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

COUNTRY REPORT: **LIECHTENSTEIN**

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# 1 Introduction

The validation of non-formal and informal learning remains low on Liechtenstein's policy agenda and the take-up by users is negligible. There is no centralised, holistic approach to validation, although approaches have been developed in higher education and initial vocational education and training (VET).

No major changes have been made to the validation of non-formal and informal learning since the 2016 update. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) covering formal education was finalised in 2017, with no plans to include non-formal and informal learning in the later stages of development<sup>1</sup>.

Progress towards the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation has been limited. In higher education validation is at the discretion of higher education institutions. The system of validation in initial VET is aligned with the Swiss system: due to the lack of VET schools, only the first of the four steps is delivered in Liechtenstein, where after the candidates are referred to Switzerland. In 2017 no new candidates showed interest in the services which reflects the low number of unqualified and unemployed workforce in Liechtenstein but may also indicate that the system does not sufficiently serve users. The number of staff involved in validation in VET is small, while in higher education the staff is spread across faculties.

Alignment with the 2012 Council Recommendation would require a number of changes. Action is needed to ensure that the NQF will be broadened to non-formal and informal learning, and to make validation more user-friendly. More attention should be given to disadvantaged groups and to the development of a mechanism to offer skills audits for those who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment, irrespective of their residence. In the initial VET sector, validation currently provides permission to participate in the final examination for vocational qualifications, rather than full qualifications, while in higher education validation is mainly used for access and admission. The standards used for the validation processes within VET and higher education are identical to those used within the formal education system, although the Lisbon Convention is respected. More efforts could be made to promote the Union transparency tools. Synergies between validation arrangements and credit systems are applicable through the use of ECTS. ECVET is not generally used.

The disadvantages in the VET validation system include the time-consuming and demanding processes and high indirect costs to users which encourage people with work experience to opt for regular VET programmes rather than for validation.<sup>2</sup> The limited experience in validation (two individuals have so far gone through the validation in initial VET) does not allow for an evaluation of the strengths, but they are likely to include support from employers who value the thorough processes, and the personalised guidance to users<sup>3</sup>. Validation in higher education is at the discretion of individual institutions with limited central level coordination<sup>4</sup>. Due to the devolution of responsibilities to faculties and the lack of economic incentives for validation, institutions have not created shared regulations or practices in validation. The *de facto* cap in the University of Liechtenstein for the number of validation cases concerning higher education access without formal access qualifications ensures that validation remains an under-utilised channel to higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Agency for International Affairs Liechtenstein, 23/04/2018

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein 23/04/2018; confirmed by an email message from the Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 23/04/2018, and interview with the Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein's Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with the Department of Higher Education Liechtenstein, 03/05/2018.

## 2 National perspective

### 2.1 Overarching approach to validation

As in 2016, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a policy priority in Liechtenstein or a focus of public attention. According to the National Education Strategy for 2020, Liechtenstein aims to promote the validation of non-formal learning in further education and lifelong learning (Government of Liechtenstein, 2011a), but this goal has not been actively pursued<sup>5</sup>. For example, during the preparation of the NQF the validation of non-formal and informal learning was not seen as a priority, and there are limited prospects for inclusion at later stages<sup>6</sup>.

No major changes have been made to the validation of non-formal and informal learning since the 2016 update, regarding the approach, focus, methods and the use of validation. Validation approaches have been developed in initial VET and higher education, while other sectors are not covered. The NQF, with appropriate links to the EQF, was finalised at the end of 2017. As noted above, it covers formal qualifications from vocational secondary level to tertiary education level, including the dual VET system and the academic higher education system (Government of Liechtenstein, 2017a).

