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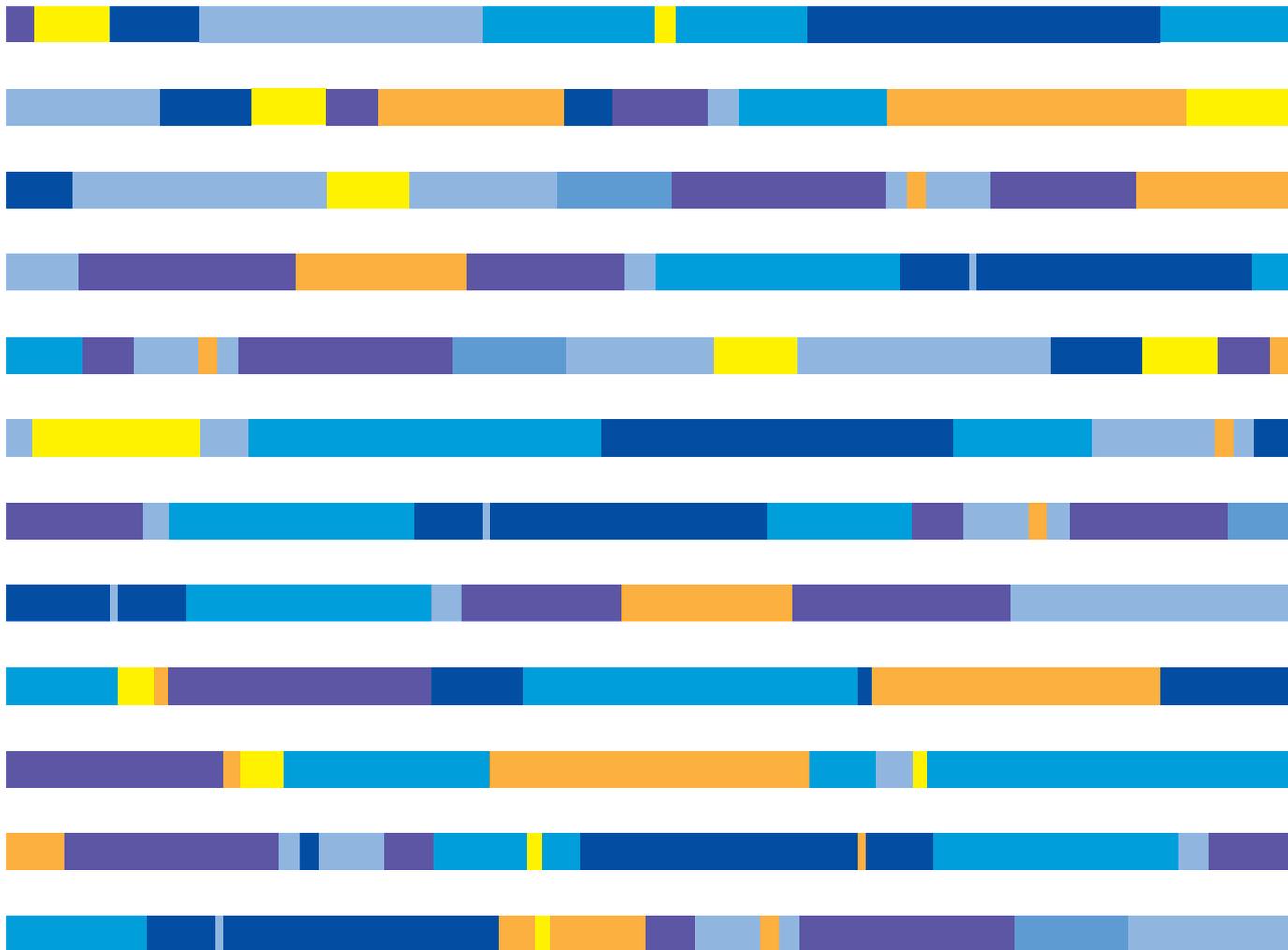
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **GERMANY**

Author: Claudia Ball



Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Claudia Ball, as part of the 2018 update to the European Inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Manuel Souto-Otero, Ilona Murphy, Gabor Endrodi, David Scott and Andreea Hrimiuc) under the supervision of a steering committee formed by the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Godelieve Van-Den Brande; Martina Ni Cheallaigh and Corinna Liersch), Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba and Jens Bjornavold), and the ETF (Michael Graham and Kersti Raudsepp).

The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework advisory group (EQF AG) members for Germany as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under DG EMPL Implementing Framework Contract EAC/47/2014-3: VC 2017/0692

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The publication has neither been edited nor proof-read by Cedefop's editing service.

Please cite this publication as:

Ball, C. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Germany*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Germany.pdf

1 Introduction

Since 2012, Germany has started and further developed numerous initiatives and measures to improve the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The numerous initiatives have been summarized and strategically developed according to the identified needs in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation has an eye on different target groups, covers all elements of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) and systematically develops prior achievements.

In accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the instrument of *Qualifikationsanalyse* (qualification analysis) was developed to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications of foreign workers. As an instrument for the validation of formally gained competences in the absence of the related proof, it also paves the way for the assessment of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning. The instrument was developed in various nationally funded projects and is methodologically oriented towards high quality standards. The instrument is currently further developed in *ValiKom* and implemented for different target groups such as formally low-skilled adults. As the goal to support low-skilled adults in the validation of non-formal and informal learning is highly welcome to make their learning outcomes visible, the legal basis and financial instruments have to be clarified and set up to ensure its long-term accessibility and impact.

Since the 2016 Inventory, measures of *Qualifikationsanalyse* have been implemented in practice and combined with self-assessment and further developed in the R&D project *ValiKom at pilot stage*. All institutions affected (e.g. Federal Ministry of Education and Research, German Confederation of Skilled Crafts, Chambers of Crafts as well as Chambers of Industry and Commerce) have jointly reflected on its outcomes.

Although Germany has achieved a lot since 2012, the validation measures are often designed for the specific educational sector, e.g. Higher Education or Secondary vocational education, but also for different trades and occupations such as skilled crafts and care work, and cannot easily be combined or transferred. Nevertheless, the following country report describes the achievements in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany and identifies the potential for further development.

In order to highlight the achievements in validation of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, the federal system must be understood. Germany's federal structure determines shared competences of the *Bund* (German federation) and the *Länder* (federal states) in education and training. The *Grundgesetz* (Basic Constitutional Law of the Federal Republic of Germany) stipulates that primary responsibility for legislation and administration in education rests with the *Länder*. The scope of the Federal Government's responsibilities in the field of education is also defined in the *Grundgesetz*, according to which the *Bund* bears responsibility for certain domains of education. Due to that federal structure of varying competences for education, a common legal framework and a standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level and across education sectors does not exist in Germany and it is therefore difficult to implement compared to other countries.

Within **vocational education and training** there are mainly three instruments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in place or currently explored:

- External Students' Examination,

Since the introduction of the Vocational Training Act in 1969, the *Externenprüfung* (External Students' Examination) provides a legally based instrument for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by giving access to the regular (final) examination within the formal VET system without prior formal training.

