



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

Thematic report: awareness  
raising

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## 1 Introduction

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<sup>1</sup>;
- 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 - 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 report provides a summary of material gathered in the Member State Country Reports for the European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. The specific focus of the material is to provide an overarching analysis of the activities that are being undertaken and/or planned, to raise awareness of the importance of validation, exploring the approaches used, the different methods that have been developed to raise awareness, and to consider the different types of campaigns and/or dissemination strategies employed.

## 2 Context

For many Member States, the development and implementation of effective systems to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning forms a central strand of activity to support a culture of lifelong learning and enhancing employability.

However, critical to the success of these frameworks to support validation, is the associated level of awareness amongst guidance practitioners, employers and of course the general public. If general awareness around validation, the associated processes, and most importantly the benefits of validating learning is limited, then people are less likely to access and take advantage of available validation processes.

The strategic approaches, and operational delivery methods used to raise awareness of validation of learning, the availability of opportunities, and the benefits of the process, can vary greatly, and often depend on the specific country context. For instance in Bulgaria where there is no uniform system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, so awareness-raising activities are arranged and implemented within specific projects rather than at a wider national level. This is also the case in the Czech Republic, where the technical assistance project for the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (NSK) UNIV3<sup>2</sup> includes components on provision and dissemination of information.

Some countries are geared up to function at a national level, through a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach, such as in France, whilst at the other end of the spectrum, for example in Croatia where a national validation system is yet to be developed, the role of guidance practitioners has yet to be defined within a clear and standardised structure, there are however initiatives taking place at a national level. In Finland, where the validation of informal and non-formal learning is not promoted publically as such, the public authorities

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> More information can be found at: <http://www.nuv.cz/univ3>

and social partners are actively involved in raising awareness about the competence-based qualification system in which validation is embedded as a central feature.

The challenge of raising awareness of the availability of, and the benefits of, validation of non-formal and informal learning is, for some Member States, more significant than for others. A review of the evidence suggests that a key factor supporting awareness-raising around the benefits of validation is the existing level of awareness of lifelong learning more generally across the country. For example in Lithuania, the national context demonstrates a lack of guidance around validation, as well as fundamental issues which compound this including a lack of tradition and culture of lifelong learning, and low prestige of learning gained outside the formal education system. Similarly, in Hungary, the levels of awareness of the general public, and guidance counsellors on both the education and employment sectors are low.

Similarly, in Cyprus, although there are relatively good levels of awareness about the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) System of Vocational Qualifications, and the ICT certificates offered by private providers and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning more generally are less well known amongst the general public.

Whilst most of the country reports demonstrate that activities are taking place to raise awareness of the importance and availability of validation of informal and non-formal learning (to a greater or lesser degree), there are still some examples, such as Greece and Slovakia, where this is not taking place at all.

## **2.1 Different types of awareness raising campaigns**

Analysis of the evidence presented in the Country Reports highlights a number of different approaches that member states have taken to develop, organise and deliver campaigns to raise awareness of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### **2.1.1 National level campaigns**

The material in the country reports shows that in some country contexts such as France, Denmark, and Norway, the approaches to raising awareness about the importance and value of validation of learning functions at a national level, is a well-established element within the existing institutional framework.

This is the case in France, where the general level of awareness around opportunities for validation is relatively high; the specific scheme for validation of learning to facilitate access to the HE sector has been in place since 1985. Since 2002, a network of regional offices to provide information about VAE, called Points d'Information Conseil (PIC), has been in place. Such structures act as a focal point at the regional level to provide basic information about the process and refer applicants to the relevant awarding body.

At the regional and local level, a number of initiatives are also in place to enhance the level of awareness of validation among guidance practitioners. For example, the region of Ile-de-France via its VAE information service (Pôle Régional Information Conseil en VAE) organises regular information sessions on VAE for all counsellors/advisors/practitioners working in the field of vocational guidance, labour market services and social inclusion. Further information about the co-ordination and delivery of awareness-raising activities is provided in the Case Study in section 2.4.

Other countries are in the early stages of development for their awareness-raising activities, as is the case in Malta, and also Flanders in Belgium, where up until now the level of information availability and promotion to raise awareness has been limited. However, plans are in train to implement a large awareness-raising campaign, supported by a dedicated website and information brochure. Moreover, intermediate organisations who work closely with identified target groups will have a key role as information centres, providing a guidance and signposting function to support the awareness-raising activities.

In Denmark, in recognition that the availability of information, and subsequent levels of awareness amongst the public concerning validation are both relatively low, in the Autumn of 2012 the Danish Ministry of Education launched an information campaign to increase public awareness of, and to promote the use of, validation of prior learning. The campaign was nationally co-ordinated, but delivered at a local level, by the VEU centres ('Voksen- og Efteruddannelserne, or Adult and Continuing Training). The campaign employed different online platforms to communicate the campaigns' messages, increase the visibility of the campaign and direct people to use the VEU centres websites. The country report confirms that the campaign was successful in achieving its objective of raising awareness of validation of learning.