**The legal basis for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has not changed since 2011.**

**Within the VET system**, section V (focused on qualification approaches) of the 2008 Vocational Training Act covers the most important provisions:

- Article 45 states that vocational qualifications can be proved by state-recognised qualification approaches to validation of non-formal learning;
- Article 46 determines that the admission to any examination or qualification approach does not depend on attending certain educational programmes; where vocational qualifications have not been acquired in an organised educational programme, admission is only granted if the applicant has at least five years of work experience;
- Article 47 states that the government can promote organisations that develop or provide qualification approaches for the validation of non-formal learning/education.

Citizens from other (EU) countries have the same rights to undergo validation processes as citizens of Liechtenstein. The 2016 update notes that the citizens of Switzerland, Austria and Germany may use the advice and counselling of the Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling, ABB (*Amt für Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung*) for both formal recognition of formal qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET (if they live in Liechtenstein).

**The legal basis of validation in the higher education system** was reformed in 2010 regarding the admission to higher or further education programmes based on the validation of non-formal or informal learning. In 2011, in conjunction with the new Law

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein 23/04/2018.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein 23/04/2018 and the Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018.

on Higher Education, also a new Regulation on Higher Education came into force (Government of Liechtenstein, 2011b) stating:

- the conditions and the process of admission without a Matura degree (upper secondary qualification) or a comparable degree *sur dossier* (on the basis of a written application with documents providing evidence of knowledge and competences relevant to the respective degree) (Ordinance on Higher Education, Article 23 ff.);
- the limitation of the crediting of learning acquired outside of the higher education system regarding the acquisition of a protected further education master (Ordinance on Higher Education, Article 16, Paragraph 2).

Decisions on admission to higher education programmes without a *Matura* – the admission *sur dossier* – are at the discretion of the individual higher educational institutions, in practice the individual faculties. They decide on the prospective student's ability to study based on validation of non-formal or informal learning (Government of Liechtenstein, 2013). Admission *sur dossier* can be implemented only in bachelor programmes and further education Master programmes.

In further education Master programmes, up to one-sixth of the necessary work load for the full qualification – 10 out of 60 ECTS credit points - can be validated through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning<sup>7</sup>.

No specific efforts have been made to support the **implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation**<sup>8</sup>. In general, the existing validation arrangements do not adequately support low-skilled adults.

## 2.2 Validation in education and training

**Liechtenstein has no centralised system or holistic procedure for validation of non-formal and informal learning across sectors;** while validation approaches have been developed in higher education, and validation in initial VET is delivered with Switzerland, there are none for general education or adult education, including continuing VET. In higher education, validation is under the supervision of the Office of Education (Department of Higher Education), but within the purview of individual higher education institutions, more specifically the faculties, which implies a lack of shared national reference point for all validation cases, and case-by-case tailoring<sup>9</sup>. Validation for initial VET is carried out in Switzerland, while ABB provides only initial information and guidance.

Given the small size of population and generally good employment situation, no priorities have been identified regarding population groups, industry fields or education sectors, apart from initial VET and higher education.

**The validation process in initial VET** is geared towards partial certification of a formal qualification in the dual VET system<sup>10</sup>, where school-based provision is offered in Swiss VET schools and work-based learning in companies in Liechtenstein.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein's Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the Department of Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>10</sup> The dual system of VET plays an important role in Liechtenstein. Roughly 65% of students complete an apprenticeship after leaving compulsory school. Apprenticeships are organised in close cooperation with businesses and last, on average, 3-4 years. Roughly 700 businesses from trade and industry, of the service sector and administration offer education positions in around 80 professions. About 1 200 apprenticeship positions are registered. Source: Eurydice, 2016b.

Validation provides access to the final examination for vocational qualifications which also takes place in Switzerland.

In the VET sector, any resident of Liechtenstein with at least five years of work experience can apply for admission to the final examination for the vocational qualification. If the applicant has followed an organised educational programme in VET schools in Switzerland, two years of relevant work experience allow direct enrolment to the final exam for the vocational qualification given the exemption from the apprenticeship stage<sup>11</sup>.