- External Assessment through Qualifikationsanalyse (qualification analysis)

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG, *Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*) was introduced in 2012. It is meant to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications acquired abroad. This Act considers the professional experience as a central aspect of an individual's competence profile and vocational qualifications and its openness to validation of non-certified learning, albeit only for holders of a formal foreign qualification. If the formal proof cannot be presented by the applicant through no fault of his own during this examination of the equivalence of foreign degrees with the German reference occupation, it is possible to carry out a Qualifikationsanalyse (qualification analysis) in order to be able to assess the applicant's competences.

- Self-assessment and external assessment (qualification analysis) of professional competences in the project *ValiKom*.

Based on the qualification analysis approach the pilot project *ValiKom* (11/2015-10/2018) has developed a joint procedure to assess and validate occupational skills and competences acquired outside the formal education system. It applies self-assessment and external assessment in order to document prior learning and examine the equivalence of the competences compared to formal regulated professions. However, it does not yet have a legal base.

In **Higher Education** (HE), decisions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK) regarding crediting qualifications acquired at work are implemented by federal state laws. Within this legal framework, validation initiatives primarily take place at university level and programme level in examination boards. There are a number of elaborated validation instruments in Higher Education. Generally, validation of non-formal and informal learning is taking place in all education sectors (vocational education, adult education, continuing vocational education and higher education), which have different, but tailor-made approaches to validation in place. Moreover, validation of non-formal and informal learning supports the transition from one education sector to another, for example from school to VET or from VET to higher education.

Since the country report from 2016, further bottom-up and top-down approaches have complemented each other in the formal education system, which already contains elements of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. These approaches are:

1. The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) including its *Qualifikationsanalyse* (qualification analysis) component has been further pushed forward through the project Prototyping Transfer focussing on the facilitation of a Germany-wide implementation of the qualification analysis approach and the further development of supporting tools and structures. Starting from this the *ValiKom* project has transferred the qualification analysis into an approach focussing on the validation of non- and informally gained competences in a specific profession. The project developed tools specifically addressing the requirements of validating non- and informal learning and is currently in its final phase.
2. In addition to these operational approaches, there have been further initiatives and (research) projects concluded on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)

has concluded a research project on the implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2015, 2018). Furthermore, the German Public Employment Service (PES) in cooperation with Bertelsmann Stiftung started a large-scale ICT-based assessment project in order to develop and implement digital tests for the assessment of competences gained at work in the *MySKILLS* project. So far, tests for eight professions have been completed and are available for use within placement processes.

3. The External students' examination as well as measures described with regard to higher education and validation in the previous Inventory updates (such as in the 2010, 2014 and 2016 country reports), remain in operation. Instruments such as the ProfilPASS in Adult Education are still used in order to document and visualize competencies acquired during the life cycle.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Validation in Germany is still widely understood as an overall process that includes four stages (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), as well as one step within the validation processes inbetween assessment and certification (Annen & Bretschneider, 2014). However, in practice, the understanding of validation still differs across education sectors and thus leads to the need for further discussion and confidence building in order to develop mutual understanding and trust as a basis for next steps related to validation.

Overall, validation in Germany can still be described as a colourful mosaic of local, regional, sectoral and national approaches and initiatives which also reflects the allocation of responsibilities within the complex German educational system. Experts therefore claim that a national validation system also intended in the Council's Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012) has not yet become apparent in Germany, although it is discussed in the framework of the European education policy debate (Dehnbostel, 2015). A comprehensive system of recognition that defines uniform procedures and includes a legal basis as well as regulations on financing services and counselling does not yet exist (Velten & Herdin, 2016). However, a comprehensive system with uniform procedures that covers General Education, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and Adult Education is a significant challenge due to the German federal structure.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is taking place within all education sectors in Germany with all sectors having different approaches in place. In 2013, a working group was convened by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) on 'validation of non-formal and informal learning' in order to exploit expert knowledge from policy, practice, science and social partners to work on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Council from 2012. All relevant stakeholders affected by the topic of recommendations joined the group that aimed to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning on a political level and in practice through a joint approach and to coordinate the single initiatives in a better way (BMBF, 2018). The working group compiled an inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning and looked at the validation systems of the Netherlands and Switzerland. Strategically the members agreed that future instruments for validation and certification would need to be oriented on the existing

standards of the education system to facilitate the transition into the formal education system and to avoid a parallel system.

Consequently, the BMBF has initiated the ValiKom project to develop and implement a standardized validation procedure in the VET-sector. ValiKom targets persons who acquired vocational skills but do not have the formal proof for those in terms of a certificate. Therefore, ValiKom especially supports formally low-skilled adults in their upskilling pathways and seeks to integrate them into the formal education system. As ValiKom has reached an advanced stage since 2016, it is perceived as a useful supplement for both main validation instruments in vocational education: *Externenprüfung* and Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) (BMBF, 2018). The BMBF is interested in a follow-up project to expand the procedure for further occupations and to integrate more chambers. Furthermore, questions of financing, legal basis and necessary forms of support such as counselling have to be clarified.

The Coalition Agreement between the political parties CDU, CSU and SPD (CDU, CSU & SPD, 2018) shows the intention to foster qualified employment of persons with foreign professional qualification and refers to the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG). The accompanying information, consulting and support remain important and shall be further developed as well as the financial support for the recognition (recognition grant). In contrast to the last years (2014-2018) where the policy explicitly promoted the development and testing of methods for the recognition of informal learning in the context of vocational education and training in general, the issue of validation is mentioned only in relation to the validation of competences acquired abroad.

The *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, BIBB) further ran the project *Einführung von Verfahren zur Validierung nichtformalen und informellen Lernens – Anforderungen und Handlungsoptionen* (Implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – requirements and possible courses of action). This project did the following: a) identified quality indicators for validation methods; b) analysed existing validation options in Germany based on the identified indicators; c) developed scenarios for the different variations of possible validation methods; and, d) evaluated those scenarios regarding their potential realisation.

The project developed six scenarios for the validation of competences gained in non-formal and informal learning. Three scenarios describe validation procedures that include a legally recognised certification referring to qualifications, whereas the other three scenarios deal with the identification and documentation of competences. These scenarios could be introduced complementary to the first three or used independently (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2018). By using different online questionnaires experts of validation were asked to estimate the potential for realisation, the desirability of the individual scenario and the effects on the educational system. The experts mainly do not see a high potential for realisation and sometimes even deny the individual scenario such as validation of non-formal and informal learning through the reference to Qualification Frameworks. Instead they confirm a combination of the two scenarios: validation through partial qualifications and a comprehensive competence assessment. It is also stressed by the results, that 88% of the experts agree that validation procedures should measure comprehensively the competences of persons and should result in a documentation of full or partial equivalence (referring to a qualification profile) (86%). While the experts agree that the main goal of a validation procedure should be to provide useful information for actors on the labour market

(72%) only a slight majority of 51% supports the certification of non-formal and informal learning as full formal qualifications (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2018).