The Portuguese report highlighted an interesting situation, whereby a national media campaign promoting validation, had been developed in 2011 by the former New Opportunities Initiative (NOI). The initiative ended and this caused the campaign to end also. However, in recognition of the importance of such campaigns, a new initiative and accompanying network of advice and guidance centres: Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional (CQEP) was formally launched at a national conference in December 2013. Alongside the initiative, a national media campaign was launched to raise awareness of the new centres, and to recruit young people and adults to access the opportunities on offer through the network.

In Romania, active promotion and dissemination of information regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning is limited, and according to the country report little progress has been made since 2010. There has recently been a general recognition that the low numbers of beneficiaries accessing validation services, especially among disadvantaged groups, indicates that much more should be done in terms of information campaigns. In response, the National Qualification Authority has also been involved in raising awareness about validation and its benefits through its website and published brochures.

Building on this activity, an ESF funded project recently launched a national media campaign to stimulate participation in lifelong learning in Romania. The campaign included a viral video promoting the benefits of validation of prior learning, which was broadcast on national TV and on the Internet, as well as the project website showing a map of the location of Assessment Centres in Romania. A review of the success of the campaign identified that one of the main results from the campaign activities was the significant number of beneficiaries requesting information on the validation process as a result of becoming aware of it thanks to campaign activities. However, the review also highlighted key issues that had been identified through the campaign, mainly that the assessment centres network should be more accessible to people, and furthermore that only a small number of qualifications are eligible for validation.

In Finland, whilst there is no strategic approach to awareness-raising around validation per se, there is nonetheless a co-ordinated approach to raising awareness about the competence-based qualification system in which validation is embedded as a central feature. The awareness-raising activities involve stakeholders such as the public authorities and the social partners who take an active role. For more information about the Finnish approach, please refer to the case study in Section 2.3.

### **2.1.2 Campaigns organised at a project level**

Alongside examples of awareness-raising campaigns being developed and delivered at a national level, the Country Reports also highlight campaigns that are organised at a project level. For example, the Country Report for Iceland states that campaigns to raise awareness about validation of learning are organised and delivered according to specific projects, and tend to focus on a specific sector. In most projects, a co-ordinated approach is adopted, forming an overarching campaign to raise awareness. For example, an advertisement is published in local or national newspapers and brochures about the project are distributed in companies and among relevant stakeholders linked to the sector. Career counsellors from Lifelong Learning centres also visit companies to provide information directly to individuals. As a follow-up activity, an information meeting is held for a group of interested individuals

and career counsellors provide information and guidance through individual interviews (screening) before admission.

In Bulgaria also, there is no uniform national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, and therefore validation arrangements, including awareness-raising activities, are implemented within specific projects. The project, 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', has two main recruitment channels: through companies identified by the social partners, and through labour offices of the Public Employment Agency (EA). In the first case, the target group includes employees. The companies have consultants who inform employees about the opportunities for and benefits of validation, the relevant steps and processes, and VET course providers. In the second case, the target group includes mostly unemployed people.

In the case of Poland, activities to promote and raise awareness of validation processes are organised not only at a project level but also have an occupational focus. At a project level the validation process usually addresses a specific group of people with experience in certain occupational areas (e.g. in banking, construction, etc) and the recruitment process is supported by promotion in the press, radio, television and social media. The awareness-raising and provision of initial information on the validation process usually incorporates background on the procedure, the conditions of recruitment, location and time of a course, and the principles of successful completion. The organiser of the validation process also provides relevant information and instructions related to the exam and certification.

Further supporting the occupational focus, in the case of the validation of informal learning carried out by the chambers of crafts and Regional Examination Boards, the recruitment process is informed by information posted on the websites of the validating institutions, information provided by the teachers, trainers and professional counsellors (working with labour market agencies) and by school professional counsellors.

In Turkey, a national level project was recently completed which had the key objective of the establishment of 'an efficient and sustainable National Qualifications System based on agreed occupational standards with an appropriate system for assessment, grading, and certification at all levels in line with European Qualifications Framework'. The VQA carried out the project entitled 'Strengthening Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) and National Qualifications System (NQS) in Turkey' (UYEP - Türkiye'de Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumunun ve Ulusal Yeterlilik Sisteminin Güçlendirilmesi Projesi in 2010-2013). One of the goals of the project was raising awareness of the validation processes.

