Country report

Austria

2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

National developments towards a national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning started in 2013 and are strongly linked to both the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy (LLL: 2020, 2011) as well as to the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Council Recommendation on validation as well as the implementation of the European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) also play an important role in this process. Steering groups and working groups have been set up for supporting coordination across sectors. Since the 2014 Inventory, important developments have taken place particularly in relation to the national validation strategy and the implementation of the NQF. Until now, there has been no uniform framework for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Austria. Within the education and training system, a number of different Acts and Regulations enable formal education and training institutions (general education, vocational education and training, and higher education) to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings (for example, in the context of ‘external exams’). Many validation initiatives and arrangements are linked to the sector of adult education (in many cases in the context of second chance education) and some measures can also be identified in other fields (such as the labour market and the third sector). These initiatives were mainly developed from bottom-up processes with the involvement of relevant stakeholders (such as social partners). The national validation strategy intends to provide a platform and framework for the development and coordination of all of these initiatives and to provide potential users with an overview of relevant available measures.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

In 2013, a working group (linked to action line 10 and measure 10.3 of the Lifelong Learning (LLL): 2020 strategy) was established for the development of a national validation strategy. In 2015, a consultation document for the national validation strategy (including key objectives and measures) was published and there was also a national consultation process. The results of the consultation process were subsequently analysed and these were used to draft the national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The national strategy will also serve as the starting point for defining organisational structures and a detailed implementation plan in the second semester of 2016.

The Austrian ECVET strategy was launched in 2014. One of its aims is to improve the recognition of competences gained in non-formal and informal learning contexts and thereby to support the implementation of the national validation strategy.

The Austrian NQF is about to enter the operational stage. In early 2016 a highly important milestone was achieved: a legal base for the NQF was adopted by the Austrian parliament and the NQF Act came into force in March 2016.

The high number of refugees that came to Austria in 2015 brought about an urgent need to understand their qualifications and competences in order to support their integration into the labour market as well as into society. To this end, the Austrian Public Employment Service (PES) Vienna, for example, carried out a pilot project for people admitted as asylum seekers between August and December 2015, called ‘competence checks’ which included elements of validation of informally acquired competences. This initiative should be rolled out nationwide in 2016. Further initiatives are currently being set up to address this urgent matter and a national validation strategy intends to provide them with a platform and framework for development and coordination.

The consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy builds on the definition of ‘validation’ as presented in the Recommendation and suggests the following
distinction (BMBF, 2015a, 7): Based on their key objectives, two approaches for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are distinguished which could be closely interlinked and considered as steps or phases in a comprehensive validation process:

- ‘Formative validation’ approaches are personal and individual-based measures which result in the proof of competences obtained independently of defined standards of the qualifications system. The focus is on the identification and documentation of competences.

- ‘Summative validation’ approaches are requirements - or standards - based measures which result in obtaining a qualification (or a part of it) of the formal or non-formal context, i.e. the competences of an individual are assessed and certified based on a relevant standard of a formal or non-formal qualification. The focus is on assessment and certification.

Comprehensive overviews and analyses of existing validation arrangements in Austria have shown that most of the numerous initiatives are developed in a decentralised and bottom-up approach, except for those validation arrangements that are closely linked to the formal system (which are usually based on legal regulations). The national validation strategy follows a more centralised approach to the development and quality assurance of validation initiatives. It also aims at improving cooperation and coordination of validation initiatives across sectors. At the same time it seeks to take regional and local requirements into account and builds on experiences of existing validation initiatives. Thus, it combines a centralised top-down with a practical bottom-up approach.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is closely connected to the Austrian strategy for lifelong learning (cf. 2.1).

In the past, validation in Austria has been characterised by a lack of an overall strategy and coherent approach, which led to a fragmented ‘validation landscape’ specifically serving the needs of different sectors and target groups. The national validation strategy brings clarity in terms of concepts and definitions, provides an overview of existing validation arrangements, serves as a basis for developing new initiatives, assuring their quality, and for training and developing professionals. A more coordinated and quality assured approach to validation intends to enhance stakeholders’ and society’s awareness of and trust in the outcomes of validation practices.\(^1\)

The strongest enabler for the development of validation arrangements and initiatives is the identification of needs that can be addressed with this approach as well as the identification of benefits related to these activities. For example, a high number of unemployed people who have no formal qualifications but have developed relevant competences in the work context has led to the development of validation initiatives in the apprenticeship system (initiatives such as ‘You have skills/competences!’ or ‘Competence with a system’ were introduced, cf. section 2.2).

Another very recent example of addressing identified needs is related to the high number of refugees that are currently in Austria. There are some specific validation projects and initiatives in Austria targeted on migrants, which are usually offered by organisations supporting them (third sector) or by the Public Employment Services. However, migrants are also addressed in initiatives targeted on people with lower qualifications. There are also some validation initiatives specifically targeted towards recognized refugees and people granted subsidiary protection (such as the initiative ‘competence checks’ in Vienna that was piloted in 2015 and planned to be rolled out nationwide in 2016).

\(^1\) There are some doubts about whether this is an achievable aim: For example, representatives of the Chamber of Labour (AK) and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) see the introduction of arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018 at the latest (as suggested by the Recommendation on validation) as a conceivable option but they do not view complete and nationwide implementation as realistic in practice (Lachmayr & Löfler 2013a, 9).
The development of the NQF can also be considered as an enabler for developing validation arrangements that result in the award of (formal or non-formal) qualifications. With the coming into force of the NQF-Act, the Austrian NQF enters its operational stage and a second implementation phase of arrangements regarding the inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the NQF will be developed (cf. section 3).

In the past, the main barriers to validation were identified in the lack of an overall and coherent framework for validation and the fragmentation of related approaches and initiatives as well as general financial constraints, all of which will be addressed and removed by means of a national validation strategy.

According to the consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy (BMBF, 2015a), the following measures are suggested:

- Development of quality assurance arrangements and quality criteria for validation procedures,
- Professionalization of validation practitioners,
- Identification of validation approaches and initiatives existing in Austria and coordinating them within the framework of an overall strategy in order to make them visible and accessible for different target groups,
- Development of new validation models and measures based on needs analysis,
- Awareness raising activities in order to enhance the value of competences gained in different learning contexts as well as their recognition.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Over the last few years, the issue of recording, validating and recognising competences gained outside formal learning contexts\(^2\) has been increasingly addressed in public debate and supra-regional political initiatives can be identified (cf. Schlögl, 2009, 23; ibw, 2007; Zürcher, 2007). In previous years, different attempts have been made by researchers in order to cluster approaches and types of validation initiatives offered in Austria.

Some researchers have clustered the Austrian validation initiatives in three ‘ideal types’ (based on Schneeberger et al., 2007; Biffl et al., 2012, 29-30; Biffl & Pfeffer, 2013; Pfeffer & Skrivanek, 2013; Lachmayr & Löffler, 2013a, 5-6; Mayerl & Schlögl, 2015; Biffl et al., 2016):

- acquisition of certificates/qualifications from the formal education system (such as ‘exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam’, the ‘acquisition of lower secondary school qualifications by adults’ or other so called external exams);
- acquisition of certificates/qualifications without any equivalents in the formal education system (such as awarding of the professional engineering title HTL-IngenieurIn, the certificates issued by the Academy of Continuing Education in the adult education sector, access conditions to regulated professions, and the certification of individuals [e.g. in IT or welding sectors]);
- procedures to identify and validate informal learning (such as reference frameworks for linguistic competence and ICT competences as well as competence identification by applying portfolio methods mainly in adult education and career guidance or in the third sector).

\(^2\) Non-formal and informal learning contexts cannot always be clearly distinguished from the formal context. Zürcher (2015), for example, acknowledges that the range between informal and formal learning can be conceptualised as a continuum and proposes a model for the continuum that defines its constituting variable ‘formalisation’.
The first type can also be called ‘legally binding procedures’ because they lead to the attainment of legally regulated qualifications. The other two types are not legally binding procedures since they do not lead to a qualification at all or to a qualification that is not legally regulated (Mayerl & Schlögl, 2015, 14).

Initiatives for validating non-formal and informal learning in Austria can also be distinguished based on their purpose and target group, as presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures and initiatives that explicitly aim at obtaining a qualification</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiatives integrated into the formal education and training system</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(procedures with a legal basis)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>External exams or certification exams without attending programmes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- obtaining a qualification belonging to the formal context (legally</td>
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<tr>
<td>regulated qualifications) without attending formal learning programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>(preparatory courses are often offered in the non-formal learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>context; relevant competences might also be acquired via professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>experience);</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shortening programmes/exemptions:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- shortening programmes leading to a qualification belonging to the</td>
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<tr>
<td>formal context - e.g. possibilities for skipping grades for pupils at</td>
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<td>a general education school or VET college who demonstrate relevant</td>
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<tr>
<td>achievements, reduction of training times in qualified healthcare and</td>
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<td>nursing based on relevant professional experience, and shortening of</td>
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<td>degree programmes at universities of applied science based on the</td>
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<tr>
<td>recognition of professional experience;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gaining access to education and training programmes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- to higher education - ‘non-traditional’ access paths to regular study</td>
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<tr>
<td>programmes and courses at higher education institutions for learners</td>
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<td>without the upper secondary school leaving exam (such as higher</td>
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<td>education entrance examination, special VET diploma, admission to</td>
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<tr>
<td>degree programmes at universities of applied science or to continuing</td>
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<td>vocational education and training programmes at higher education</td>
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<td>institutions based on relevant professional experience);</td>
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<td>- to further education programmes regulated by law – such as ‘alternative access’ to nursing or psychotherapy education;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initiatives outside the formal education and training system</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- obtaining a qualification without an equivalent in the formal system</td>
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<tr>
<td>– such as qualifications offered by the ‘Weiterbildungsakademie’ (wba)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- obtaining a qualification (or a part of a qualification or certificate)</td>
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<td>without an equivalent in the formal system but partly integrated into</td>
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<td>the formal context – such as the European Computer Driving Licence;</td>
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<td>- gaining access to or shortening of CVET courses not regulated by law;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initiatives and measures for identifying, documenting/visualising an individual’s competences</strong> (without explicitly aiming at obtaining a qualification)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- gaining access to regulated trades by providing proof of relevant occupational experience in the form of an individual certificate of competence (to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and experiences required, a portfolio including school reports, certificates, testimonials has to be prepared);</td>
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<tr>
<td>- making acquired competences visible for enhancing one’s chances in the labour market or for career planning;</td>
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<td>- supporting company personnel development by identifying and documenting employee’s competences;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- defining salary structure based on the recognition of an individual’s competence gained through professional experience (e.g. as part of the collective bargaining agreement for employees in non-university research).</td>
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3 Based on Luomi-Messerer 2014.
In recent years, policy discussions have covered measures to validate non-formal and informal learning, particularly in connection with the strategy for lifelong learning and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

In July 2011, four federal ministries (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry for Science and Research; Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) supported by the social partners and all key stakeholders, agreed on a joint strategy, Lifelong Learning 2020 (LLL: 2020, 2011). This was based on a set of guiding principles, benchmarks for 2020, and ten action strands, including concrete operational measures for LLL implementation. The development of a coherent approach towards validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a central element in this strategy. Agreed measures include the establishment of a national validation strategy, the development and implementation of ‘competence balance’ schemes, the provision of training programmes for enhancing know-how regarding assessment of learning outcomes gained through non-formal and informal learning as well as the development of a cross-sectoral quality assurance system for assessment procedures (LLL: 2020, 2011, 46).