In 2015, expert monitoring was implemented by the BIBB and *Bertelsmann Stiftung* regarding expert opinion on opportunities and limitations of validation methods for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The monitoring (Velten & Herdin, 2016) stressed the need for a stronger appreciation (valuing) of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. 70% of the experts support a nation-wide validation system. Current validation opportunities such as *Externenprüfung* are considered as insufficient by the experts. They support the variety of validation opportunities such as competence profiles, access to examinations and assignment of partial qualifications whereas the award of full formal qualifications is seen as controversial. Anyway, the validation of non-formal and informal learning needs a reference frame to evaluate the learning outcomes, here the formal educational system seems suitable to them. Asked about the support system for a better recognition the experts point out that accessible counselling services and qualified personnel are essential to guide the learners through the whole validation process.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Validation of non-formal learning has been considered to be a very important topic in Germany because the majority of adult education and continuing education belongs to the non-formal learning sector (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2018). Despite the cooperative government approach of the initial vocational education in Germany the non-formal sector is mostly governed by market rules. There are on the one hand many institutions offering different types of certificates and on the other hand the companies decide to what extent they recognise the prior learning of employees and applicants.

As discussed in the previous Country Updates, legislative provisions are in place for validation in the field of **vocational education and training**. This includes the External students' examination under § 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and § 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (HwO). It targets people with substantial vocational experience (generally 1.5 times as many years of practice as the duration of the regular VET-programme) and legitimises admission to the final examination in a recognised occupation that normally requires formal training in the dual system. Therefore, the External students' examination, if a successful exam, leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regularly acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade.

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) – being in place since 2012 – is also of major relevance here. It primarily serves the assurance of skilled labour as well as the integration of migrants in Germany. All persons possessing a qualification acquired in a foreign country have a legal right to have the equivalence of this qualification verified by a competent body within three months based on this law. The Act regulates around 450 occupations: These include the 350 training occupations in the dual system, that are regulated in the BBiG and the Crafts Code. Besides the occupations of the dual system the Act applies at federal level for about 40 regulated professions (Articles 3 to 61 of the Recognition Act, e.g. doctors, nurses) and 41 regulated master trades (BMBF 2012). However, it does not lead to the same certificate as the formal learning pathway, but it leads to the same rights of use in regulated professions such as nurses in the healthcare sector (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014). Engelmann & Müller-Wacker (2014) claim that a shift of paradigm was started by the Recognition Act by considering professional experience as a

central aspect of an individual's competence profile and vocational qualifications (BQFG §3, Abs. 1). However, experiences on how this is applied in practice, are different. Experts state that, in most cases, professional experience showed by validation candidates is sufficient in order to close gaps within formal education pathways. Engelmann & Müller-Wacker (2014) see a need for more coherence in the validation of non-formal and informal learning through professional experience.

This Act also entails in § 14 other procedures for the determination of equivalence when no proof for prior learning can be provided, which opens up opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This part intends to give access to equivalence assessments for professionals who cannot provide relevant documents on their foreign formal qualifications or their further vocational education and training for reasons beyond their control. It also applies to those who, in addition to their formal qualification, claim to have professional experience for which they do not have formal proof. This is therefore the first-time concrete methods for the assessment and certification of competences are legally specified.

The *Qualifikationsanalyse* (qualification analysis) was developed, tested, scientifically evaluated and adjusted in the project Prototyping. The qualification analysis was developed in cooperation with the Chamber of Crafts and Trades and is mainly used for skilled trades. It aims to identify the skills, knowledge and ability to carry out one or more professional activities in the absence of formal evidence. The model procedure offers a wide variety of possible methods for determining the competence to act for professional activities in the reference profession in a person-related and demand-oriented manner. It is implemented by two experts, one of whom usually has the technical background and the other checks compliance with the qualification standards of the procedure. Based on the subject of the qualification analysis, they develop typical tasks of the profession or for the activities. They can choose from various methods such as technical discussions, role-plays, case studies, work samples and trial work in the company. They prove whether the person has the main skills required to perform the professional activities to a sufficient degree. Between 2012 and 2016 a total of 483 qualification analyses have been executed.

Implemented in 2015, the project *ValiKom* (11/2015-10/2018) targets persons who acquired relevant skills and competences through the work process but lack a certificate or a comprehensible document demonstrating what they know and are able to do. The result is that progression routes and social participation is hampered. Moreover, employers face a variety of documents job seekers present that they cannot easily understand.

As a result, the German government has stated in its previous coalition treaty already that it seeks to develop and test new processes leading to transparency and recognition for people who have non-formally and informally acquired skills. To this purpose, the BMBF, together with the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), agreed to ask eight chambers of both sectors to conduct the pilot project ValiKom. ValiKom was supported by four German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (IHK) and four Chamber of Crafts and Trades to ensure the certification of the non-formal and informal acquired skills and competences, because they are normally responsible for examinations and the award of professional qualifications. The project aimed to establish a framework with a view to validating occupational skills and competences through standardised procedures, assessment criteria and tools. With its target groups (formally low-skilled people, people without any formal qualification, persons returning to work after a period of absence, persons willing to

change their profession) it addressed employees with a diverse career and background.

The procedure developed by ValiKom was tested in 2017-2018. According to interviewees and experts, very positive experiences have been made and a high level of satisfaction with the process has been achieved among the participants (Reutter & Engelmann, 2017). Almost all of the 160 participants could get a full or partial equivalence certified. The test showed that the procedure is highly individualized, the target group and the reference professions are very diverse. Participants received a project certificate from the chambers. At the end of 2018 BMBF started ValiKom-Transfer, involving up to 30 chambers and opening the validating process to more occupations. On the basis of the results of this new initiative, possibilities of embedding the validating procedure in a law will be examined.

Within **Higher Education**, the situation primarily remains the same as described in the country reports 2014 and 2016: the decisions of the KMK which determine the framework for recognition by universities remain in place. These relate to providing credit for competences acquired at work (2002, extended 2008 and 2010) and granting access to HE for qualified workers (2009). The number of students who qualified themselves through work and do not have a general higher education entrance qualification has continuously risen between 2010 and 2016 to 2.6% (CHE, 2018). Validation of non-formal and informal learning within higher education has been further taken up in the framework of the ANKOM-initiative described in the previous updates and in the *Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen* (Advancement through Education: Open Universities) initiative (2011-2020). Both funded initiatives aim for a better permeability between vocational education and training and higher education. Whereas ANKOM primarily addressed the recognition of prior learning, *Aufstieg durch Bildung* deals with recognition as a part of opening the universities for non-traditional students and develops courses for this new target group. Non-traditional students are defined as persons who begin a study at university based on their vocational education and working experience but without a gained higher education entrance qualification (*Abitur*).

Higher education initiatives in the context of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning are implemented primarily by individual higher education institutions and partnerships. They mostly take place on a project basis and are usually limited to a particular region. Since 2016 the universities have implemented individual databases to handle the applications and standardize the decisions for recognition processes. In this context, either so-called 'individual' or 'global' procedures can be employed, or a combination of both. Individual procedures are based on proof such as employers' references provided by applicants that are compared to the contents of a degree programme. Global procedures are based on a comparison of vocational curricula and curricula of higher education programmes to identify global equivalences that can be recognised (see Stamm-Riemer, Loroff & Hartmann, 2011).