### **2.1.3 Campaigns that focus on a specific time period**

As well as having the organising principle for campaigns as a physical delivery area i.e. a specific geography, or project activity, the evidence also highlighted interesting examples of a defined period of time being the focus for structuring awareness-raising around validation.

For example in Wallonia in Belgium, a dedicated campaign of awareness-raising was developed to build on existing materials (a website, information material, a newsletter, targeted emails to job seekers, and advertising in the media). As part of a co-ordinated communication plan, a dedicated initiative – "2013 Year of Competencies" was implemented. Indicators suggested the activities were successful – for example the number of visitors to the website was almost 43,900 in 2012, of which 63% were new visitors.

Similarly, in Croatia, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has organised an annual Lifelong Learning Week since 2008. The activities in the campaign are all directed towards raising awareness of the benefits of lifelong learning, and by association, the different forms of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. In 2011, 600 adult education institutions took part in 350 events, organized as part of this nationwide campaign. In cooperation with partners (state administration bodies, Croatian Employment Service, counties, local government, adult education institutions, schools, cultural institutions and other organisations), various activities were organised to motivate citizens to participate

in lifelong learning and to get acquainted with various possibilities of learning and education<sup>3</sup>.

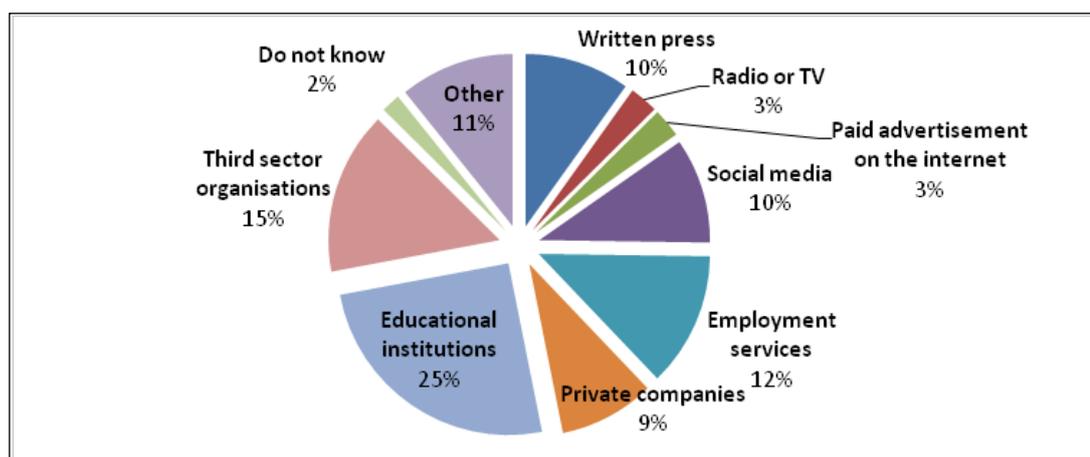
## 2.2 Different methods to raise awareness of validation

### There are a range of methods available and in use

The online survey<sup>4</sup> showed that various methods of recruitment for participants in the validation process are used. A range of approaches were identified, however most respondents cited their main recruiting channels as: educational institutions, third sector organisations, employment services, and private companies.

Working directly with institutions was identified as the most popular way of promoting validation opportunities, key reasons for this being that it is a naturally occurring outcome of existing work practices, rather than an additional activity which must be funded separately. That said, however, the survey found that some projects were using paid advertisements in the written press, on TV or the radio and on the internet. Some of the respondents had also attempted to capitalise on the increased use of social media with 10 per cent of projects using this method (see Figure 1.1).

**Figure 2.1 Recruitment method for the validation process**



Source: 2014 Inventory Update: Online Survey of Projects and Practices; total number of respondents: 46

### Raising awareness through on-line resources

A significant number of Member States have developed resources and activities on-line, aimed at raising awareness of validation and publicising its benefits. Analysis of the Country Reports shows this is a common tool for awareness-raising.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has the main role in raising awareness and providing information on validation, along with the Swedish National Agency of Education regarding adult education. The main channel for information, advice and guidance is the Internet portal: [www.valideringsinfo.se](http://www.valideringsinfo.se). The website is targeted predominantly at guidance counsellors and individuals interested in validation.

In Switzerland, as with the Austrian case study described below, a number of different web-based resources are available, forming an integrated package of awareness-raising and information provision. Concerning upper-secondary VET, the cantonal services are responsible for adult qualification processes. As part of this they manage and develop an

<sup>3</sup> For more information please refer to the Lifelong Learning Week website: <http://cjelozivotno-ucenje.hr/english.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> 2014 Inventory Update: Online Survey of Projects and Practices

information portal about validation procedures, most often in cooperation with the cantonal services of occupational, educational and careers guidance, and register applications. At the federal level, the official site supporting validation procedures refers to two other information portals: the portal of occupational, educational and careers guidance, which is aimed at all groups, and the portal addressed to stakeholders interested in implementing validation procedures.