The implementation of the strategy is coordinated in the framework of the ‘national platform 20:20’ which is composed of representatives of different ministries, social partner organisations, federal states, Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) as well as higher education and adult education. The national government appointed a specific task force with representatives from the four ministries who had developed the strategy for strategically steering the implementation processes.

The development and implementation of a national validation strategy is the task of a working group (linked to action line 10 and measure 10.3 of the LLL: 2020 strategy) which was established in 2013. It is comprised of representatives of various ministries and stakeholder organisations and its work is backed up by empirical support. The members include representatives of:

- relevant federal ministries (Education and Women’s Affairs; Science, Research and Economy; Families and Youth; Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection; Health; Defence and Sports),
- social partner organisations (Chamber of Labour, Chamber of Commerce),
- youth organisations (Austrian Youth Association),
- adult education (Austrian Conference of Adult Education),
- Universities Austria,
- Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences.

In a first stage, status quo and needs analyses in three areas were carried out: low-qualified people (Rath, 2014), VET (Luomi-Messerer, 2014a), and higher education (AQ Austria, 2014). The results were brought together in the second quarter of 2014, and a consultation document for developing the national validation strategy and the definition of relevant measures was subsequently prepared. In 2015, the consultation document for the national validation strategy (including key objectives and measures) was published (BMBF, 2015a) and a consultation process was carried out. The results of the consultation process have subsequently been reviewed and analysed. On this basis a national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning has been drafted and is expected to serve as the starting point for defining organisational structures and a detailed implementation plan in the second semester of 2016. It is planned that the implementation of the strategy will strongly involve practitioners and validation experts from various sectors in order to make use of their experience.

The LLL: 2020 strategy can be understood as an important approach to strengthen the links between education, training, employment and social affairs, and ensuring a more flexible qualifications system. Furthermore, the LLL: 2020 strategy as well as the NQF policy paper
(BMUKK & BMWF 2009) place high importance on general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes in the NQF (cf. section 3).

The rationale for policy initiatives in this area are presented in the LLL:2020 strategy (LLL: 2020, 2011, 44) as well as in the consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy (BMBF, 2015a) and refers in particular to the following aspects:

- visualising competences gained outside the formal system to enhance their usability and value in the education and training system as well as the labour market;
- enhancing permeability in the qualifications system and flexibility of individual pathways;
- enhancing opportunities in education and training as well as the labour market;
- facilitating and supporting individual development and motivation;
- achieving equivalency between non-formal and informal learning processes with formal education and training pathways;
- acknowledging validation arrangements as an integrated element of the qualification system.

Since the validation measures and arrangements currently offered have different aims and objectives and are linked to different levels of the qualifications system, the target groups are also rather diverse. Furthermore, the consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy does not consciously restrict validation to specific target groups, but it is assumed that people with lower qualifications will benefit as one of the main target groups.

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

Nevertheless, there are some legal regulations built into the formal system allowing for some recognition possibilities and validation initiatives in different sectors which have developed their own understanding of validation. One source states: ‘Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Austria is legally regulated primarily by means of admission to examinations and entry requirements. The legal frameworks ensure that there are binding regulations for entitlement to access (formal type of recognition according to Colardyn and Bjornavold 2004) to examinations in the formal education system’ (Mayerl & Schlögl, 2015, 13).

Validation initiatives with rather loose links to the formal system or without any links at all are usually not based on legal regulations, except for those providing access to the labour market by virtue of trade or other professional authorisation. Some validation arrangements are offered for unemployed people or people at risk of unemployment (such as types of skills audits) but not in a systematic way.

The majority of the validation initiatives and arrangements are probably linked to the adult education sector or to ‘second chance’ initiatives. However, relevant arrangements can also
be identified in vocational education and training (VET), higher education or in other fields (such as the labour market and the third sector).

2.2 Validation in education and training

Introduction

There is no national system for validation, thus far. Nevertheless, in the education and training system, different Acts and Regulations include mechanisms and arrangements that enable education and training institutions in the formal education and training system to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. Various ministries and institutions have developed measures and initiatives for identifying and formally recognising competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Thus, validation exists in many contexts but is lacking coherence. As mentioned above, Austria has recently been developing a national validation strategy that is expected to enhance coordination and coherence.

Currently Austrian validation arrangements and initiatives do not always clearly address the four stages or phases of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification). Depending on the initiative and in particular on the purpose of validation, certain phases are emphasised – for example:

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

In Austria, almost all formal qualifications (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) may be obtained by taking external exams based on legally binding procedures. Usually, these exams are taken at the responsible institution within the formal sector of education and training by using the same standards and methods as in the formal programmes. Sometimes, these providers or adult education providers also offer preparatory courses but attendance is not mandatory. There are also legal regulations for gaining access to formal education and training programmes (including those offered at higher education institutions) based on validation. In higher education, these procedures are delegated to the higher education institution that decides on the specific methods and procedures. In CVET/adult education, there are legally regulated as well as non-legally regulated qualifications offered; thus, some validation arrangements are legally binding and others are not and the procedures used differ between providers.

Some examples of validation arrangements in the education and training context are listed below.

Examples from general education and school-based VET (legally binding procedures)

- Acquisition of *Hauptschule* qualifications (completion of compulsory schooling) in second-chance education (general education):
Some lower secondary schools in a particular school district provide the option of an external exam that allows the retaking of exams to obtain Hauptschule qualifications within the framework of the lower secondary school-leaving certificate (i.e. not requiring prior school attendance). The external exam has to be taken in front of an examination committee (usually composed of teachers). Preparation takes place at different locations, at schools or adult learning institutions; however, the exams can also be taken without attending these courses. The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education aims at enabling adults who lack basic skills or who never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education. All courses provided within this framework include a clearing-period at the beginning for the identification of competences and the design of an individual development plan for those who finished compulsory schooling without a lower secondary qualification. Operating since 2012, these courses are free of charge and subject to consistent and nationwide quality guidelines.

- Exams for external candidates (ExternistInnenprüfungen):
  External candidates can sit exams covering single subjects or whole grades in general education as well as in VET schools and colleges. The number of users of this opportunity is not collected centrally but is considered to be very low.

- Upper secondary school leaving exam for external candidates (ExternistInnenreifeprüfung):
  External candidates can sit for the Reifeprüfung exam (upper secondary school leaving exam providing direct access to higher education or Reifeprüfung and Diploma examination) or examinations on individual subjects or school years. Entry to the exams normally requires records of a specific number of completed years of school, or a graduation from a school. Applications for admission to this exam have to be submitted to the regional boards of education, such as the Vienna school board. The examinations take place at the corresponding schools (upper-secondary academic schools or VET colleges) or at specially set-up examination centres. Examination preparation occurs independently, course attendance is not mandatory. Adult-education institutions or private schools offer preparation courses. The candidates can select the date and order of the individual examination modules. The number of users is very low: According to Statistik Austria, in the study year 2012/2013, approximately 0.5% (at universities of applied sciences) respectively 0.35% (at universities) of all newly enrolled students gained access to higher education with this particular examination experience.

Examples from dual VET (legally binding procedure)

- Exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination ("Außerordentlicher Zugang zur Lehrlabschlussprüfung"; dual VET):
  In addition to those who have completed an entire apprenticeship, people without formal training can take the final apprenticeship examination. The only requirement is that they are over 18 years old and have evidence of having acquired the corresponding vocational skills and knowledge in another form; for example, in practice (work experience) or in courses. The applicants must bring the appropriate application to the respective Apprenticeship Centre of the Chamber of Commerce and sit for the written and oral apprenticeship examination. The regulations are the same as for those who have completed an entire apprenticeship: The examination has to take place in front of a board of examiners (examination committee), which, in addition to the chairperson, is made up of legally established stakeholders (social partners: employer and employee representatives). They have to be professional experts in the respective apprenticeship occupations and at least the chairperson has to be an authorized apprenticeship trainer. Adult-education institutions offer

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4 Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at
preparation courses for candidates without formal training. In 2014, 17% of those who passed apprenticeship exams were admitted based on the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination (Dornmayer & Nowak, 2015, 83).

- **Recognition of prior learning for exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination:**

The revised Vocational Training Act of 2011\(^6\) offers the possibility for granting exemption of parts of the practical part of the final apprenticeship examination for candidates in second-chance education who can provide evidence of relevant professional experience.

Two initiatives that are closely linked to obtaining an apprenticeship qualification based on the validation of professional competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning are of particular relevance in Austria. Both include all four stages of a validation process. These regional initiatives – described in more detail in the 2014 Inventory report – are:

- ‘You have skills/competences’ (‘Du kannst was!’),\(^7\)
- ‘Competence with System’ (‘Kompetenz mit System’).\(^8\)

The following regional initiatives that have recently been introduced are (in Vienna) also linked to alternative pathways for obtaining apprenticeship qualifications that include validation:

### ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’\(^9\) and ‘Recognition system Vienna: My chance – I have competences!’\(^10\)

Both measures are part of the ‘Vienna 2020 Qualification Plan’ which is a comprehensive, joint strategy for reducing the percentage of people with a low formal education in Vienna.

#### ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’

The ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’ (Qualifikationspass Wien) was developed through cooperation between the Public Employment Service Vienna and the ‘waff’ (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund). The ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’ is a document supported by a specific data base. It facilitates the systematic identification of qualifications and competences and the documentation of education and training completed, courses attended or certificates received. Non-formally as well as informally acquired competences are also documented. It provides information on which parts of a vocational qualification (apprenticeship) have already been achieved and which parts are still missing. This documentation is the basis for the planning and realisation of further training and should be used for guiding the person towards the apprenticeship examination.