In contrast to the 'global' or 'generalized' procedure which is focussed on formal education and formal further education the 'individual' procedure takes prior non-formal and informal learning into account (Freitag, 2015). Although the different initiatives and projects show the relevance of recognition of prior learning in higher education and the increased openness of universities for non-traditional students there is still a need to develop and implement recognition standards and methods for the university as a whole or all universities in the federal state. The ANKOM initiative identified the qualification of the experts of the specific profession who consult interested students and/or are responsible for the recognition of prior learning as one

barrier for further dissemination of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (Freitag, 2015).

Finally, the validation of competences for teaching in adult and continuing education is addressed. The project GRETA (12/2014 to 11/2018) aims at the further professionalization and recognition of teachers' competences and the development of a system of recognition accepted in the field of adult and continuing education. Teachers working in adult and continuing education have diverse educational backgrounds and professional experience and that is why the definition of their competences is complicated. Therefore, the project examines relevant competences for teaching activities and their assessment as well as suitable validation methods for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired educators' competences. GRETA developed a competence model for teachers that differs between competence areas and aspects. Within the assessment of the teachers' competences the teacher fills in the PortfolioPlus which is evaluated by an expert. The result of the competence assessment is discussed in a face-to-face meeting with the expert and individual learning opportunities are considered. In 2017, 19 teachers participated in the competence assessment during the piloting of the instrument.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Further Projects and initiatives directed towards auditing individual competence profiles in order to define a career project or plan a professional reorientation or training are often (but not exclusively) initiated below legislative level. This includes, to a large extent, validation opportunities that have been described in the 2010, 2014 and 2016 updates such as ProfilPASS, *Qualipass/Qualippass – Bildungspass Baden Württemberg* (Education pass Baden Württemberg), *Qualifizierungspass* (Qualification pass) or AiKomPass, but also new local/regional initiatives like *Bergsträßer Kompetenznachweis*. Particularly for migrants and refugees instruments have been developed that focus on the identification and documentation of social and personal skills but also vocational skills, for example *my-professional-experience.org*, a quick digital self-assessment screening-tool for *MYSKILLS*, as well as the *Kompetenzkarten* (Competence Cards).

In the context of collective labour agreements between the so-called Sozialpartner (Unions and employers' associations), a number of branches validated competences acquired through informal learning using qualifications in the formal education system as reference. Examples are the metal and electrical industry, as well as the building industry. However, this is not based on an actual assessment, but on the performance rating of employers with regard to individual employees' competences. There is usually no documentation of this classification (Schöpf, 2015).

Furthermore, there are a number of approaches applied at company level; those are, among others, assessments, competence checks, diagnostics, personnel and work analysis approaches or supplier certificates (Dehnbostel, 2015).

2.3.1 Skills audits

To better integrate young people into training and counteract shortages of skilled staff, the BMBF, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the Federal Employment Agency (BA) consolidated and expanded certain funding measures in 2014. The 'Educational Chains' initiative (*Abschluss und Anschluss - Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss*), funded by the Federal Government, BA and ESF, aims to provide up to 500 000 potential analyses for students at schools and career

start coaching for up to 115 000 students at around 2 550 schools between 2015 and 2018. These activities will be supplemented by careers orientation measures, career entry support activities and special training support measures. The whole of the process from vocational orientation to the start of training is documented by using a central organisational and support instrument such as the **career choice pass (Berufswahlpass)**. The aim is to introduce this into all schools and forms of schools on a gradual basis. Since July 2014, the National Association *Berufswahlpass* is coordinated by the *Servicestelle Bildungskette* at the BIBB. The Federal and Länder governments are negotiating the sustainable anchoring of the Educational Chains Initiative in the regular Länder education and training system in Federal-Länder agreements.

Under the jurisdiction of the social code (SGB II and SGB III), the Vocational and Career Psychology Service (BPS) of the German National Employment Agency has developed **services for competence assessment**. They are intended to *'better identify soft skills of their [the employment agencies] customers and use the results for job search and targeted integration measures'* (IAG, 2014, p.6). In addition, this profiling of the German employment service can be seen as a kind of skills audit. This profiling includes competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning. It is based on a multistage process in order to identify different competence dimensions (IAB, 2014): K1 – Questionnaire for the self-assessment of performance within professional life; K2 – Test to assess perception; K3 – Assessment of performance orientation; and, K4 – Assessment centre to assess social and communication skills. The results of this assessment are used internally within job-search assistance. A certification for external use, such as for job application, is not yet foreseen (Schöpf, 2015).

Furthermore, the German National Employment Agency since November 2017 offers *MYSKILLS*¹ tests nationwide for currently eight (soon to be 30) reference VET professions. *MYSKILLS* provides multilingual electronic tests that assess competences in job seekers with several years of experience but no formal proof as well, as in the case of migrants without formal qualification or proof of their competences. *MYSKILLS* is supporting job placement officers in getting a better picture of an individual's competences in the 4-7 occupational fields of application of the respective profession. Per profession, the tests of about 120 items each take about four hours to complete. They are administered at the 156 Vocational and Career Psychology Service centres (BPS) of the federal employment agency on behalf of a job centre or an employment agency.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

As already described in the 2016 update a number of different certificates and validation opportunities exist in the third sector, in order to document voluntary engagement. Major certificates in this field are the *Kompetenznachweis Kultur* (Certificate of Competence Culture) and *Nachweis International* (Certificate International). The Certificate of Competence International is based on the Certificate of Competence Culture. Both issuing organisations agreed on common education standards for their coaches and are based on the same quality assurance mechanisms.

Other relevant certificates are the *Youthpass*, *JuLeiCa* (Jugendleiterkarte, Youth Leader Card), the above-mentioned *Qualipass/ Qualipass – Education pass Baden*

¹ <https://www.myskills.de/en/>

Württemberg (Bildungspass Baden Württemberg), the Certificate of Competence Hessen (Komptenznachweis Hessen), ProfilPASS and the Competence Cards (Kompetenzkarten).

All those certificates have a coaching/training system and/or an approval system in place for documentation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. In addition to the above-listed system, a number of other certificates exist that are purely based on a self-assessment approach or limited to a certificate of participation.

Links to the general education system are so far not in place although strongly advocated by youth and youth workers. On the other hand, such validation results have been evaluated as very positively perceived by potential employers. (Baumbast, Hoffmann-van de Poll & Lüders, 2012).

3 Links to national qualification systems

The German Qualifications Framework (DQR) is expected to support fostering of the learning outcomes approach through underlining the importance of what a learner knows, understands and can do rather than the place and duration of learning. It is therefore considered to provide an important impetus to the topic of validation. Based on descriptors for learning outcomes, the DQR is generally open for the alignment of learning outcomes of all education sectors and is expected to support the permeability of the entire education system, as well as the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Following the referencing of formal qualifications to the DQR, the referencing of qualifications acquired through non-formal learning is currently under discussion.