### **Case study example: Raising awareness using on-line resources - Austria**

In Austria, the provision of on-line resources has been developed in a co-ordinated way, amongst key partner organisations. Information about opportunities for validation is available on-line through the websites of a number of stakeholder organisations: the Public Employment Service, responsible ministries, social partners and various advisory centres for different target groups. Austria is also a good example of a country where awareness-raising activities have been developed to meet the needs of different target groups:

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

Further to the website providing information for those who would benefit from accessing validation services, resources have also been developed on line for those supporting the process. For instance, the website, [www.erwachsenenbildung.at](http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at) (provided by the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture), serves as an online-platform for everybody who deals with adult education or further education as a learner, teacher, or someone working in organisation and administration. It provides information on initiatives related to validation of non-formal and informal learning relevant for adult educators and guidance practitioners.

#### **2.2.2 Using media campaigns to raise awareness**

The use of media campaigns varies across the Member States. In some cases it is a central strand of awareness-raising activity, in others it serves as an additional channel for publicity, complementing other forms of engagement.

In Hungary, awareness of validation within the media at a national level is relatively high. The Hungarian Country Report states that professional journals publish interviews and articles about developments in Hungary as regards validation, as well as writing about the topic in general, and highlighting examples in international practice. Furthermore, the periodical Felnőttképzés (Adult Education and Training) has regularly published articles about the validation of prior learning outcomes over the past few years. In the late 2011 issue, a special feature introduced validation in general and there were articles about the French and the Portuguese national validation systems.

In Iceland, at a project level, the use of media is key, and awareness-raising activities include advertising in local or national media to publicise project activities and support recruitment.

In Wallonia in Belgium, the '2013 Year of Competences' campaign took place, and the successful delivery of the activities relied heavily on advertising campaigns in the media, including in the Metro newspaper. The media is also highlighted as an important channel for publicising validation within the Higher Education sector in Wallonia.

As noted in Section 1.1, in Romania, an ESF funded project launched a national media campaign to stimulate participation in lifelong learning in Romania. A viral video promoting the benefits of validation of prior learning was intensively broadcast on national TV and on the internet. Similarly, in Cyprus, the HRDA promotes its System of Vocational Qualifications through advertisements in the media.

### **2.2.3 Combining approaches and employing a 'package' of methods together**

An approach that was commonly described in the Country Reports was to use a combination of channels or methods, to form a co-ordinated suite of activities supporting awareness-raising, rather than focussing solely on a single tool or outlet.

For example, in Wallonia in Belgium, validation of competencies is an individual citizens' entitlement and in support of this, awareness raising is done through a number of methods, including a dedicated website, available information material, a newsletter, targeted emails to job seekers, and advertising campaigns in the media. These activities are all part of a co-ordinated communication plan, which included a dedicated initiative – "2013 Year of Competencies". In Cyprus also, the HRDA employs a range of methods to raise awareness, including the press, media, internet, radio and television promotion.

### **2.2.4 A sectoral focus for awareness raising methods**

In a small number of examples, the approach to awareness-raising has been shaped by the sector within which the validation activity is taking place. In most cases, the awareness-raising activities within the HE sector tend to be better developed than other education sectors. For instance in Scotland, at national level, information on validation and recognition of prior learning is provided on the SCQF website. UK Quality Code for Higher Education<sup>5</sup> states that HEIs must make sure that "Those who might be eligible for the recognition of prior learning are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment for recognition." The Code goes on to state that the form of support offered to individuals who wish to undergo a validation of learning process will vary according to the "higher education provider's approach to RPL and the nature and number of claims it receives". Examples of universities' approaches to engaging and informing potential Recognition of Prior Learning candidates include:

- An Education Guidance Adviser from the Lifelong Learning Academy at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) meets with potential RPL candidates and gives them information on the university's RPL procedures, as well as initial guidance on reflection and how to formulate learning outcomes relating to their prior learning.
- University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) have flexible entry RPL guidelines and a handbook for students on how to access/follow these guidelines.
- Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has School, Advisors' and Assessors' Guides to support the implementation of the GCU RPL Policy as well as a Guide for Students and an on-line Expression of Interest form.

In Estonia, awareness-raising for validation has also been delivered with a sectoral focus. For instance, in the HE sector, awareness-raising activities having included information

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the Code please refer to: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx>

seminars, the distribution of leaflets, handbooks, and the development of a website as part of the Primus programme<sup>6</sup> more detail of which is presented as a case study below.