During the pilot phase (end of November 2015 until end of April 2016), a ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’ will be created for 100 people in employment and for 900 unemployed people living in Vienna. The initiative is planned to be rolled out subsequently and during the remaining part of 2016 such a document will be created for a total number of 1,000 people in employment and 2,500 unemployed people.

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\(^6\) BGBl. I - Ausgegeben am 29. Dezember 2011 - Nr. 148

\(^7\) Dzhengozova, 2015; Eichbauer, 2015; Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015; Luomi-Messerer, 2014b; Bauer, 2012; Bauer, 2008a, b.

\(^8\) Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015; Weber et al., 2011; http://www.ams.at/service-arbeitsuchende/angebote-frauen/kompetenz-system


\(^10\) [https://www.wien.gv.at/rk/msg/2015/04/29007.html](https://www.wien.gv.at/rk/msg/2015/04/29007.html)
‘Recognition system Vienna: My chance – I have competences!’

This initiative (Wiener Anerkennungssystem: Meine Chance - ich kann das!) was developed in cooperation with social partners, vocational schools in Vienna, the Public Employment Service Vienna and the ‘waff’ (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund). It also supports the acquisition of an apprenticeship qualification. The apprenticeship examination comprises a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part is waived for candidates who have successfully completed an accredited course or the responsible vocational school attests that the required theoretical knowledge has been achieved. Candidates are supported in the development of an individual portfolio documenting the theoretical knowledge; this is included in the ‘Qualification Pass Vienna’.

During the pilot phase (2015/16), this opportunity is offered in three areas: apprenticeship exam for cook, restaurant professional, and office professional. Candidates have to fulfil the following requirements: they are at least 22 years old, live in Vienna, are in employment, and have at least 18 month work experience in the respective profession.

Examples from CVET and adult education

- Recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts in VET Schools for Adults (legally binding procedure)

Individuals who have already entered the labour market or have completed a course of technical or vocational education have the opportunity to attend evening courses in order to obtain a higher-level VET qualification (same as from Colleges of Higher Vocational Education). Since 2010, the school subjects are implemented in a modular format. This facilitates the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts. Candidates have the right to apply for the assessment of modules instead of attending courses.12

- Access to CVET courses offered by higher education institutions without Reifeprüfung13:

Access can be granted to people who have relevant vocational training and long-term practice based on the regulation of each individual course. The respective institution decides the evidence that must be provided.

- Recognising professional experiences in CVET courses offered by higher education institutions:

Several courses offer opportunities for the recognition of professional experiences. The concrete procedures are usually decided by the head of the individual course and relevant information is usually available on the websites of the higher education institutions. However, there is no overview or further detailed information available. Some examples include:

- QUALI-QIBB: Based on the concepts developed in the EU project VET-CERT14, the training programme ‘certified quality process management for QIBB’15 (zum/zur zertifizierten Qualitätsprozessmanager/in für QIBB) has been piloted (starting in autumn 2013) through cooperation between Austrian Reference Point for Quality

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11 In Austria, there is no clear distinction between qualifications acquired in adult education and other educational sectors. Several preparatory courses are offered in adult education institutions (‘Second Chance Education’) for the purpose of obtaining formal qualifications e.g. for completion of compulsory schooling or for completion of the Higher Education Entrance Examination in an alternative way. Non-formal qualifications that could be considered as CVET are also offered by adult education institutions. Furthermore, there are various validation processes offered in this area that do not lead to a qualification at all (as defined by the NQF).

12 §23a des SchUg-B - Schulunterrichtsgesetz für Berufstätige – ohttps://www.jusline.at/Schulunterrichtsgesetz_fuer_Berufstaetige_(SchUG-B).html

13 This arrangement could also be presented in the section on higher education.


15 Cf. http://www.arqa-vet.at/quali-qibb/quali-qibb/; QIBB is the Austrian quality initiative in VET.
Assurance in VET (ARQA-VET) and the University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria. The training programme comprises 12 ECTS and is based on validation of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) recognition and exemption can be granted by the head of the training programme.

- Postgraduate university course, Bildungs- und Berufsberatung\(^{16}\) (educational and vocational guidance) offered at the Danube University Krems: The course, offered since 2011, aims at certifying the competence level of people with professional experience in educational and vocational guidance but without formally recognised qualifications. Additionally, further training modules are offered for enhancing competences and receiving an academic degree. Awards are issued on two levels, an Academic Expert (60 ECTS; includes the award of the European Career Guidance Certificate) and a Master of Arts (90 ECTS). The assessment methods include an online-test (for assessing competences related to the professional field - 15 ECTS) and an assessment centre (assessing counselling and guidance competences as well as social and self-competences - 30 ECTS) and are developed to assess formally as well as informally acquired knowledge, skills, and competences.

- Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie, wba\(^{17}\)):

  The wba in the sector of adult education is considered a model-approach for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning of adult educators in Austria and has been presented in more detail in previous Inventory reports. The wba certifies and issues degrees to adult educators according to defined standards. A framework curriculum has been developed and people active in adult education can have credits awarded for their acquired competences, skills, and practice periods. The acquired competences are documented in an e-portfolio and missing competences can be acquired at different educational establishments for adults. Certificates are offered on two levels: wba-certificate - certified adult educator (rated at 60 ECTS\(^{18}\)) and wba-diploma - graduate adult educator (rated at 60 ECTS, with specialisation in one of four fields of adult education: teachers/trainers, education managers, counsellors, and librarians). The wba aims to facilitate links between the adult learning sector, CVET, and higher education and to enhance the professionalisation of adult learning (cf. Steiner, 2010; Heilinger, 2012; Bosch et al., 2015). As of January 2015, a new learning outcome-oriented wba-curricula, now called ‘qualification-profiles’ entered into force. They provide detailed insights on required competences for adult educators and put particular emphasis on vocation specific competences. The revision of the curricula also aims at making the wba-certificates suitable for NQF inclusion (Reisinger & Wagner, 2011; Reisinger & Steiner, 2014)\(^{19}\). The wba-certificates can be considered as non-formal qualifications.

**Examples linked to the higher education context**

In Austria, recognition of non-formal and informal learning cannot lead to a complete award of a higher education qualification. However, some higher education institutions or programmes are open to admission on the basis of recognition of prior learning. There are also some arrangements for the validation and recognition of prior learning as a basis for the allocation of credits towards a qualification and/or exemption from some programme requirements; in practice, they are used only to a very limited extent.

In the context of the development of the Austrian validation strategy, the Ministry of Science, Research and Economy has commissioned a study to explore existing arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education as well as their legal basis (AQ Austria, 2014). Additionally, AQ Austria carried out a project to further explore these

\(^{16}\) Cf. [http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/bbb](http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/bbb)

\(^{17}\) Cf. [www.wba.or.at](http://www.wba.or.at); more details are provided in the 2014 Inventory.

\(^{18}\) Until 2013: 30 ECTS.

\(^{19}\) The wba certificates are linked to NQF Corridor 2.
validation opportunities.\textsuperscript{20} In a recently published report, the Austrian Higher Education Conference\textsuperscript{21} (Österreichische Hochschulkonferenz, 2015) recommended the development of framework conditions for supporting access to higher education programmes for ‘non-traditional’ students based on quality assured procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Universities are autonomous institutions but they will take part in the development of validation procedures as laid down, for example, in ‘performance agreements’ concluded between universities and the federal government (BMUKK & BMWF, 2012, 76). ‘Performance agreements’ are agreements between government and individual higher education institutions, which set out specific quantitative or qualitative goals that institutions will seek to achieve in a given time period and which may be (but are not necessarily) linked to institutional funding.

Some examples of existing arrangements include:

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

Traditionally, access to higher education in Austria is granted based on the completion of the school-based upper secondary certificate called ‘Matura’ or ‘Reifeprüfung’ (school-leaving certificates of Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges or Secondary Academic Schools). Non-traditional access is granted based on specific exams as described below. The number of users is rather low: In 2013/14, approximately 6% of all newly enrolled students were admitted based on these specific exams (Unger, 2015, 52).

- Limited Higher Education Entrance Examination (\textit{Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP)}): This exam provides restricted access to post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions. It enables those who have not taken the \textit{Reifeprüfung} exam to study specific subjects or subject areas at these institutions. Admission to the SBP requires applicants, among other things, “to furnish proof of previous knowledge acquired through job-specific programmes in relation to their desired study course. Should they not be able to prove such previous knowledge, they can take additional exams”. The SBP consists of specialist exams taken individually and includes four compulsory and optional subjects. The study course selected will determine the compulsory subjects to be taken by the exam candidate. Adult-learning institutions and universities offer non-compulsory bridge courses for the preparation of the exam.

- General Higher Education Entrance Examination for leavers of the apprenticeship training and VET schools (\textit{Berufsreifeprüfung, BRP}; special VET diploma): This exam provides general access to higher education and grants the right to study in all disciplines at post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions without the \textit{Reifeprüfung} exam. In principle, this exam can be taken without prior attendance at upper secondary schools. The BRP is comprised of four partial exams differentiated by content: German (a five-hour written exam); Mathematics (one four-hour written examination); modern foreign language (in accordance with the candidate’s choice, one five-hour written examination or an oral exam); a specialist area (one five-hour written and oral examination about a topic from the candidate’s occupational field and a relevant oral exam with the objective of dealing with content at a higher level). The exam subject ‘specialist area’ links to previous occupational knowledge. These partial exams can be taken jointly on one date or separately. Adult learning institutions offer specific preparation courses but attendance is not mandatory. Credits for the BRP can be obtained from examinations completed in a different context such as the master craftsperson examination (\textit{Meisterprüfung}), for individual areas or certain language certificates. In a new initiative called ‘Lehre mit Matura’ (apprenticeship with special VET diploma/BRP), during their apprenticeship, apprentices can attend preparation courses for the BRP (\textit{for free}) and can take three

\textsuperscript{20} The final report of this project was not available at the time of writing this Inventory report.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. http://www.hochschulplan.at/?page_id=6#dokumente
of the four parts of the exam. Thus, they can finish both the apprenticeship and the BRP at nearly the same time when they have reached the age of 19.

