especially non-formal and informal learning creates one of the key obstacles for increasing the current low supply of workers to certain labour market segments, particularly among people under the age of 25 and those who are 45 and older[13]. Similarly, in Spain, learning culture is still dominated by gaining knowledge through formal education. However, the Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (MECU: *Spanish National Qualifications Framework*) is under development and it aims to include qualifications acquired through formal education, but also integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning[14]. A further challenge is the lack of legal framework and in some instances where the validation framework is relatively recent.

3 Engaging stakeholders in validation policy formulation and implementation

As part of the 2014 update, country experts were asked to report on the level of engagement of relevant stakeholders in shaping the design of validation policies and initiatives. Based on the findings of the country updates, most countries report that the level of stakeholder engagement in validation is either medium or high, though six countries report the overall level of engagement is low.

Cannot be assessed	Medium
CH, PT	BE (Flanders and Wallonia), DK, ES, IE, IT, LI, PL, UK (England & Northern Ireland)
BG, SI, EE, HU, LT (HE and youth sector), RO	AT, HR, CY, CZ, FI, FR, DE, EL, HR, IS, LT (VET), LV, LU, MT, NO, NL, SE, SK, TK, UK (Wales, Scotland)
Low	High

Since the 2010 Inventory was carried out, overall, the level of stakeholders' engagement has not changed significantly. Generally speaking, a review of the country updates demonstrates that a range and combination of stakeholders can be involved indifferent aspects of validation. For example in the design of validation policies (including via their participation in working groups, committees/boards/councils and consultation processes), in the organisation of validation procedures or in in quality assurance mechanisms.

Examples of stakeholder involvement in different aspects of

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[13] Diagnosis of the Poland 2030 Report,
http://www.mlodziez.org.pl/s/p/aktualnosci/45/455/Stanislaw_Drzazdzewski_3.pdf.

[14] Cedefop (2013) *European Inventory on NQF 2012: SPAIN*. Internet:
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/NQF_developments_2012-SPAIN.pdf [14 October 2013].

validation

Stakeholder involvement in design of validation policies

- In Slovakia, the Ministry of Education shapes the design of validation policies and initiatives, in cooperation with representatives of employers, employees, regional authorities, education and training institutions and central public administration.

- In Turkey, through consultation and working group activities, the VQA also brings together a large number of stakeholders including Ministries, trade unions, chambers and the public employment services who are actively involved in validation policy making processes.

- In Ireland, the national Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority (QQI) is currently engaging stakeholders in the design and development of RPL through its recent consultation.

- In Austria, where there are high levels of stakeholder involvement through a bottom-up approach, social partners play a major role in the design of the legal, economic, and social framework conditions for validation.

Stakeholder involvement in the organisation of validation procedures

- The Finnish CBQ system is a tripartite system, in which all stakeholders have an equally important role at different stages: development of qualification requirements, QA (by Qualification Committees), organising validation procedures and assessment. The stakeholder organisations are employer and employee organisations, training providers, private practitioners, and educational authorities.

- In the Netherlands social partners, sector organisations and accredited EVC-providers are involved in setting up validation procedures. Social partners take responsibility together with the government for promoting and maintaining a high quality national system for validation and stimulate the use of validation through collective labour agreements.

- In Switzerland, a common negotiation involving all partners always takes place in the implementation of the validation procedure in the different sectors. Traditionally, validation procedures are always develop through interaction between third sector initiatives or professional groups, centres of skills audit/ guidance, schools, and governmental projects, at cantonal or regional level and at national level.

Stakeholder involvement in quality assurance mechanisms

- In Iceland, quality guidelines for the initiation of validation in new sectors require the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Steering groups are formed for each sector, which sets the stage for validation (standards, intake criteria, recruitment etc.).

- In the UK (Wales), in relation to the CQFW Common Accord (CCA), common principles and quality assurance arrangements for validation were developed in partnerships with regulatory authorities, Awarding Organisations, together with other key national and regional bodies.

- In Estonia, to ensure impartiality in awarding occupational qualifications, the IAOQ is planning to set up an occupational qualifications committee consisting of the representatives of stakeholders in the given field: specialists, employers, employees, trainers, representatives of professional associations and, if necessary, representatives of clients, as well as other interested parties

In the section that follows we provide further examples of categories of stakeholders, with a focus on the private sector and social partner engagement.