Furthermore, a website has been developed to raise awareness of validation<sup>7</sup>. These elements are complemented by activity at individual institutional level, for example Tallinn University has a website for providing information<sup>8</sup>. Further to this, the vocational education sector has developed sector-specific information materials around validation of learning, and Qualification awarding bodies also provide their own information.

### **Case study example: The Primus Project in Estonia – raising awareness around recognition of prior learning within the HE sector**

The Primus project in Estonia incorporates dedicated awareness-raising activity to support to validation of learning within the HE sector. The activities are designed to support the improvement of access to higher education, the competitiveness of graduates from higher education institutions, and to facilitate access to employment.

As well as having the key objective of improving awareness of the Recognition of Prior Learning and its potential, among the project's various target groups, the project also aims to improve the quality of assessment and counselling, and to obtain data and information to create a clear picture of how RPL assessments are being conducted.

The awareness-raising activities which take place as part of the project are tailored to the HE sector context, and include organising the distribution of information about RPL and validation of learning among students, as well as potential applicants and the public in general.

A focus is also placed on supporting practitioners, through carrying out training sessions and seminars for RPL assessors and advisers, and compiling the necessary guidelines and information materials to improve the assessment and counselling quality.

These activities are supported and guided by an established network of partners and experts from specific fields that operates as a forum, where common needs are discussed, and priorities and specific improvements agreed upon. The network has also been through a process of agreeing upon common principles and quality criteria for recognition of learning, as well as informing the development of various e-solutions, including electronic RPL application forms compatible with study information systems within the HEIs.

More details can be found at the project website: <http://primus.archimedes.ee/en/rpl>

## **2.3 Communication of the added value/benefits of validation to learners, guidance practitioners and employers**

Many of the campaigns and strategies that have been described in the Country Reports also include elements which focus on promoting the benefits of validation. These can be at a targeted level, providing tailored information to engage with identified groups - as is the case in Scotland where information is presented with different target audiences in mind (please see case study below for more details) or at a more general level, for instance within a country context where awareness is generally low.

This is the case in Turkey, where the validation of prior non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new phenomenon, and multiple activities are in place to promote the process, and in particular there is a focus on raising awareness of the benefits of validation. Individuals can find information on the VQA website and the relevant authorised certification bodies, and in addition to this the VQA provides information and raises awareness through presentations

<sup>6</sup> More information about the Primus programme can be found here: <http://primus.archimedes.ee/en/about>

<sup>7</sup> The website can be accessed here: <http://vota.archimedes.ee>

<sup>8</sup> The website can be accessed here: <http://www.tlu.ee/vota>

in relevant conferences, workshops, and seminars organised by stakeholders, and through a news bulletin.

Also in Croatia, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport has developed a dedicated web portal<sup>9</sup> for The Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF<sup>10</sup>) which also provides publicity information relating to validation. This resource is a tool used for awareness raising for a range of target groups comprising practitioners, professionals and the wider public.

### **Case study example: Promoting the benefits of validation in Scotland**

At national level, information on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is provided on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) website (<http://scqf.org.uk>). The information is presented with different target audiences in mind and each section of the site provides targeted and tailored information about the process, and benefits involved.

For example, for employers, information is provided on potential benefits across a range of workforce development processes: recruitment, Induction, supervision and appraisal, performance review, and gaining qualifications. The specific benefits are also set out:

- helping to identify employees' skills effectively;
- helping to identify skills gaps in organisations;
- helping to identify appropriate training opportunities;
- reducing the time required in employee training due to minimised duplication of learning;
- increasing motivation and interest in workplace activities on the part of the employee/learner
- generating new ideas and developments for the organisation as a result of the employee/learner reflecting on work activities.

For learners, the multiple benefits of validation of learning are set out, and are framed within the context of having the opportunity to reflect on what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of their learning and skills, thinking about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them, building confidence and recognising their strengths and achievements.

Specific benefits are set out, helping learners to:

- think about the learning they have already achieved and plan how to build on this to meet their personal and career goals
- get a place on a programme at a college or university or learning and training provider, if they don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of learning by evidencing that they already have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (e.g. units or modules)
- increase their self-esteem by recognising their achievements in learning
- plan their career development and educational path
- identify areas of competence and areas requiring further study.

Information and resources are provided to support education providers and advisers, validation tools, an RPL toolkit, and other resources are available from the website, including case studies which demonstrate how the use of RPL has benefited learners, employees and employers.

<sup>9</sup> The portal can be seen at: [www.kvalifikacije.hr](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr)

<sup>10</sup> More information about the Framework can be found here: <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/about-croqf>

### Promoting the benefits of validation to learners

As noted above in the Scottish case study example, there are instances where effective awareness-raising within the Country Reports has been identified as targeting information to individuals using a range of different 'channels', and this includes engaging with specific learner groups.