The four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification) identified in the Council recommendation are included in the initial VET validation arrangements. The validation is comparable to the model of the Council recommendation, but can take two to three years or even longer. Only the first step – information and advice – is (partially) offered in Liechtenstein (Cedefop, 2011). Information and some initial guidance is given but further guidance takes place in Switzerland<sup>12</sup>. The multi-stage process outlined in the 2016 update involves various competence tests and showcasing of prior experience. Candidates who lack proof of a certain core competence need to follow relevant courses and take exams, which contributes to a time-consuming and demanding process:

### **Step 1 - Information and advice (partly delivered in Liechtenstein):**

ABB provides information and advice to interested individuals. This includes information on the ABB website through the Gateway Portal (*Eingangsportal*) and the first interview during which the validation process is explained and the needs of the candidate are identified. Contrary to the information in the 2016 Inventory update, the ABB also allocates the candidate to the appropriate VET centre in Switzerland which offers further advice on validation (*Abklärungszentrum*)<sup>13</sup>. Candidates are expected to attend an information event at the advice centre: these events are open to both employers and employees who want to have their skills validated. The ABB also provides a written confirmation that it will cover the costs of the validation process. For the services of the Step 1, the ABB collects a nominal fee (CHF 50).

### **Step 2 - Skills audit and guidance (in Switzerland)**

The applicant describes and documents his/her competences in a standard format dossier available online, and can add assessments/references from others. Guidance seminars and coaching are available, and the candidate has access to a careers adviser in Switzerland.

The aim of step 2 is to complete and submit the full dossier correctly.

### **Step 3 – Assessment (in Switzerland):**

A panel of experts is responsible for the assessment of the candidate's dossier (Panel Audit). The dossier, which includes the confirmation from the ABB to cover the costs of the validation, is then examined by the expert panel and a discussion is held with the candidate to clarify any questions.

The aim of step 3 is to enable the expert panel to make an assessment of the candidate's dossier.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein, 23/04/2018.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein's Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>13</sup> The VET centres can be found on the Gateway Portal (Eingangsportal) of Liechtenstein's Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB.

**Step 4a - Validation/ Partial certification (in Switzerland):**

The candidate receives a proof of learning, which identifies the competences he/she has acquired as well as the modules/competences which must be obtained in order to achieve the qualification. (This proof of learning can on its own improve the applicant's chances on the labour market). The candidate can attend the necessary training or acquire additional work experience in order to achieve the full qualification. Candidates do not have to participate in the final examination to validate basic vocational education.

The aim of step 4a is to identify which of the candidate's existing skills can be recognised.

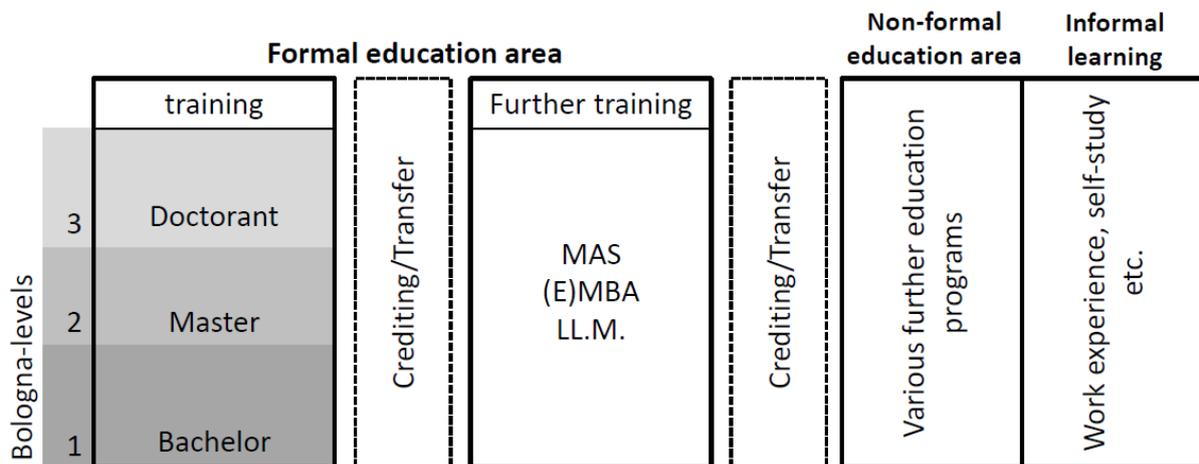
**Step 4b – Certification (in Switzerland):**