3.1.1 Notable private sector /social partner engagement

The engagement of private sector actors (including social partners) in the development and delivery of validation has been reported in a number of countries. The private sector contributes in a variety of ways to the development and implementation of validation. In some cases the private sector is consulted during the elaboration of legislation related to validation (Belgium-Flanders, France, Denmark, Luxembourg and Spain). For example in Denmark, in the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training, the social partners are usually involved in decisions about assessment of prior learning. They have contributed significantly and have had influence in a number of areas within the legislation.

Sometimes the private sector implements validation programmes, either following sectoral initiatives or implementing their own processes (e.g. in Sweden, Denmark, Finland). Examples from Denmark are presented in the box below.

Danish social partner involvement in validation

LO, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions[15] is engaged in the recognition of prior learning. This is especially relevant following proposal for a VET reform, where validation plays an important part of the support directed towards adults. LO sees validation as a tool in relation to educational policy that can move adults from unskilled to skilled workers and from skilled workers to higher education.

LO believes, that the main issue is for employees with vocational experience to gain recognition or for skills learnt in practice. LO is involved in the shaping of policies and strategies at the political level, performs tasks and is represented at central, regional and local level in the assembled organs that characterise the VET system.

LO believes that work still remains to be done in ensuring that the validation results in recognition, which in turn creates an educational process that improves the competences of each adult. This requires a steady and conscious effort at both national and political level.

DA, the Confederation of Danish Employers[16], is focused on the recognition of prior learning, especially in the field of adult education and continuing training.
DA believes that prior learning assessments contribute to facilitating access to continuing training and presents an opportunity for individual to obtain partial or full certificates.
Like LO, DA is involved in the shaping of policies and strategies at the political level, performs tasks and is represented at both central, regional and local level in the assembled organs that are characteristic of the vocational education system.

FTF, the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark[17], is a central organisation. As part of its focus, the FTF calls for the removal of fees associated with validation in higher education.
Organisations that are part of the FTF list information about the options for validation on their websites and provide guidance for their members on validation possibilities. Many organisations are concerned with providing validation in relation to the labour market and jobs to a greater extent.
Several unions take part in working groups with other stakeholders in order to strengthen the effort and thereby enforcing the skills development of their members through validation.

3.1.2 Stakeholder involvement in raising awareness

In some countries, the private sector, including social partners informs, promotes and raises awareness about validation opportunities. Notable examples of where this occurs are in Spain, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Netherlands where social partners in particular have a key role to play in promoting and maintaining a high quality national system of validation (EVC). In Spain, professional counsellors provided through social partners, education and labour administrations, local authorities, chambers of commerce, and other public and private organisations have a key role to play in providing information on validation. The thematic report on raising awareness presents further insights and practical examples in relation to stakeholder involvement in raising awareness.

3.1.3 Stakeholder involvement in the development of standards and assessment procedures for validation

In some countries, the private sector and social partners have a key role to play in both the development of standards and assessment procedures for validation. For instance, in Iceland, representatives of the social partners (including trade unions and employer organisations) participate in steering groups set up to support the design and development of

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[15] http://www.lo.dk/English%20version/About%20LO.aspx

[16] http://www.da.dk/default.asp

[17] http://www.ftf.dk/index.php?id=33303

new validation projects. In projects where the focus is on validation against job standards, representatives from companies are involved and/or take the role of assessors.

In Finland, private sector actors, including social partners, have an important role in collaboration and development activities in the CBQs system and in IVET. Their engagement in the competence-based qualification system stretches from national to local level and from strategic work to being involved in assessments[18].

In Slovakia, the private sector is represented in the sectoral councils defining the qualifications and assessment standards. Representatives of employers are also a partner in the national project on definition of the qualifications system.

In Switzerland, in relation to upper-secondary and higher vocational training (VET/PET), labour market organisations, amongst other aspects are responsible for defining standards, for the quality assurance of vocational qualifications, establishing qualification profiles, and defining objective assessment criteria, in compliance with the assessment criteria. Furthermore, labour market organisations develop validation projects under the aegis of the competent professional associations. For example a validation procedure aiming at the acquisition of the Diploma in Leadership and Management is awarded by the Swiss Managers Association (SKO/ASC) to Swiss army officers[19].

In Latvia, the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council (employers and trade unions) is actively involved in updating and elaborating Occupational Standards. Social partners actively engage in forming the legal framework, for example representatives of the Employers' Confederation of Latvia and the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia were in the working group that elaborated the draft amendments of the Vocational Education Law.