In Cyprus, an Education Fair takes place which mainly targets upper secondary students, in which the Chamber of Commerce participates, the key activities of the Fair include raising awareness of ICT Europe certificate, as well as promotion of the European Computer Driving License (ECDL).

In Ireland, in the absence of a national communications strategy for validation or Recognition of Prior Learning, despite the fact that national awareness of the principles and benefits of validation is increasing, general awareness is considered to be relatively low. At local levels, the benefits of RPL to individuals are communicated primarily through individual education and training providers who promote their own practice and benefits. It is interesting to note that activities to promote the benefits of validation are largely being developed in response to a growing interest in the use of validation for the low-skilled and unemployed.

The context in Finland is somewhat different. There is no dedicated approach to awareness-raising for validation specifically, the benefits of validating learning are promoted as part of a wider 'package' of awareness raising for the acquisition of competence-based qualifications within the nationally- recognised system.

#### Case Study Example: Finland – a website promoting the benefits of acquiring competence-based qualifications (incorporating validation of non-formal and informal learning)

In Finland, there is no dedicated, co-ordinated approach to awareness raising for validation. Instead, the public authorities and social partners are actively involved in raising awareness about the competence-based qualification system in which validation is embedded as a central feature.

A dedicated website (<http://nayttotutkinnot.fi>) provides information about the qualification system itself, including good practice examples, validation and assessment methods and also offers information on the benefits of acquiring such qualifications both for individuals and from an employer perspective.

For individuals the benefits highlighted include:

- Enabling the demonstration of acquired learning and skills, and supporting further professional development in a variety of ways;
- Helping the individual to be more competitive in the labor market;
- Improving their job opportunities by broadening the opportunities available to them; Helping to identify areas requiring further development within their skills sets; Allowing people to identify new areas for skills development;
- Providing an opportunity to assess the individuals' existing level of professional qualification;
- Enabling documentation of acquired skills and competencies to contribute towards certification.
- This can be a catalyst to people gaining more information about organisations providing other modes of studies and other qualification opportunities;
- This can also have the effect of increasing people's self-confidence and motivation to study;
- This can in some cases lead to an increase in salary for candidates who are already employed, or enable those seeking employment to apply for jobs that are at a higher wage level.

The difficulties that can be associated with targeting awareness-raising to individuals were also highlighted within the Country Report material. In Germany for instance, significant

challenges were identified as regards raising awareness amongst individuals around validation of non-formal and informal learning. Research in 2012<sup>11</sup> found that many people have limited awareness of the validation opportunities which are available in Germany. The research project established that 54 % of respondents who were going through or had completed the validation process had found information about it 'by accident', while only 46 % had expressly searched for information.

This echoes the findings of the latest Eurobarometer<sup>12</sup> which found that whilst overall a third (34%) of EU citizens had heard of one of the various tools available for documenting skills and qualifications<sup>13</sup> levels of awareness varied greatly across individual member states. For instance, awareness of the Europass CV was highest in Lithuania (52%) and Malta (48%), while only a minority of respondents had heard of this in the UK (4%), France (5%), and Denmark (5%).

### 2.3.1 Promoting the benefits of validation to guidance practitioners

Research<sup>14</sup> identified the importance of raising awareness of the benefits of validation amongst support staff and guidance practitioners in particular, and a key part of this was found to be developing mechanisms for supporting and training staff. This included the promotion of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for staff, and support such as developing mutual support networks to share experience and best practice.

In practical terms, the provision of information to guidance and support practitioners across the Member States varies in the approaches taken. For instance, the platform for Austrian educational guidance practitioners (bib-wiki<sup>15</sup>) presents information on guidance related issues, including validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In Denmark, within eVejledning (online guidance service), initiatives have been developed to support guidance practitioners to enhance their knowledge and awareness of recognition of prior learning programmes. Alongside these initiatives, the adult and continuing training centres (VEU-centres) focus on qualifying guidance practitioners in relation to the recognition of prior learning programmes relating to general and vocational adult education and training. A key focus in project activity is supporting guidance practitioners to qualify with regards to the provision of support for validation of prior learning.

In France, the provision of guidance on validation issues is embedded within the framework of information provision for Lifelong Learning. Therefore professionals in charge of providing advice on validation of learning can also offer general occupational/vocational guidance and advice on lifelong learning opportunities. Support for practitioners is organised and delivered at the regional and local level, a number of specific initiatives are in place to enhance the level of awareness of validation of learning among guidance practitioners. For example, the region of Ile-de-France via its VAE information service (Pôle Régional Information Conseil en VAE) organises regular information sessions on validation of learning, for all counsellors/advisors/practitioners working in the field of vocational guidance, labour market services and social inclusion.