- Admission to universities of applied sciences without Reifeprüfung and shortening of study period:

Under certain conditions, the universities of applied sciences can admit applicants who have not taken the Reifeprüfung examination or any of the specific exams mentioned above. Several universities of applied sciences offer preparation courses for apprentices or persons in supervisor courses specifically designed for access to study programmes in these institutions. Based on the recognition of prior learning, study periods can also be shortened or exemptions from individual courses can be granted. The respective institution decides the amount of courses or semesters to be accredited and the evidence that must be provided.

Some Austrian higher education institutions have already introduced Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) initiatives. For example, as a common project the University of Graz and the Graz University of Technology established the first Austrian MOOC-platform iMooX. Furthermore, Universities Austria has published criteria and principles for MOOCs (Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz, 2014). However, there seem to be no clear strategy in relation to validation of learning undertaken by means of open educational resources (OER).

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Several types of validation arrangements offered in Austria are closely linked to the labour market (some of them are also closely linked to CVET). Only a few of these arrangements have a legal basis. Some of these arrangements aim at obtaining a non-formal qualification, certificates, or titles, whereas others are linked to various other aims (such as defining salary structures or supporting personnel development in companies). The following table presents examples of different types of validation arrangements before they are described in more detail below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>proof of relevant occupational experience as part of entry requirements for regulated occupations,</td>
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<td>awarding of the professional title engineer (Ingenieur),</td>
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<td>proof of relevant occupational experience as part of collective agreements,</td>
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<td>certification of competences of individuals (personal certification),</td>
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<td>supporting company personnel development,</td>
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<tr>
<td>supporting low-qualified people who are in the process of obtaining a qualification outside of the formal system</td>
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Entry requirements for regulated occupations

Proof of relevant occupational experience is part of the entry requirements for a number of regulated occupations in Austria. In order to be admitted into a regulated trade, a relevant

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22 http://www.uni-graz.at
23 http://www.tugraz.at
24 http://www.imoox.at
26 These trades are regulated through the Gewerbeordnung15 (The Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act) - www.gewerbeordnung.at
A certificate of competence must be produced, which can be achieved through two routes and usually include opportunities for validation and recognition of competences gained through non-formal and informal learning:

- ‘Each of the regulated occupations has its own regulations governing the certificate of competence (trade) or the master’s certificate (craft). The certificate of competence can normally be achieved by completing relevant vocational training, relevant practical training, as well as, if necessary, individual additional training or through a qualifying examination. The only admission criterion for the qualifying examination is that the candidate must be over 18 years of age. The examinations are conducted by the examination offices of the Chamber of Commerce. Since 2004, the examination for the certificate of competence and the master’s certificate consists, with few exceptions, of five modules. The modular training system offers many opportunities for accreditation.

- Through an individual certificate of competence: In this case there is the possibility, using relevant evidence, to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and experiences required to carry out the trade. Assessment takes place by applying to the district administrative authorities. As a rule, the relevant evidence required takes the form of a portfolio (e.g. school reports, certificates, testimonials). If there is only evidence for part of the required skills, the authorities can restrict the performance of the relevant occupation to certain activities’ (Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015, 19-20).

To be able to take the civil engineering examination (Ziviltechnikerprüfung) 27, which is laid down in the Austrian Civil Engineers’ Act (Ziviltechnikergesetz), candidates need to prove that they have a degree from a relevant study programme at a university or university of applied sciences plus three years’ professional experience.

To be able to take the specialist exam for certified financial accountants (Bilanzbuchhalterprüfung), which is laid down in the Austrian Financial Accounting Act (Bilanzbuchhaltungsgesetz), individuals need to prove at least three years of specialist activity in the field of accounting. Credits can be obtained for previous qualifications.

**Awarding of the professional title engineer (Ingenieur)**

It is possible to grant the Ingenieur title that is awarded to graduates of VET colleges of engineering (HTL), based on professional experience of at least three years, which must include ‘specialist subject-oriented activities’. Currently, learning outcomes (standards) are being defined and the procedure for issuing this professional title is being revised.

**Collective Agreements**

Some collective agreements include regulations for the recognition of informally gained competences, e.g. by defining salary structures based on the recognition of an individual’s competence gained through professional experience (e.g. the collective agreement for workers in the non-university-based research sector). Although this form of recognition does not lead to any kind of certification, it does mean that for employers, legally binding regulations on the basis of concrete work profiles can be created in respect of better remuneration. However, it is conceivable that in the future it will be possible to make greater use of the collective agreement grading as ‘evidence of competence’ for possible recognition through portfolio procedures (Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015, 21).

**Certification of competences of individuals (personal certification)**

In most cases, these certificates are valid for a limited period and must therefore be regularly renewed through re-certification. A distinction can be made between certifications with and without a legal base (Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015, 26):

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27 Civil engineers carry out the planning, consultancy and preparation of expert opinions for specific specialist areas (such as construction and surveying, geology, etc.) (cf. Tritscher-Archan 2012, 27).
With legal base: Standardised certificates are in many cases issued based on the standard ÖNORM EN ISO/IEC 17024. This standard describes the general requirements for certifying organizations who have to be accredited by ‘Akkreditierung Austria’ in order to have the right to issue personal certificates. Competences of individuals are certified based on examinations and for the admission to exams, candidates need to provide evidence of relevant competences (acquired in formal, non-formal or informal learning contexts). Personal certification is offered in various fields and plays a particularly important role for welders and quality management personnel.

Without legal base: There is also a range of additional market-based certification, particularly in the areas of information technology (e.g. CISCO, Microsoft), languages (e.g. TOIFL certificates) and project management (SAP).

Supporting company personnel development

In Austria, some companies have procedures in place for identifying and documenting competences of their employees as part of personnel development and planning. In some cases, certificates are also issued. For example, Xerox and REWE use internal databases for documenting further education and training courses attended by their staff members. Additionally, Xerox has created a database that can be used by their employees themselves for documenting their competences. REWE issues certificates for successful participation in in-company training offers. For achieving a certificate, competences acquired in other contexts (non-formal or informal) can be recognised.

Supporting low-qualified people in obtaining a qualification from outside the formal system

There are some initiatives that aim to support people with learning difficulties in obtaining a qualification which is not part of the formal system but can be achieved based on validation. An example from a recently finalised project is presented in the box below.

‘Expanding competences based on competence identification’ (KOMKOM)

The project, initiated in 2012 and finalised in 2015, was financed by the Ministry of Education, and co-financed by the University of Klagenfurt and built on the experiences gained in the EU-funded project ‘NQF Inclusive - Accreditation and Certification of basic vocational education for disadvantaged people through NQF’. KOMKOM was targeted towards low-qualified people who want to achieve a qualification that could be linked to NQF levels 1 and 2. The project developed a competence assessment procedure for a basic qualification for technical/craft-based services to identify existing knowledge, skills and competences of formally low-qualified adults and provide a basis for their individual development through work-related learning. One of the main requirements was that the instrument to be developed could be used by social integration enterprises. It also had to be suitable for the different requirements of these enterprises (different fields for learning and working).

In the first phase, a set of learning outcomes and assessment indicators were defined for an ‘initial technical qualification’ (Technisch-handwerkliche Grundqualifikation). These learning outcomes are related to professional and methodical competences, social and communicative competences and personal competences.

In April 2013, the project was extended by a further 15 months. In this phase, the instrument was

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28 [http://www.bmwfw.gv.at/TechnikUndVermessung/Akkreditierung/Seiten/AkkreditierungsstellePIZ.aspx](http://www.bmwfw.gv.at/TechnikUndVermessung/Akkreditierung/Seiten/AkkreditierungsstellePIZ.aspx)


tested and learning outcomes for an ‘initial technical qualification’ were defined related to NQF level 2 with a particular focus on compatibility and connectivity with training programmes belonging to the formal system. Furthermore, specific software was developed for facilitating a structured identification and recording of competences. A tool for self-evaluation (in ‘easy language’) that can be used with tablets was also developed.

For the future, it is planned to pilot the competence assessment procedure in an ESF-funded project and to define a basic qualification for technical/craft-based services at NQF level 3 in order to design further learning pathways for disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, it is planned to investigate in which other vocational fields the approach could be applied in order to support this target group. KOMKOM received the VITA AWARD 2015 for its innovative approach for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences.  

2.3.1 Skills audits

In Austria, there are no systematic or nationally standardised measures for skills audits in place but there are several initiatives aimed at identifying and analysing an individual’s competences, aptitudes and motivations in order to (re-)define a career pathway. Such procedures are mainly offered in adult learning institutions but are also offered by the Public Employment Service or by freelanced guidance practitioners or coaches. Skills audits are not offered systematically and usually individuals have to pay for these procedures (however, in some cases funding is available). These measures are often oriented towards career planning for specific target groups (cf. Zürcher, 2007; Preißer, 2007; Prokopp & Luomi-Messerer, 2006). Some of the procedures developed in the Austrian Adult Education sector build on established methods, such as the Swiss Qualifications Handbook (CH-Q) System of Managing Competencies; others have developed new methods. Some examples are presented below. There are also some initiatives specifically targeted on refugees or migrants (see section 9.4.3). Some examples of skills audit approaches include:

‘waff-Kompetenzenbilanz’

The ‘waff’ (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund) is a regional initiative that offers skills audits for people with low qualifications as well as for individuals who are not able to benefit from their qualifications in Vienna because they have been obtained outside of Austria. The skills audit is based on the competence model developed by John Erpenbeck and Lutz von Rosenstiel and is part of a coaching process.

Competence profile KOMPAZ

The centre for the recognition of competences at the Adult Education Centre Linz (Volkshochschule Linz) was founded in 2004 (funding organisations are the city of Linz and the Chamber of Labour Upper Austria). The centre offers workshops for identifying non-formally and informally acquired competences (from all areas of life and work). The Swiss Qualifications Handbook (CH-Q) System of Managing Competencies is used for methodological orientation. The results of competence identification are compiled using a competence profile created through the portfolio method (cf. Schildberger, 2010; Reumann, 2012). The CH-Q was established in 2001 in Switzerland with the aim of making it possible for young people and adults to record and document formal, informal and previously acquired skills in a process oriented way and to apply for the validation of these skills. It is conceived as a portfolio and contains comprehensive instructions on how to use the instrument. It is in the form of a folder with a wide variety of forms enabling a clear, systematic, and chronological sorting and filing of evidence, references, and individual remarks and notes. It is intended to encourage and support the process of self-reflection.