The expert panel re-evaluates the candidate's dossier. The aim of step 4b is to receive the full proof of qualification (Cedefop, 2011). In principle if all requirements are met, the candidate receives a full qualification. In practice this step applies to all candidates who bring necessary qualifications, which can also be acquired through informal and non-formal learning.

**In the higher education sector,** the higher education institutions are free to choose appropriate approaches towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning as long as they are fair and undiscriminating (LLV, 2013). The validation of non-formal and informal learning is mainly used for access and admission to higher education programmes or gaining credits on the basis of prior learning or work experience, but not to obtain a full qualification or certification.

Figure 2.1 below illustrates the relationships between the formal, the non-formal, and the informal areas of education (LLV, 2013) in higher education. Recognition and transfer of learning outcomes is possible between these different areas.

Figure 2.1 Relationships between formal, non-formal and informal areas of education in higher education



The development of the national qualifications framework for higher education (NQFL-HS) in 2011 has brought opportunities for validation and recognition of prior learning towards admission to higher education (LLV, 2013):

- admission towards study programmes (Bachelor/Master level) – the opportunity of admission sur dossier and assessment of the ability to study by the higher education institutions;

- permeability from higher vocational education to further education study programmes in the higher education institutions;
- validation of non-formal- and informally-acquired skills and knowledge for the recognition of programme achievements – especially within further education.

The admission to higher education programmes (bachelor and further education master programmes) without a *Matura* is based on a portfolio in which the applicants showcase the courses they have attended and their professional competences in line with the curricula of the given programme. Validation is carried out for a specific educational programme chosen by the candidate. The validation is not a statement of equivalence or validation for *Matura*, but validation of prior acquired learning towards admission at higher education level<sup>14</sup>.

Validation cannot be used to obtain a full qualification, degree or diploma, but can only be used to access or gain admission to a higher education programme bachelor or further education master programme, or to gain credits in further education master programmes (up to 10 of the 60 ECTS credit points)<sup>15</sup>.

**Liechtenstein has no specific strategy in relation to validation of learning undertaken by means of open educational resources (OER).** MOOCs and Open Course Ware initiatives are not common in Liechtenstein and thus validation of learning acquired through OER is not a priority topic<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.3 Validation and the labour market

There are currently no national validation arrangements in place to help people to access the labour market or to support their career development other than the ABB's initial VET validation system which is based on close collaboration with Switzerland, where the VET schools are located. Consequently there are no other known initiatives linked to formal education sectors (e.g. general education, IVET, CVET, adult education, higher education) where the validation outcomes in the private sector could be used in formal education.

### 2.3.1 Skills audits

Skills audits, undertaken in Switzerland, are a mandatory part of the validation process in initial VET, following the provision of initial information and advice. In this phase, the candidates describe and document their competences in a dossier. Candidates can attend guidance seminars or be assisted by a professional consultant. After the assessment by an audit panel, the candidate receives a portfolio that states the person's competences, knowledge and skills acquired both through formal and non-formal and informal learning, as well as the necessary steps, including additional training, to achieve a full qualification. The learning offer is provided in Switzerland.

The rules relating to skills audits are governed by the Swiss legislation and labour agreements, and they involve collaboration between private sector organisations (e.g. employers) and formal education institutions.