In Poland, improving the awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners is directly linked to educational reforms and the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework. Similarly, in Bulgaria, awareness-raising of validation for guidance practitioners has included the publication of guidance such as a "Manual for vocational schools for validating non-

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<sup>11</sup> See Schreiber/ Gutschow/ Weber-Höller/ Gei, 2012, p. 21

<sup>12</sup> European Commission DG EAC *Special Barometer 417: European Area of Skills and Qualifications*, June 2014 the report can be accessed here: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_417\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_417_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Tools included: Europass CV, Diploma supplements, Certificate supplements, Language Passport, Europass Mobility, and Youthpass.

<sup>14</sup> Whittaker, R. Et al *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2011. The report can be found [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> The website can be accessed here: <http://www.bibwiki.at/index.php/Hauptseite>

formal and informal learning” which was created as part of the project “System for validation of non-formal and acquired knowledge, skills and competencies”.

Also related to specific project activity, in the Czech Republic, the technical assistance project UNIV 3 carries out a range of activities including delivering presentations and lectures aimed at various audiences including people in human resources as well as guidance counsellors in public employment services.

In Italy, many of the actions highlighted in the country report regarding validation were aimed at supporting the ‘practitioner learning community’ and raising the awareness of professionals and stakeholders. The Isfol web portal Va.Li.Co. (Validation Libretto Competences)<sup>16</sup>, which was set up in 2012, gives Italian administrators and operators a database of validation practices and experiences. The tool is intended to help with the design and implementation of practices, and is consistent with the national and European context.

The situation in Romania is an interesting one and highlights the challenges faced when trying to raise awareness of practitioners within a broader context where general awareness levels are low. There are relatively limited initiatives to enhance the awareness of validation practices amongst guidance practitioners in Romania. However, the Euroguidance network has regularly publicised the role of validation in its conferences and seminars. More specifically, the network has promoted the role of validation in the formal educational system amongst the school counsellors network, with a special focus on the lifelong learning portfolio of students in pre-university education. Although the school counsellors are highly interested in supporting the validation process of students, the lack of legal framework and common methodologies to support the validation process in formal education has to be overcome in order to develop specific practices among practitioners.

### **2.3.2 Promoting the benefits of validation to employers**

Engaging with employers and clearly communicating with them the value of validation of non-formal and informal learning can be challenging, and this is reflected in the country reports. As reported in the thematic report on competence assessments published in parallel to this report, there are only a limited number of examples of awareness-raising activities targeting employers.

That said, some Member States have well-developed approaches to engaging with employers. In Cyprus for instance, the HRDA engages with companies to help them guide their employees through the validation process and achieve certification. At a local level, awareness-raising events for companies have taken place, where CEOs and sectoral representatives have attended. The Chamber of Commerce in Cyprus also promotes awareness of the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) via its member networks.

Even in a country context where the validation framework is in its infancy, the importance of engaging with is nonetheless recognised. In Malta, at a national level, Guidelines for the validation of informal and non-formal learning are being drafted by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). These guidelines will be accompanied by information leaflets on the validation process, targeting specific groups of users including employers.

In Lithuania, the wider national context is defined by a lack of awareness about the benefits involved in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning, across all groups, including employers. The Country Report states that the majority of employers do not see any need to formally certify employees’ competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways, they are aware of the potential benefits for the individual their business, but do not recognise the potential benefits for the business.

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<sup>16</sup> The website can be accessed here: <http://librettocompetenze.isfol.it>

## 2.4 Role of stakeholders

The Country Report evidence suggests that in many cases, Ministries and social partner organisations are the main actors in raising awareness on validation. In Denmark for instance, the Ministry of Education provides extensive information about validation of prior learning on its website, along with the educational institutions offering validation, as well as guidance organisations such as Job Centres and Study Guidance centres.

However there are several examples of other types of organisations taking an active role. In several cases, such as the UK (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland), there is no centrally-organised approach to promoting and raising awareness of validation, but this is delivered by the individual learning providers which offer validation opportunities.

In Switzerland, responsibility for awareness-raising is shared between the individual providers in charge of the validation procedure and of other stakeholders including professional organisations and trade unions.

In Finland, it is interesting to note that the Trade Unions and Federation of Trade Unions are very active in promoting validation. This is alongside a concerted programme of activity in the HE sector focussed on developing recognition of prior learning through training, seminars and dissemination activities.

Another approach identified in the Country Reports is one of multiple organisations sharing responsibility, and this can be organised in a number of ways, such as according to geographical boundaries, as is the case in Spain where the Communities themselves publish their calls for validation of professional competences acquired through professional experience in the regional official gazette.

A sectoral approach to allocation of responsibilities is also evident in some Member States. For example in Romania, The Ministry of Education is responsible for counselling services in schools and universities; the Ministry of Labour through its Employment Agencies is responsible for counselling unemployed people; and the validation centres function under the National Authority for Qualification supervision.