33 https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/content/la-vita-e-bella
35 Cf. www.kompetenzzprofil.at
Additionally, there is a possibility to attend a one-day assessment centre carried out by external assessors. Upon successful completion of the workshop series, participants receive the well-known CH-Q certificate for self-competence management (level 1). It is estimated that since its foundation about 1,500 certificates have been awarded by the Adult Education Centre Linz (Mayerl & Schlögl, 2015, 25). Since 2007, the CH-Q model for competence management is also offered by the Adult Education Centre of Burgenland (VHS Burgenland). This initiative is called ‘Wissen, was ich kann – Knowing what I am capable of’.

‘Potential analysis’ offered at WIFI

“Potential analysis” is offered in the framework of the initiative ‘Counselling and guidance for career and enterprises’ at the Economic Promotion Institute (Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut, WIFI) of the Economic Chambers which is established in all Austrian provinces. The three steps of the analysis include:

- an initial consultation meeting (45 to 60 minutes) analyses the actual life situation and personal circumstances, and interests, experiences as well as professional success and plans are addressed;
- a testing procedure (four to five hours) aims to identify strengths and areas for development;
- the subsequent appraisal session (60 to 90 minutes) is dedicated to a process of reflection, taking account of results, as well as identifying concrete training measures.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

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. There are some validation initiatives in this area (e.g. youth and volunteering) and also some initiatives for developing a more coherent approach. In most cases these validation initiatives are not connected to the formal system and there are only a few cooperation activities for recognising competences gained in this sector in formal education programmes.

In the youth sector, some activities regarding formalisation of competences gained and developing a link to the (formal) qualifications system can be observed. The Austrian Youth Strategy (BMWFJ 2013, 53-55) suggests the implementation of a competence balance procedure for the documentation and recognition of informally acquired basic skills and key competences of young people. This approach should facilitate self-evaluation regarding knowledge and competences, personal development, and planning of education and training. Developments started in autumn 2012 and the role-out of the initiative called WIK:I started in 2015.

‘What I can do through informal learning’ - WIK:1

In the youth sector (initiated by the BMWFJ), a new approach was developed in 2012/2013 for documenting and recognising informally gained competences of young people. It was piloted in the second half of 2013 and is offered nationwide since 2015: the WIK/I (Was ich kann durch informelles Lernen / ‘What I can do based on informal learning’) competence portfolio. It is a personal document that is developed in a guided process by collecting and analysing personally significant activities (activities from daily life, such as family life or hobbies, voluntary activities or extra-curricular activities – ‘what I do’) and by identifying and describing competences gained in these activities (‘what I can do’). The description of skills is always linked to specific activities (‘I can

38 BMWFJ & Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke 2013..
39 https://www.bmfj.gv.at/jugend/jugendarbeit/wiki.html
The WIK:I competence portfolio is usually developed in two half-day workshops with eight to twelve participants and two workshop leaders or portfolio tutors. The WIK:I method is a guided self-assessment tool for young people. The WIK:I competence portfolio for young people is a portfolio with various documents and material (such as checklists, questionnaires, posters etc.) developed in workshops and in self-directed work. The three main results include:

- the competence profile (documentation of competences identified);
- the action plan or list of measures to be taken (documentation of next steps, resources and support needed, time schedule);
- the competence certificate that can be used for job applications.

Based on the competence portfolio, an individual WIK:I competence certificate can be issued. The competence certificate is developed together with (and also signed by) a portfolio tutor and is a shortened version of the competence portfolio that can be used for specific job applications. The main aim of this initiative is to support the self-reflection process of young people, to enhance their ability to describe their competences and to explain how they have acquired them.

The initiative aufZAQ developed in Austria and South Tirol since 2003 provides certification for training courses in the area of youth work (non-formal learning). Thus, aufZAQ is a quality assurance initiative for training provision in this field. A certification process for individuals who are active in youth work is also under discussion and a competence framework for youth workers is currently being developed. This competence framework describes competence areas of youth workers and leaders in a coherent way. It is considered to be compatible with the Austrian NQF and should enhance the visibility and comparability of the competences gained as well as of the respective qualifications.

Some youth organisations (such as the ‘Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Austria’, the ‘Catholic Youth Organisation Austria’, or the ‘Austrian Alpine Club’s youth organization’) have already started to develop competence-based descriptions of their courses. In the future, it might be possible to use these competence descriptions in validation processes.

In some cases the competences gained in youth work or in non-formal training courses offered in this context are validated and recognised in other education and training programmes. For example, the following opportunities are presented on the website of the ‘Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Austria’ (PPÖ):

- Courses and activities related to youth and group leaders:
  - Project management certification - Project Management Austria: the documentation of the participation in the training course as well as experiences gained in projects at PPÖ are accepted as contributions to the entry requirements;
  - Institute for Social Pedagogy: Evidence of engagement in activities of PPÖ is recognized as required practical training (internship).

- Courses and activities related to trainers:
  - Certified Management Consultant: training activities in the context of PPÖ are recognised;
  - Initiative Outdoor Activities – CVET university course: evidence of engagement at PPÖ is recognised as required professional experience for entering the course. The ‘woodbadge-course’ is recognised as a self-awareness course.

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40 The office of aufZAQ is based in the office of the Austrian National Youth Council. Cf. www.aufzaq.at. The initiative is provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, the Youth Departments of the Federal States of Austria and the Youth Work Department of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano – South Tyrol.
41 Cf. http://www.aufzaq.at/fachtagung/
Furthermore, participants of projects funded by Erasmus+ Youth in Action and Youth in Action programmes can use the Youthpass.\footnote{Cf. www.jugendinaktion.at/youthpass} The Youthpass is a European recognition tool for non-formal and informal learning in youth work. Participants of these projects can describe what they have done and show what they have learnt. The certificate is based on the eight European key competences for lifelong learning. The Youthpass can only be issued to participants in projects within this EU programme and it is only used to a very limited extent to support validation initiatives (cf. Tanzer, 2011).

Some third-sector institutions have also developed approaches for validating competences gained in voluntary activities. Some examples that are considered good practice in Austria are presented in the box below.

**Austrian Volunteer Passport**

In 2005, the Austrian Volunteer Passport\footnote{Cf. http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/index.php?id=CH0891; see also Löffler, 2015, 107.} was introduced, providing certification of competences and qualifications obtained through volunteering that can be documented and properly demonstrated in the passport. It was developed by the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in cooperation with a personnel-consulting agency. It enables volunteers to use them to complement their job applications.\footnote{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} 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).\footnote{Cf. GHK 2011, 23-24; BMASK 2009, 83-84}

**Competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations**

The competence portfolio for volunteers of a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke\footnote{Cf. www.kompetenz-portfolio.at; see also Löffler, 2015, 108.}) 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; ExpertInnengruppe Lebenslanges Lernen, 2015).

These instruments for documenting competences gained in voluntary activities can also be used by youth organisations. An example of a specific approach related to this sector was developed in the province of Styria.
Since 2010, the Provincial Youth Department in Styria has issued the certificate EHREN.WERT.VOLL (Worth. To be. Cherished) for making competences visible that have been acquired in voluntary activities in children and youth work. The certificate is issued based on the competence portfolio developed by the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Graz.

Specific validation measures are offered to older people. An example, developed in an EU-funded project, is presented in the box below:

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**‘Sustainable learning in the community - Raising awareness of older people's competencies and identifying new opportunities for learning and engagement’ – SLIC-project**

The ‘SLIC competence workshop’ for older people was developed and tested in a Grundtvig project (2007-2010) coordinated by the Austrian Red Cross. The main aims of the project were to develop new, practical ways to help older adults review their past experience and personal skills and to explore new and potential opportunities for learning and community engagement. In the SLIC II project (‘Valuing older people's skills and experience: Training peer facilitators’, 2011-2012), a six-day peer facilitator training course was developed. In 2013, a follow-up project coordinated by the platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke) was initiated and financed by the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. Workshops are currently offered by the member organisations of the platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations, the Caritas Vienna and the Vienna Hilfswerk.

The main parts of the two-day interactive workshop with older learners are:

- To create an individual skills profile from past experience and learning (based on a review of participants’ employment, life experiences, interests and qualification): the skills profile is considered a useful tool to raise self-esteem and a good starting point for volunteering. It helps participants to get to know their own strengths and recognise their value.

- To create a personal action plan based on identifying and giving priority to areas of new interest: participants get acquainted with different areas and organisations offering opportunities for engagement. They are supported to select activities for volunteering work that best fit their individual skills profile and interests. This will be documented in the personal action plan.

A feasibility study was conducted recently to analyse how competences gained in volunteering activities can be made visible in order to create qualifications that could be integrated into the NQF. A pilot study was carried out for the description of learning outcomes for selected courses in the context of volunteering (emergency rescue service and fire brigade). Both studies illustrated examples where it was possible for compatibility between training courses in the volunteering sector and the NQF. The expert group on lifelong learning (ExpertInnengruppe Lebenslanges Lernen, 2015, 39) recently confirmed that the focus should be on the following aims:

- to make visible the engagement in volunteering activities as part of lifelong learning and as area of adult learning and out-of-school youth education;

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49 Cf. portfolio.uni-graz.at
50 Cf. http://www.slic-project.eu/
51 The SLIC II project was chosen as good practice model and received a certificate by the Austrian Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs on February 26, 2013.
to ensure comparability of education and training programmes offered in the area of volunteering with the NQF;

■ to ensure and enhance opportunities for validating competences gained in voluntary work in accordance with the Austrian validation strategy;

■ to integrate competence development as core concept into guidance, coordination, and management of volunteers.

Other areas where validation procedures are offered

■ Competence balance for people who have completed the civilian service: In October 2013, a new regulation for civilian service was put into force. According to this regulation, a ‘standardised competence balance’ has to be issued at the end of a completed civilian service. This is supported by the development of a common document and guidelines for completing it. This document is composed of three sections for recording any training programmes attended during the civilian service, practical activities carried out and knowledge, skills and competences gained. This standardised documentation should facilitate the recognition of competences gained during civilian service as further learning.

3 Links to national qualifications systems

The NQF in Austria was referenced to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) in 2012 (BMUKK & BMWF, 2012). However, only so called ‘reference qualifications’ and ‘Bologna qualifications’ were included in the framework and linked to the EQF. The Austrian NQF is about to enter the operational stage. In early 2016 a highly important milestone has been reached: a legal base for the NQF was adopted by the Austrian parliament and the NQF Act came into force in March 2016.