Since the 2010 Inventory was carried out, recent developments in terms of the introduction of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) with a key role to play in shaping arrangements for validation can be observed.

Examples of countries introducing Sector Skills Bodies since 2010

In **Malta**, to support the development and implementation of a system of validation, Sector Skills Units have been established with the role of identifying the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their respective sector. A key function of the Units is to develop guidelines and mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning for all skills within their sector. They are also responsible for ensuring validation institutions met the required standards for the validation.

Sector Skills Committees are charged with overseeing the Sector Skills Units) and are also responsible for the validation process. The Committee has responsibility for:
- appointing validation process managers and external evaluators as validation practitioners
- capturing the experiences of individuals undergoing validation
- overseeing training institutions,
- providing guidance and counselling services to individuals
- undertake assessments and tests for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Taking on a role with regard to audit and quality, with specific responsibilities in relation to audit of assessment processes (undertaken by validation practitioners). Sector Skills Units are responsible for appointing assessors according to a defined set of selection criteria, though Sector Skills Units may from time to time subcontract other public or private entities to carry out the assessment required for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of candidates.

In **Croatia**, Sector Skills Councils have an important role to play in setting up the national validation system in terms of providing recommendations to the National Council in relation to sector

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[18] Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

[19] www.cadres.ch/fr/armee

developments and learning outcomes, as well as occupational standards and qualification standards more generally. In Malta, as illustrated in the box below, the establishment of Sector Skills Units is intended to play a leading role in the development and implementation of the validation system.

As reported in the 2010 Inventory, Scotland continues to be a good example of where the private sector is heavily involved in sector based validation activities. For instance, the Scottish Police College has an RPL policy in place. Working together with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), the Scottish Police College allows entry / access, exemptions / credits, direct entry to year 2 or 3, and full award of the BA in police studies and other CPD qualifications. In the health and social care sector, an RPL profiling tool was developed as the result of a pilot project which took place between 2006 and 2008 (see the case study produced for the 2010 Inventory update which describes this project in more detail). This profiling tool has been adapted by Kinross and Perth council (KPC) for its work with the long-term unemployed. The new tool allows the users to prepare evidence for a portfolio, based on reflection on their experiences and skills. An assessor supports the user through a professional discussion, enabling the learner to match his / her learning to SVQ units and identify supporting evidence[20].

In Sweden the central social partner organisations are also involved in the development and implementation of sector models of validation in their specific sectors. The Swedish model is characterised by significant business sector involvement, whereby organisations are involved in the assessment stage of the validation process. Together with private education companies, business sector organisations can also perform a full validation process. In terms of quality measures, private sector actors are required to follow the principles of the national criteria and guidelines when delivering services to public employment offices and a validation Internet Portal exists containing a list of private sector actors involved in validation. Specific sector models (*branchmodeller*) based on standards have been developed by different business sector organisations. They have been developed for different sectors of the labour market such as construction and retail trade and are used for the validation of vocational knowledge, skills and competences in specific sectors.

3.1.4   Examples of firm-based validation processes

In Bulgaria, 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.

Research has shown that in Belgium-Flanders, many companies have undertaken analysis of the activities, roles, job and person specifications within their businesses, leading to a description of competency profiles. However, the range of models and the way they are implemented remains very varied and where validation procedures exist, these are generally not recognised outside the company or sector. In general, standards, which may or may not be validated in a formal manner, tend to be framed on the basis of a particular job description, rather than skills and personal development of the individual. This means that much firm-based validation of skills does not lead to 'qualifications' that are recognised in the wider labour market[21].

In Germany, very different constellations of stakeholders can be seen below the legislative level. There are Länder-initiatives, (sectoral) initiatives of employers and trade unions, or initiatives which bring both of these partners together. To guarantee a wide acceptance, linking all relevant stakeholders is part of the approach.

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[20] Recognition of Prior Learning and how sectors are using it in the UK and Europe (unpublished)

[21] See also, Cedefop (2014) Use of validation by enterprises for human resource and career development purposes.

In Ireland, stakeholders have been involved in different ways and across different sectors – mainly through different initiatives that have been in place. For example, a number of employers/private sector organisations have been involved through the Skillnets activities.