All residents of Liechtenstein have access to the validation system which includes a skills audit, and will benefit from state support to cover the costs, apart from the

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein, 23/04/2018.

aforementioned nominal fee of EUR 45 (CHF 50) for the services in Liechtenstein<sup>17</sup>. There is no automatic system to direct unemployed people or those at risk of losing their job to undertake a skills audit, however they are free to access this service. The requirement of residence is a barrier to access the skills audits, given the dependence of Liechtenstein on the large share of mobile workers who are non-residents.

Liechtenstein has not identified specific target groups for skills audits, such as migrants or unemployed people, to help them in the job search and application process, or those at risk of unemployment. There are also no skills audits targeting refugees, as the focus of integration is on language learning and refugees are not allowed to work<sup>18</sup>.

No data is collected on the level of participation in skills audits, however the 2016 update data showed that about 20 people were involved in different stages of initial VET validation, which cover skills audits. In 2017, there had been no interest in the VET validation system<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.4 Validation and the third sector

As in the 2016 update, no data was found regarding the involvement of the third sector in the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

There is, however, evidence of interest in non-formal and informal learning through volunteering. For example the Voluntary Social Year initiative (*Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr*)<sup>20</sup>, is currently funded by the state for 2017-2019 and offers volunteering opportunities for individuals aged from 18 to 30 including those who are interested in a career change. The guided voluntary year provides experience which can be validated for the mandatory training in social work. The final certificate serves as a proof for mandatory training (*Vorpraktikum*), or provides extra points in other study fields and facilitates job search. No information was found to what extent the programme is designed alongside education institutions.

## 3 Links to national qualification systems

A major change since the 2016 update is the finalisation of the National Qualification Framework of Liechtenstein (NQFL) at the end of 2017, after preparation since 2011<sup>21</sup>. The core of Liechtenstein's NQF is formed by the eight reference levels which describe the knowledge, skills and competences of an employee or learner. The NQF covers all levels of formal dual VET, from secondary level to advanced vocational training. The overarching NQFL, which consists of the NQF-HS for university education (developed in 2011), and the NQF for VET, is strongly linked to the NQF of Switzerland, since the school-based part of dual VET system is undertaken there.

The respective legal framework includes the decree on the NQF-HS which has been complemented with the decree for the NQF for VET (Government of Liechtenstein, 2017a), which was adopted at the end of 2017, together with the EQF-referencing report (LLV, 2017).

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>20</sup> For more information see <http://www.fsj.li/SozialesJahr.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> In 2011, the government laid the cornerstone for NQFL (National Qualifications Framework of Liechtenstein) with a government decree (RA 2010/2909-4000). The directive for the development of NQFL was to create a comprehensive framework of qualifications for Liechtenstein's education system.

As noted in the 2016 update, the NQF does not cover non-formal and informal learning. This is because Liechtenstein has sought to develop a NQF which is compatible with the qualification frameworks of its neighbouring countries, particularly those with substantial cross-border labour movements (Government of Liechtenstein, 2013). Because of the close cooperation with Switzerland in VET, the development of Liechtenstein's NQFL has been strongly linked to the Swiss model.

Furthermore, many labour market federations in Liechtenstein are integrated into the *Organisationen der Arbeitswelt* (OdA) in Switzerland, and cooperate in the decision-making process of the Swiss framework of qualifications. A verbal agreement at the ministerial level concedes Liechtenstein to accept the framework for VET with the relevant rankings and classifications of certificates, while developing measures for dissemination and publication (Eurydice, 2016b). The two countries have chosen to cover only formal qualifications under the NQF as the first step but with an option to include non-formal and informal learning later.

Currently skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be used to gain access to formal education and training programmes that are referenced on the NQFL. The development of the learning outcomes approach is evident in the overarching NQFL.

A modularised structure for qualifications is applied in higher education only, but not in VET, which has implications for validation. As noted in the 2016 update, the Liechtenstein and Swiss VET do not recognise a modular structure but only the attainment of a full qualification. VET is offered in about 100 occupations, with the practical part of the training taking place in Liechtenstein, and the school-based part of the training in Switzerland. While the implementation of the ECVET is currently at a low level<sup>22</sup>, the development of the overarching NQFL may help to identify learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning contexts.