An expert working group on referencing results of non-formal learning to the DQR was convened by the BMBF and the KMK in April 2013. The working group provided its recommendations to the DQR working group in 2014. The working group, in their recommendations, referred to: standards for documentation, assessment of learning outcomes, input criteria, employability as a criteria, framework curricula in organisations, quality assurance, weighting of referencing criteria, relation to qualifications within formal education and the scope of referencing process (see Expertengruppe, 2014). The issue of the time spent in training has been heavily discussed in the expert working group and it has been concluded that a minimum learning volume is necessary to reach a certain level of vocational 'active' competence (Nuissl, 2014).

The expert working group's recommendations have been discussed in the DQR working group (BMBF, 2015a). A possible procedure and criteria for referencing non-formal qualifications to the DQR are being tested in a pilot project which was started early 2018.

4 Standards

As already outlined in the 2016 update formal education programmes and certificates are the major reference for validation processes in Germany (Gössling & Sloane, 2015). This is also underlined by the above-mentioned expert working group that recommends a comparison of outcomes of the non-formal and informal learning with those of formal qualifications in every case (Expertengruppe, 2014). Formal qualifications provide the standard against which non-formal and informal learning outcomes are assessed. Validation aims to state equivalence with a formal qualification or certificate. Referring to recognised standards facilitates the acceptance of validation outcomes. In this sense, the *External students' examination*

also applies the same standards and assessment of learning outcomes as used within formal vocational education and training. The *Qualifikationsanalyse* within the professional qualification assessment act also refer to the competences acquired in formal vocational education and training. Therefore, *Qualifikationsanalyse* leads to an equivalent certificate as from formal education, intending to have the same market value. Similarly, also within higher education, learning outcomes obtained in non-formal and informal learning settings are usually compared to the standards of the given formal programme. Similarly, *ValiKom* refers to the same standards as used within formal vocational education and training with the specification that a *ValiKom* assessment can also focus on parts of such a standard only. The *ValiKom* approach does, however, not yet have a legal basis which needs to be further discussed (Oehme, Tews & Witt, 2017).

In 2014, the Board of the BIBB concluded a recommendation on the structure and design of training regulations within VET and a related set of guidelines that refer to the DQR and include a structuring of training regulations into fields of action (BIBB, 2014a). This is supposed to facilitate the comparison between reference standards and the identified learning outcomes. This revision of qualifications is considered to contribute to comparability and permeability of the German (vocational) education system (Annen, Gutschow & Münchhausen, 2015).

The above-described Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG), with the focus on the recognition of formal qualifications abroad, also refers to the standards of the formal education system (IVET and CVET). However, the equivalence assessment does not lead to the same certificate as the formal programme does. Initial feedback received from individual industry representatives indicates that those certificates are perceived as equivalent by some labour market actors due to the trust in the competent bodies issuing them (Reutter & Engelmann, 2017).

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Responsibility for the different approaches to validation is held by responsible organisations, as described in the 2010, 2014 and 2016 updates and summarised below.

In the case of the *External students' examination* in the context of **Vocational Education and Training**, all the different aspects from designing the procedure/approach to evaluation and review are the responsibility of the competent body. Competent authorities are mainly the Chambers of Crafts and Trades, Chambers of Industry and Commerce and Chambers of Agriculture or public offices of agriculture etc. – the responsibility depends on the recognised occupation requiring occupational training. The Vocational Training Act (§ 71) designates the respective competent bodies. This is also the case in the project initiative *ValiKom* described above, so far limited to the eight institutions involved in the initial *ValiKom* project.

Universities are responsible for the aforementioned individual or global procedures concerning 'access to higher education for qualified workers'. In **Higher Education**, the KMK and federal state laws provide the legal basis and the coordination of the various validation processes, which are under the responsibility of the universities that are autonomous. The *ANKOM*-Initiative was financially supported by the BMBF; the task of scientific supervision is to establish a dialogue between the relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, vocational training institutions, student unions, universities and the scientific community.

The field of recognition of **foreign professional qualifications** encompasses several different areas of responsibility: information, promotion and raising awareness are the duty of public authorities. Custom-fit counselling and guidance to applicants is the mission of 16 regional networks (IQ-Network) across Germany. The competent body in charge of the equivalence assessment depends on the profession: for each regulated profession, there is a special law and institution to administer it (e.g. in the healthcare sector). In the field of industry and commerce, applications are given to IHK FOSA; in handicrafts there is a decentralised system of main chambers to guarantee an efficient and consistent practice of assessment. Certain chambers develop experience regarding certain countries of origin. Other local chambers can contact them and ask for an evaluation and if possible confirmation of equivalences (BMBF, 2014, p. 32f). The implementation of the BQFG is monitored by BIBB.

The different competence passes, as they have been described above, are each coordinated by a particular institution. Those have been partially referred to already above.

There is no central institution or a standardised institutional framework for the overall coordination of the different validation approaches and systems. Different stakeholders are involved in different systems depending on their responsibilities. Within all validation processes directed towards formal qualifications, the responsible stakeholders that can award these qualifications and respective certificates use their formal standards as a reference, as described above.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising is further improving in the context of the different kinds of initiatives and projects which are delivered below the legislative level. It is also improving in the context of demographic change and the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG), which shows the strong political commitment to this issue. The online platform *Anerkennung in Deutschland* (Recognition in Germany, www.anererkennung-in-deutschland.de) contains a section on the *Qualifikationsanalyse* with information available in 15 languages. The overall portal *Anerkennung in Deutschland* is available in 11 languages and has so far attracted more than five million visitors (BMBF, 2017).

The project *Anerkannt – Anerkennung von im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen in der Arbeitswelt durch Arbeitnehmervertreter fördern* (Recognised – Fostering recognition of foreign qualifications in the world of work through employee representatives) was implemented between January 2014 and December 2015 and is an example of a project attracting a high level of interest. It aimed at training in-company experts on recognition topics with a specific focus on the recognition of foreign qualifications as in the BQFG. Similarly, the project Prototyping Transfer aimed to increase the implementation of qualification analysis and to enable more competent bodies to prepare and implement this analysis.

In the context of the above described MYSKILLS initiative implemented by the German Federal Employment Agency awareness raising also plays a key role for its implementation. Bertelsmann Stiftung for instance launched for this purpose the portal myskills.de available in six languages. Based on this initiative an additional awareness raising tool, my-professional-experience.org, is currently being implemented and further developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung. The portal enables a

low-threshold entry into the documentation of competences gained through experience for formally low qualified people and migrants. The free digital self-assessment tool is also available in six languages and aims to reach 50 000 users by the end of 2018, when all 30 professions will be online.

The DAbeKom-database provides information on validation of competences acquired in a vocational context at universities in Germany. The information is based on the details provided by universities on a voluntary basis.

Internet, meetings and written information are typical channels of information. In many cases, content is presented to a target-group in a specific manner. A lack of transparency concerning existing procedures was also identified by experts in the 2016 update. Schöpf (2015, p. 107) states that information easily accessible via electronic media, such as through search engines and relevant search terms, primarily leads to scientific and education policy-related publications and is not orientated to broader audiences.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

Information, advice and guidance on validation is usually already linked to a concrete validation opportunity (Schöpf, 2015), as they are described above.