In Denmark, private enterprises use resources on competence development to a high degree, e.g. large enterprises such as Post Denmark (www.postdanmark.dk) and Novo Nordisk Scandinavia (www.novonordisk.dk). However, this is not common amongst small enterprises. As a more general point this may be associated with lack of awareness or resources to support the use of validation in SMEs. In Iceland, private companies often motivate their employees to participate in validation and allow for flexibility in their working hours during the validation process.

3.1.5   Third sector engagement

The Inventory has collected some examples, of approaches carried out in the third sector to help individuals validate competences gained in voluntary activities. Other specific initiatives include the use of portfolios for volunteers – Austria, Iceland, Poland, and Norway.

In Austria, 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. The following box presents some examples of approaches for validating competences gained in voluntary activities in Austria:

The Austrian Volunteer Passport and competence portfolio for volunteers

The Austrian Volunteer Passport was introduced in 2005 to provide a 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[22]. 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)[23].

The competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke24) 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).

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[22] 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

[23] Cf. GHK 2011, 23-24; BMASK 2009, 83-84

[24] Cf. www.kompetenz-portfolio.at

3.1.6 Third sector stakeholders driving policy developments

In Switzerland, a considerable number of validation initiatives have been implemented due to the involvement of third sector organisations, particularly associations for equal opportunities (gender and multicultural), those dealing with the education and training of adults, and associations for voluntary work. These organisations are encouraging the development of new projects in the sphere of recognition or validation referring to the legislation framework of the relevant professional-educational sector.

In Sweden, validation is performed and supported through Swedish "*folkbildning*" (liberal/civic adult education for adults), which is considered to be part of the third sector. It has largely focused on the validation of generic skills and competences. '*Folkbildning*' is a parallel educational pathway to the formal system, with strong connections to various NGOs covering most of civil society. Folkbildningsrådet, the National Council of Adult Education, is one of the partners that the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education will consult in its Government appointed role regarding validation.

3.1.7 Third sector promoting the use of validation and its delivery

In Iceland, according to the Regulation for adult education 1163/2011, validation is intended for people with little formal education who are 23 years of age or older and have three years of experience in the sector concerned. Skills obtained in the third sector can be brought forth in the documentation phase and validated if they are relevant to the learning outcomes concerned, i.e. communication and social competences. Other third sector bodies (e.g. city service centres and services linked to rehabilitation that support people return to work offer portfolio development and career guidance that can lead to participation in validation projects.

In Denmark, the third sector[25] and the non-formal education stakeholders provide information and guidance about the options for validation of prior learning and support participants in clarifying, wording and documenting their prior learning.

In Spain, in the third sector, the main measures implemented have been the recognition of 'career profiles existing in the youth field through the system of professional qualifications'[26]. The Youth Institute (INJUVE) is the Spanish national agency for the Youth in Action Programme and is responsible of its promotion and implementation.

A number of countries have developed tools/initiatives to support the delivery of validation in the third sector. These are presented in the box below.

Examples of tools/initiatives to support validation in the third sector

In **Norway**, the 'Personal Competence Document' (PKD), developed by VOFO, (as described in the 2010 update for Norway), is still in use. It is a self-declaration document for the presentation or 'mapping' of an individual's learning (formal, non-formal and informal), including learning through voluntary work. The PKD is free to use and available on the internet (http://www2.vofo.no/pkd/). More could be done however to increase take-up of the tool.

In the **UK-Scotland**, a project carried out by the SCQF Partnership and out by Learning Link Scotland[27] in early 2012 tested the SCQF RPL toolkit within voluntary sector adult learning organisations. Skillnet, an organisation working with minority ethnic communities and Sikh Sanjog, which aims to provide a range of quality opportunities for Sikh and other Minority Ethnic women and their families, tested the toolkit. The project findings included:

■   *A greater understanding of how the toolkit might be used in the voluntary sector* - for example with people from BME communities and who have come from overseas, with young adults, ex-

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[25] http://www.daea.dk

[26] European Commission (2012) *National Youth Report Spain: First cooperation cycle of the EU Strategy 2010-2012*. Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/national_youth_reports_2012/spain.pdf [21 November 2012]. P. 8.

[27] The national voluntary sector organisation that works to support the development of community based adult learning.

offenders and homeless people, and with practitioners from the voluntary sector as a CPD tool;

- *Ideas for how the toolkit could be improved* – such as training for facilitators in how to use the toolkit, the need for a worked example of how to use the toolkit to map people's experience against the SCQF, and the need to recognise the possibilities of RPL to support progression into employment as well as education;
- *An improved understanding of how RPL can be used to support learners* – e.g. that RPL can help learners to better understand and give credit to their life and work experience, and that it can be useful at the entry point to a course or learning programme.