Within higher education, only validation for access and admission is specifically regulated by law, while validation for credit earning within a programme is not regulated or monitored. The possibility to obtain qualifications through validation is limited to the further education master programmes, where one-sixth of the total workload i.e. 10 out of 60 ECTS credit points of the study programme, can be obtained through validation<sup>23</sup>. Both unit- and module-based validation can be used in higher education. The use of ECTS in higher education and modularised study programmes may in principle facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning, but there is no robust evidence of the extent to which this is the case.

## 4 Standards

The (education and training) standards used for the validation processes for both admission decisions and assessments in VET and higher education are the same as those used within the formal education system. Swiss quality standards play an important role in the Liechtenstein education system. There are no nationally agreed standards or procedures to certify competences gained through non-formal and informal learning<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Agency for International Education Affairs Liechtenstein, 24/04/2018.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

There have been no changes regarding the organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination in Liechtenstein since the 2016 update. **ABB and employers continue to be the key stakeholders in initial VET validation.**

Due to the small size of the population and the country – less than 37 000 inhabitants in 160 square km – there has been no need for decentralisation or major coordination: the provision of information and guidance in the validation in initial VET is offered at the national level by the ABB. Contrary to the 2016 update, the ABB does not analyse the applications for validation of prior learning/work experience towards access to formal qualifications and decide whether the applicant should enrol at a vocational school before taking the apprenticeship final examination and the duration of required schooling (Cedefop, 2011), but simply refers the candidates to Switzerland, allocating them to the most appropriate information centres and offering a guarantee for state support for the validation process<sup>25</sup>. The school-based learning takes place in Switzerland, as Liechtenstein has no vocational schools.

The role of the employer is to provide evidence of work experience in the form of an employer-issued work certificate. This document should indicate the period of work with the employer and the type of activities undertaken by the employee.

The Foundation of Adult Education is a government-established and 100% government-funded institution. It receives the state funding allocated to non-formal learning – 1.7% of the education budget – and distributes the majority of this funding to providers of non-formal learning activities. It works closely with the eight learning providers for (further/adult education) non-formal learning activities which in 2017, offered 9 000 lessons (mainly traditional contact learning) for 17 000 people. The Foundation advocates the validation of non-formal and informal learning and also develops projects to pursue this goal. Its previous work has focused on basic skills, targeting educationally disadvantaged people and providing special offers to compensate for the lack of policy focus on validation. Its current work focuses on engaging new groups of learners – migrant workers and women over 50– with an attempt to provide an impulse to education institutions, and develops additional non-formal and informal learning.<sup>26</sup>

**In higher education and further education,** autonomous higher education institutions have the responsibility for all validation approaches as confirmed by the 2010 ordinance on higher education and formalised by the development of the NQFL-HS (comprising the whole process of validation). Each higher education institution which provides education programmes is responsible for its own approach towards validation of non-formal and informal learning within the legal framework. The approach is subject to quality assurance and supervised by the government. The Liechtenstein higher education and research system consists of the following accredited institutions:

- the University of Liechtenstein (Universität Liechtenstein);
- two small private higher education institutions which offer only PhD and further education Master programmes<sup>27</sup>, namely the Private University in the Principality

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 2/04/2018.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

of Liechtenstein (Private Universität im Fürstentum Liechtenstein, UFL) and the International Academy of Philosophy (Internationale Akademie für Philosophie im Fürstentum Liechtenstein, IAP); and

- the Liechtenstein Institute, a research institute which has no education provision.

## 6 Information, advice and guidance

### 6.1 Awareness-raising

There are no significant measures to improve awareness of validation among guidance practitioners or human resources managers so that they can direct individuals to validation systems as appropriate.