Information, advice and guidance regarding the External students' examination is provided by the competent bodies. There are supporting documents which can be used for the External students' examination. This is similarly implemented in the *ValiKom* project with the involved competent bodies.

The first step in the procedure for access to higher education for qualified workers is the provision of counselling (see Stamm-Riemer, Loroff & Hartmann, 2011, p. 61). Guidelines, such as user guides, application forms and information material (ibid. p. 62) are provided.

The IQ-network provides first-stage advice in Germany for applicants for an equivalence assessment in the context of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG). The DIHK project ProRecognition establishes advisers on professional recognition also in eight delegations of German Industry and Commerce worldwide.

Candidates for professional recognition are also informed about possible alternatives like the External students' examination if applicable. Based on the individual initial situation, applicants are transferred precisely to the appropriate institution that carries out the equivalence assessment and supports the applicant to arrange the necessary documents. In the field of industry and commerce, the IHK-FOSA has been created, and in the skilled crafts sector there is a main chamber in each of the Länder.

Furthermore, a first-stage advice procedure has been developed within the project Prototyping that contains specific guidelines for advice in the context of the *Qualifikationsanalyse* (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2012). The successor project Prototyping Transfer continued those efforts through further activities related to information, advice and guidance. A number of further initiatives on information, advice and guidance in the framework of the BQFG exist across Germany.

MYSKILLS is used in the context of employment agencies and job centres. Placement officers identify suitable candidates among their clients based on their prior professional experience and inform them about the possibility to take the respective *MYSKILLS* test. In case of an admission to the test, the placement officer discusses and explains the test result with the candidate and hands it over to him or her.

Together they develop a strategy for the next steps towards internships, trial, work, a job, formal recognition or further education and training.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Competent bodies decide about the admission to the External students' examination. Under § 45 of the Vocational Training Act resp. § 37 of the Crafts Code, the board of examiners takes the decision in case of doubt. Only in the event of a tie, the chair of the examination board has the crucial vote. A specific profile for the chair of the board does not exist - of course, the chair (like all members of the examination board) has to be competent in the fields of examination and must be suitable to act as an examiner. Competence in the field of examination is given through a formal skilled journeymen certificate, a master craftsman certificate or higher certificate e.g. engineering graduation in the specific field of occupation.

At universities, academic staff decide on validation procedures for access to higher education according to the Lander regulation, study regulations and exam regulations. The specific profile depends on the respective professional background. The majority of lecturers in higher education take their decisions regarding the validation and recognition of students' learning outcomes informally on the basis of their professional competence. Within the areas 'health and care', as well as 'economics', decisions are often taken systematically with regard to standardised approaches (cf. Völkl 2011, p. 182 f.). The qualification of the academic staff regarding validation and recognition procedures vary between higher educational institutions.

First-stage advice for the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) equivalence assessment is delivered by professional counsellors. The equivalence assessment itself is operated by assessors of the competent body which is responsible for defining the specific profile. Regarding the *Qualifikationsanalyse*, this is done by experts in the vocational field in question who receive the task to assess the required set of competences in a particular field (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014). Assessors in the project *ValiKom* have a similar profile.

Within the project Prototyping Transfer focussing on implementing a wide-spread use of the *Qualifikationsanalyse* across Germany, network and support mechanisms for involved validation practitioners have been developed. Among other things, an expertise and knowledge portal for qualification analysis has been put in place for employees working with qualification analysis at the competent bodies and the project aimed to realise decentralised training and supporting material for validation practitioners in this field.

7.2 Qualification requirements

All validation practitioners have to be professionals in the relevant domain (see also above). Institutions pay attention to the professional competences by considering initial qualifications of applicants and ensuring further education regarding the appropriate institutional standards.

However, the Prototyping project developed requirements for experts in the context of the quality standards for the *Qualifikationsanalyse* in the framework of the BQFG. The experts are required to have a similar or higher vocational qualification in the vocational field in question and three years of professional experience within the

profession. Furthermore, the project specifies requirements with regard to intercultural and communication competences and methodological competences. Every *Qualifikationsanalyse* is assessed by two experts. The second expert needs to prove three years of professional experience within business, administration or education (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2014).

Within the *ValiKom* project assessment is implemented by usually one subject-matter expert only. This needs to be an expert having the same formal qualification as used as reference in the individual validation process (Oehme, Tews & Witt, 2017).

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

For the External students' examination, no detail information concerning training and support for practitioners is available.

As stated by interviewees, there is no validation-specific training and support offered for staff involved in validation processes within higher education. There are however non-formalised networks emerging, such as through the ANKOM-initiative.

The need for further training of experts for conducting the *Qualifikationsanalyse* in the framework of the BQFG has been taken up by the *Prototyping Transfer* project. The project developed and provided training and supporting material for counsellors and experts at competent bodies as well as individual support for those practitioners conducting *Qualifikationsanalyse*. The training for validation practitioners in this context contains training on the legal and organisational framework, preparation of qualification analysis (such as appropriateness of methods), implementation of qualification analysis (including aspects such as openness for alternative solutions developed within work practice and not matching requirements in the formal education system) and intercultural aspects.

Similarly, ValiKom also recognises and facilitates the additional competence needs of validation practitioners with regard to the special requirements of such a validation setting. Here also differences are made between the different target groups of the qualification analysis (addressing migrants) and ValiKom (addressing formally low skilled).

8 Quality assurance

Quality standards (usually based on the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning) have been developed in the context of different validation measures. These quality assurance approaches are being developed by projects/initiatives themselves and they are partly mooted by relevant stakeholder groups that are involved in the developments such as educational practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Interviewees suggested that all approaches basically take into consideration the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning.

For the External students' assessment there is no explicit quality assurance system. It is the responsibility of the competent body to verify the procedure. The BIBB research project on 'Recognition of vocational competences using the example of the accreditation for the final examination within the frame of the external students' examination' provides a first insight into the verification procedure (see Schreiber, Gutschow, Weber-Höller & Gei, 2012). Moreover, there are assistance documents to support the procedure. However, more than half of the competent bodies covered

within the mentioned research project indicated that they did not use such assistance documents; 40% referred to internal guidelines instead (ibid. p.30).

In the context of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) there is a specialist centre for recognition counselling (Fachstelle Beratung und Qualifizierung) within the IQ-network that developed basic material for counselling. The National Guidance Forum in Education, Career and Employment²² registers contributions of the IQ-network about quality in the context of counsellors and competence assessment for migrants. Within the Prototyping project a guideline has been developed which is frequently used by the counsellors in the chambers (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2012). Furthermore, the *Prototyping* project developed quality standards for conducting *Qualifikationsanalyse* (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, 2014). Those quality standards include considerations on process transparency; four-eye principle within observation; requirements on experts; preparation for the expert role; toolbox of instruments; documented observation; openness for alternative solutions; and, support in understanding the task. Data about the practical application of those standards is not available. The project *ValiKom* refers to the same quality standards as developed within Prototyping.

Within *MYSKILLS* for all steps of both instrument development and instrument implementation, a global quality assurance system has been applied.