Several important preparatory steps have been taken recently; they are briefly described below:

The Austrian NQF primarily seeks to map all national qualifications and present them in relation to each other. The NQF should encompass all forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and all sectors of education (including general education, higher education, adult education, further education, and VET). The main objectives include supporting lifelong learning and enabling stronger links between the adult learning sector and the formal education and training system as well as recognising a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning).

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

Draft procedures for allocating qualifications to NQF levels for both Corridor 1 and Corridor 2 have been prepared (Corridor 1 presented in the Austrian Referencing Report and Corridor 2

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55 Cf. Zivildienst-Kompetenzbilanz-Verordnung 2013
56 Austrian male citizens must serve six months in the army or nine months in civilian service.
57 The document and the guidelines are available here: http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/zivildienst/formulare/organisationen.aspx
58 https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/II/I_00999/index.shtml
59 https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2016/PK0148/
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presented in national working groups) and are currently under further development based on the first results obtained from simulation projects in Corridor 1 and Corridor 2. This work is aimed at preparing smooth processes of including qualifications into the NQF that are transparent and practicable for qualifications acquired in the formal and the non-formal learning context. Current discussions related to the validation of informal learning are linked to the Council Recommendation for validation and the development of the national validation strategy and is expected to form the core of the work within Corridor 3.

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

According to the consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy, the validation strategy should be closely linked to the NQF. In the long run, it should be possible to obtain all qualifications included in the NQF also through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Austria currently does not have an explicit national credit transfer system. However, there are credit arrangements in the form of regulations governing the crediting of learning outcomes if learners change between training institutions and/or training levels. Most of these regulations refer to the crediting of learning times and are based on a comparison of curricula or training plans (Tritscher-Archan & Nowak [eds], 2011, 16). European credit transfer systems are only partly being implemented in Austria. The higher education sector has implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) according to the Bologna process. The European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) has not yet been fully implemented. ECVET is currently mainly used as an instrument to support transnational mobility stays/placements. The ECVET strategy launched in 2014 (BMBF, 2014) emphasises that ECVET should not only be used for supporting mobility but also in the national lifelong learning context for facilitating permeability and validation of non-formally and formally acquired competences. ECVET is, for example, expected to enhance possibilities for validating competences acquired in informal learning contexts in view of the apprenticeship or the master craftsperson examination (dual VET) and should provide an umbrella for initiatives and projects, such as ‘YOU have competences!’ and ‘Competence with a system’(cf. section 2.2). In relation to adult education, the strategy focuses on the following aims and activities: exploring possible use of ECVET in non-formal learning contexts, enhancing learning-outcomes-orientation in adult education, enhancing permeability between non-formal and formal learning contexts, offering transparent programmes in adult education, and supporting the implementation of the Recommendation on validation (BMBF, 2014, 8). A pilot project has also been commissioned by the Ministry of Education for exploring the use of ECVET in the non-formal learning context and at the interface between the non-formal and the formal learning contexts (for example, in the adult learning area or in second-chance education) (Tritscher-Archan & Petanowitsch, 2015a,b).

In Austria, modularised structures can only be found currently in some segments of the formal education system. For example, due to the Bologna process, study programmes at
higher education institutions are delivered through a modular scheme. In the non-formal area modularisation is a basic principle. Since 2002, the master craftsperson examination (Meisterprüfung) has been structured into modules, whereas modularisation of apprenticeship training and the creation of modular vocational degrees are only now being implemented. A modular apprenticeship trade has a maximum training period of four years and comprises, for example, a two-year basic module and various other modules lasting 18 months. In addition, a special module can be selected. Since 2010\(^{60}\) the first apprenticeship occupations have been modularised (Lachmayer, 2012, 8). Several technical and vocational schools offer evening classes for people in employment and since autumn 2011 all schools for employees have been switched to a new modular system and thus have a flexible design (Lachmayer, 2012, 32). This gives participants the chance to provide evidence of acquired knowledge by sitting for a module examination without having taken part in lessons.

Based on the amendment to the School Organisation Act (Federal Law Gazette no. 9, 14 February 2012) modularisation will also be introduced in school-based VET: the legal base for a ‘new upper cycle’ will enter into force in the whole of Austria in 2016. ‘This reform aims to step up individual learning support and provide remedial measures to students. By spreading learning content (competence modules) over semesters, students are supported in performing gradually and continually’ (BMBF, 2015, 14).

As mentioned above, in Austria, almost all qualifications (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) can be obtained without participating in the relevant programmes or courses, but not without passing the same exam (as ‘externals’) as required in the regular system (Markowitsch et al. 2007, 5). External exams are theoretically possible in all authorised Austrian education and training institutions for both general education and VET.\(^{61}\) Validation is also used to obtain exemptions and shorten programmes (e.g. there are possibilities for skipping grades for pupils at a general education school or VET college who demonstrate relevant achievements, and degree programmes at universities of applied science can be shortened based on the recognition of professional experience). Validation can be used to gain access to higher education programmes in an alternative way (e.g. non-traditional access paths to regular study programmes and courses at higher education institutions for learners without the upper secondary school leaving exam). This can include higher education entrance examinations, special VET diplomas, admissions to degree programmes at universities of applied science or to continuing higher education courses at higher education institutions based on relevant professional experience. However, these non-traditional pathways are only used to a limited extent.

4 Standards

There are no specific standards in place to support validation. For the acquisition of certificates/qualifications of the formal education system (such as ‘exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam’, the ‘acquisition of lower secondary school qualifications by adults’ or other so called external exams), the same education and training standards used in formal education and training are taken into account in the assessment process. In the case of apprenticeship training, this also includes occupational standards (the occupational profile associated with a qualification). Procedures also exist for acquiring certification without any corresponding qualification in the formal system. Such procedures are often focused on recording individual development processes. Some measures have developed their own standards (for example, the certification offered by the Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie, wba\(^{62}\)) or the competence identification procedure offered by KOMPAZ – see Section 2.3.1), others are more or less oriented towards the procedures and standards used in the formal educational system.

\(^{60}\) Based on the Vocational Training Act (BAG, Berufsausbildungsgesetz) amendment in 2006.

\(^{61}\) Based on the School Education Act and the Regulation for external exams.

\(^{62}\) www.wba.or.at
5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Austria does not have a national institution responsible for validation across all sectors. The working group (linked to action line 10 and measure 10.3 of the LLL: 2020 strategy) which was established in 2013 for the development of the Austrian validation strategy comprises the following institutions:

- relevant federal ministries (Education and Women’s Affairs; Science, Research and Economy; Families and Youth; Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection; Health; Defence and Sports),
- social partner organisations (Chamber of Labour, Chamber of Commerce),
- youth organisations (Austrian Youth Association),
- adult education (Austrian Conference of Adult Education),
- Universities Austria,
- Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences.

The existing validation procedures or measures involve different institutions and actors with different roles and responsibilities (see Section 2). In addition to those listed above, the main stakeholders are:

- educational institutions (secondary academic and VET schools and colleges, universities of applied sciences, universities, adult education institutions),
- apprenticeship offices of the competent economic chambers,
- the Austrian Public Employment Service,
- organisations operating in the third sector.

The previously listed actors divide their responsibilities for the different measures and procedures of validation (cf. ibw 2007, 57pp). The main role of the relevant ministries is preparing and adopting the legal framework conditions for validation procedures. Social partners play a major role in the design of the legal, economic, and social framework conditions in Austria. Educational institutions organise or provide preparatory courses for exams; furthermore, they hold exams or design other procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning in order to issue certificates (based on their respective quality assurance procedures). In the case of exceptional admission to the final exam of the apprenticeship training, apprenticeship offices of the responsible economic chambers offer the exam. The ministries and the social partners are the main actors in providing information, promotion and awareness-raising as well as commissioning evaluations, whilst counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions.

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

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

- the coordinating platform for the LLL: 2020 strategy - the task force that is strategically steering its implementation processes and working groups focusing on specific strategic objectives;
- the NQF steering group and the working group focussing on NQF Corridor 2.
6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Information is provided primarily by those institutions offering the preparation courses for the different measures or by those institutions offering the validation or portfolio processes. In addition, information about the options for validation is shared by the Public Employment Service, responsible ministries, social partners and various advisory centres for different target groups. Relevant information is available on websites - for example:

- The website of the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs provides information about second-chance education (such as acquisition of Hauptschule qualifications by adults, ExternistInnenreifeprüfung, Studienberechtigungsprüfung and Berufsreifeprüfung).
- The website - www.erwachsenenbildung.at - provided by the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, presents comprehensive information on Austrian adult learning and second-chance education offers, including possibilities for the validation and recognition of informally developed competences.
- The website of the Austrian Initiative for Adult 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 offers.
- The website of the Ministry of Science, Research and Economy informs the public about apprenticeship training as well as the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination. This website also gives detailed information about the awarding of the Ingenieur title.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

In Austria, there is no overall information, advice or guidance network related to validation of non-formal or informal learning. The consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy refers to the development of a coherent communication strategy for informing about validation opportunities in different sectors. For example, the development of an easy accessible online-portal is suggested (BMBF, 2015a).

As noted above, counselling and guidance is mainly provided by the relevant educational institutions or by those institutions offering the validation or portfolio processes. In the following box, three initiatives are presented that provide guidance during validation procedures and are considered as good practice in Austria:

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

The competence portfolio is a folder that documents an individual’s skills gained through voluntary work. A two-hour (approximately) discussion on competences with a certified portfolio facilitator (Portfolio Begleiter) makes up the core of the portfolio preparation. The discussion is evaluated jointly.

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63 Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at
64 Cf. http://www.berufsanerkennung.at/
in several steps, and then the participant completes the portfolio.

**Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance**

The sub-project ‘Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance’ is part of the project on Educational Guidance in Vienna (*Bildungsberatung in Wien*). The tools developed and used in the sub-project ‘Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance’ are an adaptation of tools from the ‘competence portfolio for volunteers’ developed by a platform of Austrian Adult Educational Associations (*Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke, RÖBW*) for showing results of informal learning. The tools were developed also using experiences from other projects, for example, competence workshops for elderly people.

The sub-project carried out by the RÖBW seeks to develop, test and implement tools for the work of educational counsellors. It aims at providing tools for identifying informally acquired competences, to make both counsellors and clients aware of informal learning, and to provide them with guidance about existing or missing skills when taking educational decisions. The main interest focuses on using experiences from many years of portfolio-work to develop a tool for educational guidance, especially the experience that a good discussion in the first meeting can lead to very successful results for the client. Thus, the sub-project aims at elaborating smaller formats than whole portfolios and adapting the method of competence balance for educational counselling. The target group comprises clients who have acquired competences in special fields of activity but have no certificates to prove these competences or are not even aware that they possess these competences. The tools that have been developed and tested so far are two ‘mini-formats’ of competence portfolios describing competences in one single field of activity; one is a very rough ‘competence sketch’ that results from the first counselling session, and the other is a ‘competence profile’ that is a more elaborated and better formulated ‘competence sketch’. Guidelines for providing this type of guidance were published in 2014.