In the **UK-Wales**, Agored Cymru - a charitable trust and social enterprise, is the main 'recognised body' in Wales. Agored Cymru, like all regulated Awarding Organisations, has a published RPL policy and each of its centres is required to develop procedures for RPL.

3.1.8 Youth sector involvement in validation

Based on the 2014 country updates together with contributions from the European Youth Forum, there is some evidence of youth sector involvement in validation, though in general this is relatively contained to a small number of initiatives in a limited number of countries. Contributions from Member State representatives of the European Youth Forum encourage greater involvement of the youth sector in national policies on validation. Where national/regional/local consultations in relation to aspects of validation exist, ensuring the consultation extends to a range of youth organisations – not typically restricted to the national youth council (or similar body) is encouraged. Where responsibility for validation falls to a number of different Ministries it is important that all Ministries engage the youth sector – no just limited to the Ministry responsible for matters relating to youth or education policy for example.

The 2014 Inventory has identified some important and inspiring examples of the youth sector involvement in validation. These are identified in the box below.

Examples of youth sector involvement in validation

- **The 'Nachweise International' initiative in Germany**

The 'Nachweise International' initiative in Germany is a tool for documenting the participation (Certificate of Participation International), the engagement (Certificate of Engagement International) and the competences (Certificate of Competence International) acquired in international youth work projects[28]. The Certificate of Participation International contains a short description of the sponsor, a brief explanation of the work field international youth work, as well as a characterisation of the project and its educational goals. The Certificate of Engagement International contains all information on the Certificate of participation. In addition, engagement demonstrated individually by the young person as well as her/his active contributions are described. The Certificate of Competence International gives testimony in detailed form to individually demonstrated competences, which have been worked out in an especially developed procedure of certification. It can only be issued by certified KNI-coaches and consists of the four steps competence-based analysis of a project, surveillance, dialogue, text of evidence[29] . Target groups are the participants of international youth work projects.

- **Keys for Life – Czech Republic**

In the youth sector, a policy to support VNFIL for people who are either professionals or volunteers in youth work has been developed in the Czech Republic. A national project called 'Keys for Life[30'] developed a set of occupational descriptions for a range of positions and developed training as well as assessment which could be accessed without prior training in relation to these positions. The main idea is to support the recognition of competences for individuals holding positions in youth and children organisations, independent of how these were achieved and in which organisation they were active31. Following the Keys for Life project, a new project has started in October 2012, called K2

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[28] see http://www.nachweise-international.de/en/which-certificates-are-there.html

[29] see http://www.nachweise-international.de/welche-gibt-es/kompetenznachweis.html

[30] See the case study Keys for Life as part of Dunne, Ulicna et al (2014) *Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union* http://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/2014/20140219-youth-work-study_en.htm

[31] For more information see ICF GHK (2013) *Study on the value of youth work. Keys for Life case study*

(Quality and Competitiveness in Non-formal Education32), which aims at dissemination of the Personal Competence Portfolio[33], a pilot supplement to Europasss CV.

- **NFE South R-Evolution: Empowering non-formal education in Southern Europe[34]**

Nine National Youth Councils who are cooperating at European Level in the fields of education, training, global cooperation and advocacy towards national, European and international institutions, agreed on a common educational strategy to create and implement , the blended learning approach to non-formal education. The aim is to encourage participation and support national policy strategies for the validation of lifelong learning competences developed through non formal education experiences. To be a non-formal education trainer has become a highly qualified profession in the European youth field. This is a role not recognized in our societies and educational systems; it is a key role in supporting lifelong learning and the development of soft skills in adults and pupils.