The individual university is responsible for the quality of the individual procedure for access to higher education for qualified workers. However, the ANKOM-initiative developed guidelines for quality assurance within recognition of competences acquired in vocational settings and outside higher education within higher education programmes. Those guidelines refer to learning outcome descriptions, equivalence checks, formal integration of recognition, information and advice and evaluation.

There are only evaluations in the context of the different measures, rather than an overall evaluation framework. The External students' examination has not been evaluated but, as mentioned above, a BIBB research project delivers insights into the procedures and general set-up of the system. Part of the ANKOM-project has been a formative evaluation of developments and implementation of the financed projects. The implementation of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) is monitored by the BIBB under the coordination of the BMBF. The projects Prototyping, Prototyping Transfer and *ValiKom* are/have been scientifically accompanied and evaluated.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

Data about a 'total budget' for validation efforts does not exist in Germany. Funding can come from public authorities, as well as the private and the third sector or even individual candidates in many cases. Periods of funding vary. Measures funded by the public sector are required to develop and realise strategies for sustainability.

Measures below legislative level tend to receive funding mainly from public institutions, e.g. the Federal Government or the Länder or the Federal Employment Agency. This funding is often limited for a transitory period and means that there can be problems to sustain measures in the long term. The *ProfilPASS*-system is an

²² Nationales Forum Beratung in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung, www.forum-beratung.de

example of an initiative, which has been sustained through a public-private-partnership.

However, stakeholders claim that there is a need for further funding in order to support individuals seeking validation as well as institutions offering validation and information, advice and guidance. This need has been taken up in the context of *Qualifikationsanalyse*. There has been a special fund put in place in the framework of the Prototyping Transfer project. This fund supports covering of the very costly qualification analysis. It is available to persons who cannot undertake validation based on their own funds or through the financing of others such as employment agencies or other institutions. The *Anerkennungszuschuss* (recognition grant) put in place as of December 2016 can support the recognition procedure with up to EUR 600 per person (which may include costs for participation in a qualification analysis). Other funding opportunities are available through the Länder. (BMBF, 2017)

Validation in the context of *ValiKom* is currently still implemented based on project funds.

Participation in *MYSKILLS* is free of charge to the participant. The Federal Employment Agency finances the implementation of the tests as a standard service to their placement officers and clients. County Job Centres can order *MYSKILLS* tests for their clients at EUR 164 per test and for clients from the Federal Employment Agency.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Competent authorities and universities undertake the procedures of access and recognition from their available financial budget and without further funding.

The check of the External students' examination is mostly free of charge for the applicant; however, some competent authorities charge for the admission process. Costs arise from examination fees, preparatory courses and travel costs. Actual costs of participants varied from EUR 1 871 to EUR 4 461, depending on costs for course fees, admission fees, examination fees, travelling and accommodation (see Schreiber/Gutschow/Weber-Höller/Gei, 2012, p. 42) other authors state a range between EUR 500 and EUR 7 000 for preparation and EUR 200 – EUR 450 for examination fees (Schöpf, 2015). Sometimes candidates are released from their companies to take part in the examination.

Costs for access to higher education for qualified workers can be found on the internet sites of the individual institutions (for example, at the high school of Heilbronn or the university of Stuttgart, where applicants contribute EUR 200 for the assessment).

The implementation of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Law (BQFG) is the task of the competent authorities. Costs for *Qualifikationsanalyse* are strongly dependent on the nature and scope of assessment necessary in each individual case. The costs range between a double-digit EUR amount (within professions such as clerk) up to four-digit EUR amounts (such as within metal professions). Some individuals can qualify to receive financial support from the public employment offices. The *Prototyping Transfer* project provides additional funds for the realisation of *Qualifikationsanalyse* in the framework of the project (Böse, Tursarinow & Wunsch, 2016). Moreover, more costs can arise when the statement of equivalence is connected with a need for further qualification measures.

The competence passes are usually free of charge. Costs for the *ProfilPASS* entail EUR 30 for the instrument itself and, optionally, fees for counsellors (EUR 60 to EUR 120 per hour) and for seminars (EUR 250 to EUR 300) (Schöpf, 2015).

Some validation opportunities such as *Externenprüfung* or *ProfilPASS* are supported by the *Bildungsgutschein* (education voucher) of the *Agentur für Arbeit* (employment agency). Furthermore, the *Bildungsprämie* (education premium) of the Federal Government supports the *Externenprüfung*. General competence records, independently of specific occupational profiles, such as *ProfilPASS*, are however not supported though this funding scheme. Particularly when it comes to migrants and refugees, limited funds are available on a project base for validation procedures below the level of assessment (e.g. as part of the case management in migration counselling for adults or diverse job coaching projects).

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

No studies on the benefits of the various validation procedures focussing on the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been identified for this report.

However, the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Law (BQFG) has been evaluated also with regard to benefits for individuals receiving recognition of their foreign qualification. This evaluation showed among others that more than half of the recognition seekers confirm a professional improvement after receiving recognition of their foreign qualification and there has been an income increase of about 40% determined (BMBF, 2017). However, there is no information available on the employment status and opportunities as well as the income of validation candidates that received a certificate of equivalence in direct comparison with holders of full formal VET or HE degrees.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Data on beneficiaries is not in all cases readily available.

The data report to accompany the annual report on vocational education and training contains an overview of the number of candidates completing an External students' examination. The figures for the period from 2010 to 2016 have been summarised in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 External students examination 2010 to 2016

Year	Total no of external examination (based on work experience)		Passed exams in %	Total number of examinations in IVET
2010	25 962		79.6	535 791
2011	26 109		78.8	531 501
2012	25 251		79.3	495 213
2013	24 429		80	478 374
2014	24 270		79.1	470 868
2015	23 673		79.3	460 602

2016	27 651 / 23 040		79.5	444 207
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Source: 2016: BIBB, 2018, 2015: BIBB, 2017, 2014: BIBB, 2016, 2013: BIBB, 2015, 2012: BIBB, 2014b, 2011: BIBB, 2013, 2010: BIBB, 2012

According to statements of the Federal Statistical Office, the percentage of **qualified workers** among first-year HE students has quadrupled from nearly 0.5% in 2001 to 1.9% in 2010. Between 2007 and 2010, the total number of qualified workers increased from 3 040 in 2007 to 9 241 in 2010, which means a doubling from 1.09% to 2.08% of all first-year higher education students (Nickel & Duong, 2012). This figure further increased during the following years to 11 907 in 2011, 12 464 in 2012 and 13 215 in 2013 (CHE, 2016).

In between 2012 and 2016, 483 *Qualifikationsanalysen* have been implemented (60 in 2012, 66 in 2013, 102 in 2014, 129 in 2015 and 126 in 2016). In about half of the analysis (50.9%) a total equivalence has been identified and in 35.6% a partial equivalence. The clear majority of qualification analysis (95.4%) are implemented in crafts. (Erbe, 2017) The reason for the rather low number of *Qualifikationsanalyse* is the lack of information and awareness about this option among competent bodies. Furthermore, the high efforts for such individualised assessments are perceived as an obstacle (Böse, Tursarinow & Wunsch, 2016).