However, a concern is highlighted in the Country Reporting, citing a lack of integrated approaches between the main institutions and networks responsible for counselling and guidance on one hand and the equivalent agencies responsible for validation, on the other hand. There is little coordination between those parallel services and very rarely are there opportunities for an individual to have access to integrated services, according to their specific needs.

In France, a co-ordinated, joint approach to providing information and offering guidance to individuals, employers and practitioners is in place:

### **Case study example: awareness-raising activities in France, building on a long-established approach of joint stakeholder responsibility**

There is a long and well-established tradition of promoting opportunities for validation in France, and as such the general level of awareness is good. The current scheme supporting validation of learning has been in place since 2002, and the specific approach for validation to facilitate access to the HE sector has been in place since 1985.

The constituent tasks for awareness raising and recruitment are the joint responsibility of different stakeholders. Since 2002, a network of regional offices has been in operation, to provide information about validation of learning. These are called Points d'Information Conseil (PIC), and they act as a focal point at the regional level to provide basic information about the validation process and also perform a signposting function by referring applicants to the relevant awarding body.

Alongside the network of PICs, A general information website ([www.vae.gouv.fr](http://www.vae.gouv.fr)) provides information for the general public - including employers - on the use of validation, as well as providing access to reference documents and information and contact details for each of the regional PICs. The website will be undergoing a planned redevelopment during

2014, with the intention of providing improved information services for potential candidates, employers and validation practitioners, and an additional element will be included - the website will also feature dedicated information fiches.

Other types of stakeholders and agencies also provide general information to candidates and can refer them to the relevant contact points, these include:

- Public Employment Services, including Mission locales (for young people);
- Other guidance providers (who are not part of the PIC network);
- Regional services which can vary depending on the Ministry of Education body in charge of validation: Le Dispositif Académique de Validation des Acquis (DAVA). DAVA are primarily meant to support candidates who are interested in acquiring a qualification delivered by the Ministry of National Education, but can also provide initial guidance to all candidates regardless of the qualification;
- Different stakeholders involved in the field of guidance/continuous training/skills audit - including local offices of the Association for the vocational training of adults (AFPA), sectoral training funds, and the networks of education and training institutions in charge of adult training (GRETA) etc.;
- Social partners;
- Sector specific resources are also available, for instance an official website on validation of learning in the field of health and social care. <http://vae.asp-public.fr>

## 2.5 Summary and conclusions

This report has offered a synthesis of the material gathered in the country reports, presenting an overview of the current and planned activities in relation to awareness-raising of validation.

It has become clear, through reviewing the evidence, that across the Member States there are many different approaches adopted to promote the validation process and to publicise the benefits of validation. Often, the wider country context plays a part in shaping the extent of, and nature of, awareness-raising activities: countries which have a well-established culture of lifelong learning and recognition of the importance of non-formal and informal learning tend to be geared up to deliver awareness-raising activities.

That said, there are examples where activities to raise awareness of validation at a national level are in the early stages of development, and yet there is still a strong commitment to awareness-raising and promoting the benefits of validation.

The different methods and types of campaign employed vary considerably, from multi-channel campaigns using printed media, television, the internet etc. to campaigns focussing on a particular sector or a particular target group, for example delivered through sector networks or specific membership organisations.

Communicating the added value of validation to learners, guidance practitioners and employers is central to many of the awareness-raising initiatives described, and is an important way to motivate people to take advantage of validation opportunities on offer.

The organising and delivery of awareness-raising interventions can be arranged according to a number of different structures: at a national level, a project level, according to local area territories, of perhaps with a sectoral focus. However, in most cases this is done using a collaborative working model, with stakeholders playing a role in supporting awareness-raising.

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#### On line resources referenced in the report

- Austria Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [www.erwachsenenbildung.at](http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at)
- Austria platform for educational guidance practitioners. <http://www.bibwiki.at/index.php/Hauptseite>
- Croatia, Lifelong Learning Week <http://cjelozivotno-ucenje.hr/english.aspx>
- Croatia, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport has developed a dedicated web portal for The Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) The portal can be seen at: [www.kvalifikacije.hr](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr). More information about the Framework can be found here: <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/about-croqf>
- Czech Republic, technical assistance project for the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (NSK) UNIV3. More information can be found at: <http://www.nuv.cz/univ3>.
- Estonia, information about the Primus programme: <http://primus.archimedes.ee/en/about>
- Finland, A dedicated website <http://nayttotutkinnot.fi> provides information about the qualification system
- Italy, The Isfol web portal Va.Li.Co. (Validation Libretto Competences). The website can be accessed here: <http://librettocompetenze.isfol.it>