Therefore, the recognition of non-formal education and its professionalism at national level is a priority in which the partnership is addressing in this project. The learning partnership has a specific focus on the exchange of good practices. It aims to achieve the following objectives;
- to develop a common understanding and a joint strategy to advocate for the political and formal recognition and the validation of Non-Formal Education and learning by law in all the partners countries; both at educational level and in the European labour market
- to mainstream experiences and learning outcomes developed through non-formal and informal education with reference to the European Qualification Framework- EQF;
- to legitimate the role of National Youth Councils and its member organizations as non-formal learning providers in society at national, regional and local level;
- to strengthen the capacity building of National Youth Councils and its member organizations as non-formal learning providers in society at national, regional and local level
- to strengthen the capacity building of NYC's and member organizations through the haring of good practices of the educational approaches which support national training strategies;
- to develop trainers' skills and competences in order to assure quality in NFE activities and training courses;
- to advocate for the recognition of non-formal education trainer's competences and professionalism in society;
- to establish and reinforce a lasting cooperation process focused on education and training among European National Youth Councils

Research recently published by a European expert group explored the extent to which non-formal learning and youth work can enhance the creative and innovative capacities of young people in ways that are relevant to employability[35]. In the context of record levels of youth unemployment in Europe, the report recommends actions to increase the recognition and validation of non-formal learning in business contexts and across the education sector as a whole. It also provides illustrations of a range of initiatives from the youth field aiming at enhancing recognition and validation.

3.1.9   Involvement of the Public Employment Services

Public Employment Services (PES) play a key role in a number of validation initiatives supporting the unemployed in most of countries reviewed. Typically, PES is not involved in the design of validation standards. Their role is to facilitate access to validation opportunities to their users. This includes skills audits for jobseekers and summative approaches to validation.

Concerning skills audits, the economic crisis has evidenced the need for such approaches. For instance, In the Netherlands and since 2013, a new change of strategy for validation is taking place in relation to the government's drive towards more responsibility for stakeholders in (lifelong) learning and thus validation. Social partners focus on their labour market responsibilities. The authorities take care of the individuals and groups that need special attention. The crisis has put a temporary additional pressure on PES to deliver this

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[32] http://www.nidm.cz/k2

[33] www.okp.ka2.cz

[34] www.nfesouthrevolution.eu

[35] http://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/2014/documents/report-creative-potential_en.pdf

type of services. For example in Iceland, after the economic crisis, lifelong learning centres have provided skills audits for unemployed adults who have not completed upper secondary school level education. During the first years of the crisis, it proved difficult to provide skills audits for all unemployed and jobseekers, but the current lower unemployment rates have enabled a stabilisation of this service. With regards to summative approaches leading to formal qualifications, PES generally do not implement validation themselves, but rather provide financial support to individuals to foster the use of validation procedures (for instance in the Netherlands or France) or provide guidance and support concerning validation.

4 Facilitating coordination between stakeholders

Governance mechanisms to facilitate coordination between different stakeholders are varied and differ across Member States. In some countries, given their recent development of validation, coordination is at an early stage. In others, coordination has been facilitated for a longer period of time and works effectively. Coordination mechanisms are mostly led by ministries or national agencies, although there are also countries where a more horizontal approach towards coordination exists. This section provides some country examples of where coordination works well and provides an overview of the main governance mechanisms used to facilitate coordination.

In Denmark, a mutual coordination mechanism in the form of a top-down and bottom up strategy of interaction and collaboration exists between stakeholders, from the policy level to the practitioner level. Stakeholders agree on the importance of validation of prior learning and their collaboration is expected to strengthen the use of validation of prior learning, to create stable and visible practice[36] and to develop a common use of terminology and to exchange knowledge about each other's practices[37].

In Finland, coordination between stakeholders works well because roles and responsibilities are detailed in legislation. Furthermore, given that validation procedures are mainly embedded in the formal education systems, there is wide national coordination between different stakeholders that works very effectively.

In Iceland, the cooperative approach that permeates the validation model is as a result of the relationship between the ETSC and the lifelong learning centres. Its history is rooted in the fact that the one of the main objectives of the ETSC contract with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is the development of a national strategy on validation in cooperation with social partners. As such there is a strong culture of effective and efficient collaboration supported by a network approach to validation. Representatives of the social partners participate in steering groups when projects in a new sector are being initiated and developed. In projects where the focus is on validation against job standards, representatives from companies are involved and/or take the role of assessors.

As noted in the previous section, coordination works well in small size countries such as Malta, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. In Malta there are no substantial obstacles reported to engage with and work collaboratively with stakeholders across different sectors. In Luxembourg, the model of validation has emerged from a long-standing tradition of cooperation and dialogue with the different stakeholders working on education and training.

In Turkey the benefit of effective coordination is emphasised where there is a clear view that the active involvement and high engagement of all stakeholders can reduce the risks in relation to the internalisation of changes.