**The competence portfolio of the Adult Education Centre Linz**

This contains information about an individual’s core competencies. This is achieved by means of three workshops guided by two trained coaches, an individual’s work at home in between these workshops and a concluding discussion to address any unresolved issues and open questions. In these three steps, a portfolio is created that contains information on the following issues:

- **Career progression** - this shows all of the steps taken in the formal education and training system as well as the steps that have led to the acquisition of skills and competencies through non-formal and informal learning.

- **Analysis of potential** - this is an analysis of individual tasks and activities that an individual has carried out in different roles and stages of their life in view of the skills and competencies used, or gained, to complete them. Individuals also carry out a self-assessment of their competencies.

- **Personal profile** - the abilities highlighted in the stages above are reduced to core competencies. The individual chooses which competencies to select.

Once the portfolio is complete, coaches are responsible for highlighting the individual’s core competencies and for assessing the extent to which the indicators that have been set to define social and communication competencies can be found in an individual’s competence portfolio.

The portfolio method is complemented with an assessment centre where a group of people who have completed the work on the competence portfolio undergo a number of tests, including psychometric tests, mock job interviews, group discussions, role-plays, case studies, and other tasks. Several observers assess the behaviour of the participants against six dimensions of social competence, which are ability to work with others, teamwork, ability to reflect, ability to resolve conflicts, self-awareness, and communication skills.

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

The website, www.erwachsenenbildung.at (provided by the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture), serves as an online-platform for everybody who deals with adult education or further education as a learner, teacher, or someone working in organisation and administration. For example, it provides information on initiatives related to validation of non-formal and informal learning relevant for adult educators and guidance practitioners. \(^{67}\)

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

The platform for Austrian educational guidance practitioners (bib-wiki\(^{68}\)) presents information on guidance related issues, including validation of non-formal and informal learning.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

There is no specific profile of validation practitioners in Austria. Depending on the specific measures, the practitioners are teachers, experienced professionals, and members of the respective authorities, ministries, or social partners. As the assessment is often carried out by a commission, usually members of most of the above-mentioned groups are involved.

The consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy refers to the introduction of measures for professionalization of validation practitioners, including the development of competence profiles and, if necessary, further education programmes (BMBF, 2015a).

7.2 Qualification requirements

As mentioned above, the development of competence profiles for validation practitioners will be part of the Austrian validation strategy. Based on current discussions, it can be expected that there will be no strict regulations in terms of specific qualifications required.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

It is expected that specific training programmes will be offered in relation to the competence profile that will be developed in the future and in order to apply the quality standards for validation that are also planned.

There is no specific training for validation practitioners in the context of external examinations (formal system). Since the same assessment procedures are used, their professional training and experience is considered sufficient. For example, teachers at VET schools and colleges must have a degree from a university or from a university college of teacher education; all teachers at VET schools and colleges – with the exception of teachers for general education subjects – are obliged to furnish proof of completion of several years of professional experience in the world of business.

The practitioners of portfolio methods are trainers at adult-education institutes. They have to prove expertise in the field of adult education and undergo the respective special training. For example, the platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke) offers a training course that leads to a certificate. Portfolio tutors are adult


\(^{68}\) Cf. http://www.bibwiki.at
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education trainers, working on a voluntary or professional basis, who have gained the certificate in ‘Development of competence and portfolio tutoring’. To gain the certificate, the tutor-to-be needs to have participated successfully in four training modules, have developed an extensive competence portfolio for themselves and have created an additional five practice portfolios. During this process they are professionally supported, the timeframe is flexible. Portfolio tutors have both methodological knowledge (of how to create a competence portfolio and the ability to pass on information about it) and contextual knowledge (knowledge about volunteering and associated human resources policy).

8 Quality assurance

In Austria, different ministries and sections within these ministries are responsible for the different qualifications in the formal system and also for the relevant quality assurance activities. Manifold and partly systematic quality efforts exist in the different segments of the Austrian qualifications system. Some are directly in line with European principles for quality assurance. Since many procedures and initiatives for validating non-formally or informally acquired competences belong to the formal education system and/or aim at a qualification equivalent to one of the formal systems, the same quality assurance activities as in the formal system are relevant. Due to the wide distribution of responsibilities across various ministries, there is no overall quality assurance framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, the consultation document for the development of the Austrian validation strategy refers to the introduction of measures for ensuring the quality of validation arrangements (BMBF, 2015a). Some examples of current quality assurance arrangements that are relevant for the validation opportunities in the respective sectors are presented below:

QA in GE and VET schools

Legal responsibility for the type, content of curricula and quality assurance of secondary academic schools and VET schools and colleges rests with the Ministry for Education and Women’s Affairs and is regulated in the School Organisation Act. The most important quality initiatives are set out below (Tritscher-Archan, 2010, 61pp):

- SQA and Q.I.S.: Within the framework of the national Q.I.S.-project (Quality in Schools (Q.I.S.) project, which was launched in 1999, the main aim consisted in stimulating and encouraging schools to question their own quality, steer it and develop it further. Q.I.S. is a service offered at schools with material, information, experience exchange, discussion, and presentation options in a virtual quality network. In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs launched the initiative ‘SQA – Schulqualität Allgemeinbildung’ (school quality in general education) which has become statutory in the school year 2013/2014. SQA is aimed at ensuring the best learning conditions for school pupils through improving teaching quality and quality assurance mechanisms. Between 2012 and 2016, the focus is on directing teaching and learning towards an increasingly individualised and competence-based approach. SQA provides instruments and tools for planning and implementation.

- QIBB: Quality development efforts in VET schools and colleges have been supported by the VET Quality Initiative (QIBB) since 2005/2006. QIBB is the first Austrian initiative in which all levels of the school-based VET system – schools as well as school inspection and administration – are systematically involved. Despite its voluntary nature, the degree of implementation regarding internal elements of quality development such as the creation of the mission statement and school programme as well as self-evaluation is now relatively high in the full-time school sector. In 2007, the Austrian Reference Point for Quality

69 Cf. www.qis.at
70 http://www.sqa.at/
71 Cf. www.qibb.at
Assurance in Vocational Education and Training\textsuperscript{72} (ARQA-VET) was set up and is used as a contact point and service facility for all questions associated with the theme of quality in VET. It supports the General Directorate II for Vocational Education and Training of the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs in the implementation of QIBB and the national and European activities of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA-VET).

- Introduction of educational standards: Internal evaluation and quality management are accompanied by the introduction of educational standards in the main subjects and testing procedures at schools that are based on these standards. This initiative was launched in 2002 in the general education sector, with a binding introduction of educational standards at primary school and lower secondary level effected on a legal basis starting January 2009. The development of educational standards for the VET sector was started some time later in 2004/2005.\textsuperscript{73}

- Reforming *Matura*: The reform of the higher education entrance examination (*Matura or Reifeprüfung*) is also regarded as a way of enhancing quality\textsuperscript{74}. From the 2014/2015 school year, the standardised, competence-oriented Reiferprüfung exam was introduced, with which uniform high quality standards will be set for all graduates. The new competence-oriented form of the Reife- und Diplomprüfung examination for VET colleges was introduced in the 2015/2016 academic year. The new regulations also apply to the external exams (*ExteristInnenreifeprüfung* and the *Berufsreifeprüfung*) and are supposed to provide a higher degree of standardisation.

**QA in higher education**

In higher education, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria\textsuperscript{75}) was established in 2012 as part of a fundamental reorganisation of the system of external quality assurance in Austria. The legal basis for establishing AQ Austria is the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education that entered into force on 1 March 2012.

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

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

**QA in adult education**

Preparatory courses for taking external exams, the *Berufsreifeprüfung* or the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* as well as procedures for identifying and recording competences (competence audits, portfolios) are often offered at adult education providers. Various approaches for quality assurance have been implemented in the field of adult education. For example, general international quality assurance standards are used as well as specific criteria and processes (developed at province levels or by individual providers). Many training providers have already undergone quality assurance tests (e.g. according to

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. www.arqa-vet.at
\textsuperscript{73} Cf. http://www.bildungsstandards.berufsbildendeschulen.at/
\textsuperscript{74} Cf. http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.xml
ISO Standards or the European Foundation for Quality Management - EFQM). Some associations have developed their own quality assurance measures and also specific quality labels have been developed. An overall framework of quality for Adult Education in Austria started in January 2011. The Ö-Cert is a quality label that is attuned to adult education providers and is developed and recognised nationwide in Austria. It aims at mutual recognition of quality measures by the regional governments and the Federal Ministry for Education and Women’s Affairs to provide transparency for customers/learners and to improve quality of adult education, including procedures of recognition of non-formal and informal learning provided by these institutions.

QA for training courses offered in the area of youth work

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

Since there is so far no overall validation framework or quality assurance framework for validation, only some examples of quality assurance can be presented here:

The external exams at formal education institutions employ the same quality assurance procedures as for traditional exams (for example, they are also under the supervision of the relevant educational authorities; the assessment methods and procedures as well as the assessors are the same as in the formal pathway).

For example, to obtain the Hauptschule qualification in second-chance education, an external exam has to be observed by an examination committee at a lower secondary school in the respective school district. External candidates can sit for the Reifeprüfung exam (upper secondary school leaving exam providing direct access to higher education - ExternistInnenreifeprüfung) at the corresponding schools (upper-secondary academic schools or VET colleges) or at especially set-up examination centres.

Recognition of previous vocational knowledge and skills for the exceptional admission to the apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) is regulated – similarly to the procedure for admission to the regular LAP – through the Vocational Training Act (Berufsausbildungsgesetz) and hence has a legally binding framework at the national level. The exam must be overseen by exam committees, which must be set up by the apprenticeship offices and are composed of professional experts. In addition, the apprenticeship offices of the economic chambers are integrated into the quality assurance process as a major institutional authority.