There are also no specific awareness raising campaigns/approaches in place to reach out to individuals who are less likely to be aware of validation opportunities or directly come forward to seek information about validation or outreach activities for marginalised adults/young people. Notably there are no translations available in English or other languages which could help reach out to newly arrived migrants with limited skills in German.

### 6.2 Information, advice and guidance

In VET, in line with the 2016 update, ABB, through its Gateway Portal (*Eingangsportal*), established in 2009, remains the main source of information. The Gateway Portal provides information to individuals regarding the validation process for non-formal and informal learning<sup>28</sup>. The support to individuals covers the online platform as the first point of access, online material and face-to-face interview.

Information by the ABB is publicly financed and free of charge, apart from the nominal fee of EUR 45 (CHF 50) charged to candidates who take part in the interview with the ABB. This interview covers the benefits of, and opportunities for validation, as well as the relevant procedures. The ABB also allocates the candidates to the most appropriate VET centre in Switzerland which offers further advice on validation (*Abklärungszentren*). Candidates are expected to attend an Information Event at the relevant advice centre. Detailed information is available on the following aspects: (i) target groups of validation, (ii) knowledge relevant to employers regarding the validation process and (iii) the approximate length of the process. Participation in the information event is a mandatory step before the candidates can proceed to the next step. During and after the skills audit and when preparing for the panel assessment, the candidates have access to guidance seminars or coaching.

**In higher education**, no special information sources could be identified. The ABB provides information to applicants interested in higher education<sup>29</sup>. Information on validation is offered to applicants individually in cases where they ask for admission to a study programme without a *Matura* as well as for recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.llv.li/#/12554/amt-fur-berufsbildung-und-berufsberatung>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

## 7 Validation Practitioners

### 7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

**There is limited information on the profiles of the validation professionals in initial VET** since the validation processes, excluding step 1 (information and advice,) take place in Switzerland. ABB has one counsellor tasked with validation (and a deputy), along with other duties<sup>30</sup>.

**In higher education institutions** there is no central administrative staff for recognition and validation. Practitioners are typically faculty level administrative staff who are tasked with validation along with other duties<sup>31</sup>. The head of the faculty is always involved in the validation.

### 7.2 Qualification requirements

In line with the 2016 update, the mandatory requirements for the ABB counsellors and administrative staff in the higher education institutions are related to the general qualifications, which are not specific to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### 7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

There is limited information on the training and support provided to validation practitioners.

While the ABB staff member tasked with validation in initial VET is in collaboration with the various Swiss VET centres that offer information on validation, (*Aufklärungszentren*) and also attends the annual meetings with all Gateway portals in Switzerland, these interactions focus on validation of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>32</sup>

In the same vein, the Department of Higher Education in its role as National Information Centre for Academic Recognition (ENIC/NARIC Liechtenstein) organises annual meetings for higher education staff in charge of recognition questions, which also include validation of non-formal and informal learning, in order to facilitate the development of university-wide policies as well as sector specific shared policies. In addition to national level workshops, there are also institution level workshops as well as regional meetings where representatives of neighbouring countries are invited.

## 8 Quality assurance

The Swiss, and to a lesser degree the European quality standard, play a key role in VET and higher education in Liechtenstein.

While Liechtenstein is a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET), which develops common principles and tools for quality improvement in VET, the Swiss quality assurance framework and standards remain the main basis

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

for Liechtenstein's system, given the close cooperation between the two countries, especially in validation and other aspects of VET<sup>33</sup>.

The Swiss Quality Assurance systems and procedures are supported by reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools. These tools include, among other things, checklists regarding the quality assurance requirements and measures for various aspects of validation and different stakeholders. There are checklists for:

- the development and adjustment of qualification profiles and rules for achieving these profiles;
- the vocational education offices (*Berufsbildungsämter*) of the cantons;
- the Gateway Portals (consulting authorities);
- the competence identifying and documenting organisations;
- the experts of the organisation of examinations within the cantons; and
- the validation organisations.