In Cyprus, stakeholders including representatives of trade unions, employers, and employees organisations sit on the Board of HRDA, the leading authority for the System of Vocational Qualifications where validation takes place; in Greece, social partner's

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36 Ulla Nistrup og Anne Lund: Validation of prior learning – distribution, barriers and current practice. January 2010. www.Ncfk.dk.
37 Focus on validation of prior learning, nr.3: www. NVR.nu

representatives sit in the Central examination Committees and Advisory Committee for the Certification of Occupational Profiles.

4.1 How coordination occurs

Facilitating coordination between stakeholders occurs in different ways. In this section we have grouped methods used to support coordination between stakeholders into four main categories. As we discuss earlier in the report, in some countries, coordination between stakeholders works particularly well because the respective roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in validation are set out in legislation. In other countries coordination stems from the fact stakeholders are consulted in different aspects of validation. Where responsibility for validation falls to a number of ministries or national institutions, a number of countries have introduced inter-ministerial committees. These committees have been established not only to facilitate coordination across the different ministries but in certain cases, to guide the development and implementation of validation. On the ground, a number of networks exist.

4.1.1 Legislation

As discussed in section 2.1 where the respective roles of stakeholders are defined by the legal framework or are set out in national guidelines (e.g. in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway), coordination at national level and between stakeholders typically works well and brings transparency to the validation procedures. In other countries there are also examples of where legislation relating to specific aspects of validation serves to strengthen coordination between stakeholders. For example, in Portugal, new legislation on the new network of centres CQEP[38] emphasises the establishment of partnerships, at territorial level, which encourage cooperation with employers, training institutions, organisations from the third sector and public organisations in order to create synergies and ensure robust actions. In the Netherlands, coordination between the stakeholders in EVC is strengthened with the Covenant of 2012. Coordination is also expected to be further strengthened when the new policy with its focus on turning EVC into an instrument for Validation of Learning Outcomes on (1) national qualification level and on (2) sector level training, will be established. As noted earlier, In Denmark, social partners have influenced legislation in a number of areas relating to validation. As such coordination between social partners, the government and its national bodies leading validation works well.

4.1.2 Working groups/steering groups

In many countries, working groups/steering groups have been established to engage and consult with stakeholders. In Latvia, stakeholders are engaged through consultation or working groups, or as representatives in different legislative bodies (e.g. elaborating occupational standards or learning outcomes of the programmes in the HE sector). The level of engagement is considered high, and there are many supportive structures developed for ensuring the involvement of stakeholders at governmental level (e.g. National Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council with representation of employers, public institutions and trade unions).

In Austria, in line with the implementation of the NQF and the lifelong learning strategy, Steering groups and working groups have been set up to support coordination across sectors. Stakeholders are, for example, involved in the validation policy design, and in the design of specific initiatives (many of them developed through bottom-up processes). But since there is no overall validation system in place these activities, except for those related to the formal system, are not coordinated on a national level. Nevertheless, work towards the development of a national validation strategy including all sectors has recently begun and the steering groups and working groups aim to facilitate coordination and engage stakeholders.

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[38]CQEP are centres for the information, counselling and guidance of young people and adults who seek improvement of their qualifications, through training or through the development of RVCC processes

In Germany, whilst there is no overall coordination of the different validation approaches and systems, different stakeholders are involved in every single system. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder embed all relevant stakeholders (e.g. institutions of higher education and vocational education, social partners and experts from science and practice) in the development of the DQR (German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning), mainly through working groups and expert workshops. In the higher education sector, the ANKOM-initiative[39], funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, is tasked with establishing a dialogue between the relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, vocational training institutions, students-unions, universities and the scientific community.

In Norway, The Directorate for Education and Training works together and is in regular contact with the Ministry, the County Governors, the County education authorities and the social partners (e.g. Vox, VOFO, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV). As part of the recent work carried out by Vox to prepare two sets of guidelines relating to validation in HE and post-secondary vocational education and training sectors, working groups were set up for each sector.

In Lithuania, national stakeholders, employers, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts are engaged through consultations or working groups in all areas. It is also noted that a consultative role is adopted in Spain, by employers, trade unions, and others through the participating bodies, such as the General Council for Professional Training and the State Education General Council.