Both the Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP) and the Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP) are regulated by law, via the Federal Berufsreifeprüfung Act (Bundesgesetz über die Berufsreifeprüfung), and the Higher Education Entrance Act (Studienberechtigungsgesetz) and the School Organisation Act (Schulorganisationsgesetz). These laws also contain elements of quality assurance (such as the regulation of the recognition of programmes serving as preparation for the BRP). The competent ministry, in accordance with legal regulations for university programmes, recognises bridging courses preparing for the SBP at universities. Before recognising the equivalence of bridging courses organised by adult learning institutions, two specialist boards hold hearings to examine if the case has met relevant requirements, as stipulated by the UniStG. Adult learning institutions offering bridging courses are obliged to submit an annual report that provides information about the number of previous qualifications of programme participants.

No overall framework for evaluation of the arrangements exists for the evaluation of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Evaluation is carried out in different ways and with different frequency (if at all) for the different measures, projects, or initiatives.

76 Cf. http://oe-cert.at
77 Cf. www.aufzaq.at
studies are usually carried out by independent experts or by researchers from universities and are usually commissioned by the institution providing the validation measure or by the responsible ministry. For example, studies on the *Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP)*, preparatory courses, graduates and their positions in the labour market are commissioned by the responsible ministry (Klimmer et al. 1999; 2006; 2009).


9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

There is no national funding framework for validation in Austria. The funding for validation activities depends on the respective measure, procedure, or project. For example, the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs and the Public Employment Service of Austria support those who are preparing for the Hauptschulabschluss, the Studienberechtigungsprüfung or the Berufsreifeprüfung. Co-financing is provided by the ESF. Those preparing for the Studienberechtigungsprüfung can find a range of subsidies. In Vienna, for example, there is the possibility of partial course cost reimbursement through the Educational Account of the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF) or the Vienna Chamber of Labour grants an educational voucher in order to bridge courses for parents on maternity leave (ibw, 2007, 61). In several cases, the Public Employment Service Austria also bears the costs. The development of new methods in pilot projects and research is or has been financed in many cases through EU initiatives, such as the ESF funded EQUAL projects, Socrates, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, Lifelong Learning or Erasmus+ projects. Frequently, these projects are then co-financed by the responsible ministries and/or social partner organisations. Depending on who maintains or implements the project or measure, the municipal and provincial governments also provide support and ministries and social partner institutions may set up their own initiatives.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall data on costs to individuals is available. The direct and indirect costs differ between the different measures and initiatives. There are various options for subsidies related to second chance education or unemployed people. For example, in some provinces, people can receive financial support from the authorities, Chambers of Labour or Chambers of Commerce. Cost-free opportunities are available at schools for employed individuals and are offered in the framework of the initiative Lehre mit Matura. Since 2012, the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education has provided funding for courses targeted towards adults who lack basic skills or did not graduate from a lower secondary school. In addition to the training of the various subjects, these programmes include a clearing-period at the beginning for the identification of competences and the design of an individual development plan. Participation in these programmes is free of charge for learners. Funding is based on success in order to contribute to the reduction of the drop out-rate. The total costs are only then refunded to the institutions if participants achieve their graduation successfully.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Hardly any data has been published on validation’s impact on individuals. Evaluation studies addressing this issue are only (publicly) available for certain measures. Some examples are presented below:

In a dissertation (Prokopp, 2009), results of interviews with people responsible for two initiatives that involved validating non-formal and informal learning are presented and which provided partial feedback from participants. An academic secondary school for adults in the city of Salzburg has practiced validation of non-formal and informal learning since establishing a modular course system in 2000. Thus, students can have their prior learning accredited and accordingly start courses at various module levels. Students’ feedback on that reform was said to be positive; the number of dropouts has been reduced. In the province of Burgenland, the regional Volkshochschule (adult education centre) offered a programme for validation of non-formal and informal learning with development of personal

78 Cf. www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at
portfolios for women who want to return to the labour market after an absence from working (mostly because of raising children). After the programme, these women reported that they had learned to recognise and describe their competences acquired non-formally or informally and that this had been of great help when applying for a job. Two thirds of the 116 participants had been able to find a job subsequent to the programme.

An evaluation of the competence profile of KOMPAZ showed that 63% of people who were unemployed before participating in the programme were successful in finding a job after completion. They were more self-confident, developed their learning strategies, and could actively use their informally acquired knowledge and competences for improved profiling within a working context. In general, people with higher formal qualifications stated that they got more benefits out of the portfolio process than those with lower formal qualifications; this included finding appropriate further education useful for the labour market (Auer et al. 2007).

Process-accompanying evaluation has been carried out for the Weiterbildungsakademie (wba) (Brünner et al. 2012). In general, the evaluation shows very positive results and high satisfaction of participants. Participants highlight the importance of the guidance and support provided by wba-employees. Critical remarks are related to the fact that, although the wba-certificates and -diplomas are of higher qualifying, they do not necessarily lead to better opportunities for career advancement or to higher salaries (Reisinger & Steiner 2014, 7). Furthermore, results of an online-survey among wba candidates and graduates suggest that further efforts need to be taken in order to raise awareness and to achieve broader recognition of the wba-certificates and diplomas among employers in adult education (Steiner et al. 2015, 60).

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall data on flows of beneficiaries is available. Specific figures related to the overall situation are not available but since new validation initiatives have been introduced during the last years (e.g. for low-qualified people or refugees), it can be assumed that the number of participants has increased accordingly.

Some examples of initiatives are presented below for which data is centrally collected and where a slightly increased number of successful participants (compared to the 2014 Inventory) can be observed:

- Apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) in second-chance education (exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination): In 2014, 8,099 candidates successfully passed the apprenticeship-leave exam (17% of all passed exams) (Dornmayer & Nowak, 2015, 83). In 2012, the number was slightly lower: 6,982 (15%) (Dornmayer & Nowak, 2013, 75).

- Non-traditional students in higher education programmes: In 2013/14, approximately 6% of all newly enrolled students were admitted based on a Berufsreife- (BRP) or Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP) (9% at universities of applied science and 4% at universities). In the previous years, the share of newly enrolled students with this background was 5% (Unger, 2015, 52).

9.4.2 Validation users

Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall data on flows of beneficiaries or their profile is available.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

Some initiatives are specifically targeted towards migrants (but migrants are also addressed in initiatives related to low-qualified people). Some examples of current initiatives include:
■ CH-Q method offered at the Migrare - Centre for Migrants in Upper Austria. The Migrare - Centre for Migrants in Upper Austria offers competence profiles using the CH-Q method (since 2008). Migrare works on behalf of the Public Employment Service of Upper Austria. Migrants registered there can take part in the programme (cf. Kovacs, 2010).

■ ‘PolePosition – Startklar für den Arbeitsmarkt’: The project was developed by the BFI Tiro and aims to recognize refugees and people granted subsidiary protection in Tyrol. The aim of the project is to enhance their language skills and vocational competences. Participants can acquire practice-relevant competences to support labour market entry. The training measures are developed based on regional labour market needs. During internships in enterprises, candidates that have already acquired competences are identified and documented based on the training profile of the respective apprenticeship qualification. Participants receive a ‘validation certificate’.

■ ‘Competence check’: the Public Employment Service in Vienna has launched a pilot project called Kompetenzencheck (competence check) that aims to promote their fast integration into the labour market. The focus is on helping them to recognise their existing qualifications, competences, aptitudes and professional experiences and/or desired qualifications. In order to identify and validate participants’ competences, competence tests were conducted in real work places (enterprises). The competence check has been designed as a course of ten hours. It lasts for five weeks and includes one-on-one coaching. Language support is currently provided in Arabic, Farsi, Russian and French. This initiative was piloted in 2015 and should be rolled out nationwide in 2016.

■ Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications including validation of professional experience: in 2012, the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Labour Social Affairs and Consumer Protection launched an information initiative for professional recognition (Berufsanerkennung) targeted at migrants. A website provides information about the acceptance and recognition of vocational qualifications or professional experience acquired in other countries and counselling is offered in specific information centres (which are called ‘AST’). At the AST in Vienna, for example, a competence audit process is used that is specifically adapted to this target group. The aim of the audit is to help individuals to think about and clearly identify their own competences. The competence audit is a structured individualized coaching procedure that combines the coaching phase with the completion of independent tasks. The whole process is intended to take about nine hours’ (Mayerl & Schlögel, 2015, 22).

10 Validation methods

Many procedures and initiatives for validating non-formally or informally acquired knowledge belong to the formal education system and/or aim at a formal education and training qualification (external examinations). Therefore, the assessment methods used in this context are usually the same as those used in the formal system. Relevant exams are also held at education and training institutions authorised by law.

The most commonly used methods in the context of external examinations are written tests and oral exams. The apprenticeship-leave exam – also in the case of exceptional admission
to the exam – consists of a practical and a theoretical examination. The examinees must furnish evidence of their practical know-how and job-related skills. This exam tests whether the apprentice has acquired the practical skills and qualifications relevant to his or her occupation and whether he or she is able to perform properly the tasks that are vital to the apprenticeship trade.

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

Another example is the competence portfolio presented in the box below:

**Competence portfolio of the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer (University of Graz)**

Based on the competence portfolio model developed by the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer, the University since 2008 offers workshops and individual coaching (primarily for students, but for other groups as well) where participants learn to identify, reflect on and communicate their skills and competences. Competence portfolio coaches support workshop participants in reconstructing their daily activities and reflecting on the different learning opportunities they provide. They also help individuals to document and formulate the competences acquired in these environments and to describe the transfer of competences between the environments. The model focuses on self-reflection and awareness of one's own skills and competences.

The competence portfolio is used for various target groups and occupational fields and has been applied by different institutions such as the Higher vocational and general education schools. Examples include: the Academic gymnasium in Graz provided a full-day workshop in the course ‘careers guidance’ for pupils between 16-18 years old; the Career Service Centre at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz (i.e. the Centre has provided regular workshops for students and graduates of the university since the school year 2010/2011), the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (for example, the University has held a guest lecture, introducing the model to teachers of health professionals), the Federal State Government of Styria (more details are available in section 2.5.2), and the Department of Business Education and Development at the University of Graz, which has anchored the competence portfolio in the curricula of its Master's programme in Business Education.

The fact that many methods of recognition relate to the formal system is an advantage because the certificates achieve a high level of acceptance in the labour market. The fact that preparation courses for these exams normally take place at adult education institutes appears to lower the barriers for people who might have negative experiences of more formal education and training.

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

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83 Cf. portfolio.uni-graz.at ; http://www.observal-net.eu/content/austria-case-study-2013-competence-portfolio-model-university-graz
acquired through non-formal and informal learning requires the development of standardised and comparable descriptions.
11 References

11.1 References


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Country report Austria
2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).