This is also the case for the project *Valikom*, which is considered not to be a scalable instrument for large numbers of candidates (Reutter & Engelmann, 2017). During the project duration between April 2017 and August 2018 160 validations took place in 28 professions. In 70 cases validation led to a total equivalence, in 85 to a partial equivalence and in 5 to no equivalence (Valikom, 2018). The *MYSKILLS* assessment implemented by the German PES will have capacities for 120 000 cases per year once all 30 tests are available.

9.4.2 Validation users

Such data on users is not readily available for the different validation opportunities. Generally, the focus seems to be on low-qualified workers, job returners and volunteers (Gutschow & Jörgens, 2015) as well as migrants and refugees.

Data on users is available in the framework of the BQFG in general (see BMBF, 2015b). However, this mainly reflects users of the overall equivalence check based on formal training abroad rather than equivalence based on non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

There are several validation initiatives taking place that specifically target migrants/refugees. Many of them have already been described above, such as the BQFG primarily targeting migrants and the equivalence assessment of foreign formal qualifications. The *Anerkennung in Deutschland* portal provides a general entry for recognition seekers with foreign qualifications, while *IQ-network* and the *BQ-portal* provide support and networking to employers and competent bodies when assessing foreign formal learning certificates (*anabin* is a similar information portal in this context). The project *Anerkannt – Anerkennung von im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen in der Arbeitswelt durch Arbeitnehmervertreter fördern* (Recognised – Fostering recognition of foreign qualifications in the world of work through employee representatives) was also described in the sections above. The projects Prototyping and Prototyping Transfer target foreign qualifications and therefore migrants too. Also

applicable to migrants and the projects of BMBF with DIHK, ProRecognition (which establishes advisers on professional recognition in eight delegations of German Industry and Commerce worldwide) and *Unternehmen Berufsanerkennung* (Enterprise Professional Recognition) by which employers are informed about their advantages in the context of recognition of foreign qualifications.

Furthermore, there are instruments available specifically for migrants, such as the *Kompetenzbilanz für Migrant/inn/en* (Competence balance for migrants). Competence balance focuses on adult migrants. It provides support in the identification and reflection of skills and competences acquired throughout life. This tool can also be adapted in the context of information and guidance related to the External students' examination, as described above (Bohlinger, Splittstößer & Beinke, 2011). The multilingual and picture-based instruments *Competence Cards* and *my-professional-experience.org* described above also mainly target migrants and the formally low-skilled.

Another example of validation information and guidance initiatives targeting migrants/refugees is *migranet* which provides validation information for migrants in Bavaria, with similar initiatives also existing in other Länder. Similar Information Awareness raising and Guidance (IAG) projects are offered by the Employment Agencies (BMBF, 2015b).

The above described *MYSKILLS* initiative of the Federal Employment Agency targets migrants/ refugees and with increasing importance non-migrant individuals with extensive work experience but no formal qualification in their field of work. The project ValiKom targets informally or non-formally skilled persons with its equivalent for formally skilled persons with foreign qualifications being the *Qualifikationsanalyse*.

In the context of higher education, the KMK issued a resolution on how to provide access to refugees who cannot provide proof of their prior qualifications. This resolution allows the application of a three-stage procedure inclusive of verification of personal requisites, plausibility of education biography regarding university entrance qualification and proof of university entrance qualification based on a quality secured assessment. (KMK, 2015).

10 Validation methods

For the admission to the External students' examination, besides "standard evidence", such as applications and CVs, formal evidence including qualified job references, attestations of employers, working contracts, trade applications and statutory declarations can be used. Alternative evidence includes references from customers, examples of work, information about former practice by the applicant him/herself, documents about a vocational or academic training that has been cut short, module-examinations in higher education and certificates of attendance or further education certificates.

The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (BQFG) foresees a number of concrete methods for the Qualification Analysis. Those are sample work, expert discussions, practical and theoretical exams (BQFG §14, Abs. 2). 88% of competent bodies indicate that they apply sample work and 87%, expert discussions (Böse, Schreiber & Lewalder, 2014). Role plays, case studies, work samples and work trials in companies are also applied as methods for the Qualification Analysis. Similar methods are applied in the project ValiKom. Both approaches claim to apply methods specifically taking into account the different needs of their specific target group in

general and in the context of validation of non- and informal learning. Also, the numbers of qualification analysis are increasing (Erbe, 2017).

The above described MYSKILLS initiative implemented by the German Public Employment Services and the accompanying online self-assessment tool, my-professional-experience.org, are two of the very few ICT-based assessment tools within validation applying a scalable digital test for currently eight professions, and 30 at the end of 2018. The MYSKILLS tests are based on closed item formats allowing for a statistical analysis of the results. They present the assessment participants with typical job situations in order to see to what extent they are familiar with such situations and whether they know exactly what to do in these situations. The test is available in six languages – German, English, Arabic, Farsi, Russian and Turkish. It uses a simple language and a culture sensitive approach. Participation is only possible at local PES offices. The self-assessment tool my-professional-experience.org can function as a quick (3-5 minutes) screening tool for the identification of suitable candidates for the MYSKILLS tests. It is freely available online and, based on photos, it asks the user in one of the six MYSKILLS languages how often he or she has already carried out each of 20-40 typical professional actions. The extent of the prior experience in any of the 30 reference professions is then documented for the 4-7 occupational fields of application.

11 The position of validation in society: visibility and trust

Visibility and awareness of validation is still at a rather low level in society. Many people are still not aware about the available validation opportunities as can be seen by the example of the External students' examination. Research results state that 54% of interviewed persons had found information about it 'by accident', while only 46% searched purposefully for information on the initiative (see Schreiber, Gutschow, Weber-Höller & Gei, 2012, p. 21).

However, this picture is starting to change due to the aforementioned initiatives such as the portal *Anerkennung in Deutschland* and its related initiatives or to some degree, the MYSKILLS project that raises awareness in society for the validation of non- and informal learning as well as its importance and value for the individuals concerned as well as for the economy. Furthermore, first experiences from the ValiKom project show that individuals as well as employers approach competent bodies to seek validation for themselves or to propose their employees for participation in validation. Similarly, first experiences show, that the validation of non- and informal learning can also be a start towards further education steps within the formal vocational education and training system. Trust in the outcomes of validation by employers and society seems to a large extent to be based on the reliability of the institution issuing the certificate (Reutter & Engelmann, 2017).

Initiatives such as *Anerkennung in Deutschland*, Prototyping/ Prototyping Transfer, ValiKom, MYSKILLS and my-professional-experience.org seem to contribute significantly to increasing public awareness and trust but also to the practical application of validation and validation opportunities especially in the field of vocational education and training. Further initiatives (as described in this report) to increase transparency and effectiveness of the German validation system are implemented by the German Federal Government (BMBF, 2017).

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12.1 References

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12.2 Sources

Besides the desk research and literature review, different experts were contacted and all educational sectors addressed (vocational education, higher education, adult education).

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- Servicestelle Offene Hochschule Niedersachsen gGmbH, Service Office Open University Lower Saxony
- BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research)
- TU Kaiserslautern
- BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research)
- ZDH (German Confederation of Skilled Crafts)