4.1.3 Inter-Ministerial Committees

In a number of countries Inter-Ministerial Committees are in place to support validation. In Malta, the Inter-Ministerial Committee is charged with mapping the present state of play with regards to formal, informal and non-formal adult learning. In France, an Inter-Ministerial committee for the development of VAE (Comité interministériel pour le développement de la VAE) is in place. It includes representatives of all Ministries involved and has met in 2013 to discuss future reforms and policy developments. In Spain, the Inter-Ministerial commission for monitoring and evaluation of the validation process (composed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment) is responsible for facilitating collaboration and coordination between all parties involved in validation (education and labour administrations, local authorities, social partners, chambers of commerce and other public and private organisations). In 2013, the cabinet of Ministers in Cyprus approved the establishment[40] of an interdepartmental Committee tasked to develop a comprehensive action plan for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.

4.1.4 Networks

As also discussed in section 2.1 in a number of countries networks exist or are in development to support validation and facilitate more effective coordination between stakeholders. In Sweden, The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education promotes validation by organising network meetings with the actors and stakeholders in the field. The purpose of the networks is to spread information about validation initiatives, projects and ongoing validation. The networks also discuss the development of methods, models for validation and future needs in the area.

As previously mentioned, in Scotland, there are two RPL networks operating: the SCQF RPL network and the QAA /Universities Scotland HEI RPL network. Thus there are opportunities for learning to be shared amongst stakeholders across the sectors of learning, work and the third sector. In Ireland, a number of employers/private sector organisations have been involved through the Skillnets activities. A number of HE institutions have been involved through the Strategic Innovation Fund and FIN (Framework Implementation Network) group. In Denmark, in some sectors of higher education, the Danish Ministry for Science, Innovation

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[39] see http://ankom.his.de/

[40] Decision No 74.676, 11/2/2013, proposal submitted by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

and Higher Education initiated a Knowledge Platform for validation in University Colleges and Vocational Academies. This platform aims to strengthen validation work.

5 Conclusion

Since the 2010 Inventory was carried out, the research findings show that many countries have undergone substantial changes in both their governance structure and in terms of the introduction of new legislation to support and frame arrangements for validation.

By 2014 not all European countries have yet established a (comprehensive) national/regional strategy or policy for validation; national level bodies continue to play an essential role in providing a 'steer' for validation. In a number of countries, validation is coordinated by a single actor, and in other countries devolved forms of coordination exist, where regional authorities or sectorial bodies assure stakeholder involvement without a strong steer from national level. The size of the country seems to be a relevant factor to take into account: in small countries, such as Luxembourg and Malta, their small size is reported to facilitate coordination and clarity in the allocation of roles and responsibilities amongst stakeholders. Of equal importance are the national patterns and traditions of governance, notably in the education and labour market sectors. Hence, the likelihood of "providing a steer for validation" is higher in centralised governance systems accustomed to steering from above. Moreover, the very possibility of steering from above is particularly low in countries with conflicting governance structures, such as countries overhauling their education and labour market systems or being marked by the co-existence of old and new governance systems.

In the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium-Flanders stakeholder agreements have been established to support the take-up of validation in the private sector. As illustrated above, whilst there is notable stakeholder involvement in different aspects of validation across many countries, more needs to be done to encourage greater stakeholder involvement in the private sector and the third sector. The question arises if private and third sector involvement can be stimulated by the same mechanisms leading to effective coordination in the public sector.

In summary, the following challenges with regards to the governance of validation can be observed:

- There remains significant differences in the stage of development that makes coordination difficult between the sectors of education with regard to their level of engagement and take-up of validation;
- There also remains significant differences in the use of validation between the education sector compared to the private sector and the third sector – much more needs to be done to engage both the private sector and in particular, the third sector and youth sector in validation;
- Constrained public budgets continue posing obstacles to the implementation of validation consequentially the infrastructure needed for coordination, thus calling for the mobilisation of more governance mechanisms in order to spur validation across educational and societal sectors;
- Whilst a number of countries are introducing new legislation and new governance arrangements to support validation, progress is at a relatively slow pace and does not always facilitate or take into account stakeholder cooperation;
- For some countries where a national strategy or legal framework does not exist or is in development, identifying key stakeholders willing to drive validation policy at national level remains problematic;
- Many countries still experience a lack of interest from employers, often linked to a lack of awareness of validation, limited possibility for SMEs to deploy HRD staff in developing subtle validation procedures - alongside the tendency that HRD in the private sector is often decoupled from public initiatives to spur validation. There is however growing evidence of employers adopting a more positive attitude towards validation.

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