Since 2010, Liechtenstein has featured two main projects on quality assurance in VET:

- *Qualicarte* - a voluntary instrument for enterprises based on quality requirements focusing on recruitment, introduction of students, educational process, responsibilities and certification/degrees.
- *QualüK* - a mandatory tool for industry-wide courses (*überbetriebliche Kurse*) based on 15 quality requirements focusing on content, organisation, trainers, financing and partnerships<sup>34</sup>.

**In higher education, the institutions are supervised by the Office of Education under the Ministry of Education and expected to be accredited.** All higher education institutions must be approved (accredited) by the government based on a regular evaluation by an EQAR registered Quality Assurance Agency. Quality criteria in place are in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Higher education institutions are legally obliged to have an internal quality assurance system in place.

## 9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 9.1 Funding

The funding arrangements for validation in initial VET include the costs of the validation for the ABB and education and training institutions which are covered by individual users (CHF 50) and the ABB through public budgets<sup>35</sup>. Companies do not contribute to the funding and there are no tax regulations to incentivise their participation. In higher education, the costs tend to be aligned with the costs of the regular admission processes<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

## 9.2 Distribution of costs

The applicants registered with the ABB for VET validation receive a guarantee for a state subsidy to cover the costs of the validation process. Any resident of Liechtenstein is eligible to benefit from this support<sup>37</sup>. In contrast to the information in the previous country updates, the state subsidy follows the candidate but is paid to the respective education institution against an invoice. As mentioned previously, the ABB also collects a nominal fee for its services. The updated costs are outlined in the table below.

Table 9.1 Allocation of costs within the validation process in VET

| Step of the validation procedure | Cost      | Cost covered by... |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Step 1 and 2                     | CHF 1 300 | ABB                |
| Step 3, 4 and 5                  | CHF 1 000 | ABB                |
| Complementary education          | CHF 5 400 | ABB                |
| Fees for ABB service             | CHF 50    | Candidate          |

Source: Interview with ABB, 26/04/2018.

The indirect costs for individuals include the (work) time foregone during the validation process which for those in employment usually leads to a salary reduction as well as the time devoted to the validation process including the development of a detailed dossier with documentation and evidence of their knowledge, skills, and competences which have been acquired through non-formal or informal learning<sup>38</sup>.

Liechtenstein does not offer tax incentives for firms to engage in validation schemes of the vocational sector.

**In higher education**, each higher education institution decides on the fees for an admission approach *sur dossier*. In the University of Liechtenstein there are no separate fees for validation - the costs are covered by the general application fee<sup>39</sup>. There is no central level information on the validation costs of the private higher education institutions<sup>40</sup>. There are no financial incentives for higher education institutions to engage in validation<sup>41</sup>.

## 9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is currently limited evidence of the benefits, including cost-effectiveness, due to small numbers of validation cases in Liechtenstein. The main benefits of the validation arrangements in VET include improved employability as well as enhanced access to further training as a result of the skills validation. The 2016 report, based on information from ABB, notes that individuals who are going through the VET validation of non-formal or informal skills are more likely to keep their jobs than other

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

low-skilled employees and more interested in additional training and increasing their prospects to find new employment. Furthermore, the validation could improve the integration and flexibility of mobile EU-citizens in Liechtenstein's labour market by allowing them to change jobs while demonstrating their skills; however given the low policy focus and take-up of validation this has remained a theoretical option<sup>42</sup>.

## 9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

### 9.4.1 Validation trends

Since 2016 update some progress has been made in the monitoring of the validation users, however detailed data is only available at the level of education providers, i.e. higher education institutions in Liechtenstein and VET schools in Switzerland.

Validation in initial VET has stagnated, given that in 2017 there were no interested candidates<sup>43</sup>. Only two residents of Liechtenstein have so far gained their vocational qualification using the validation process<sup>44</sup>. In initial VET, the 2016 update showed that about 20 individuals were using the validation system, but for the 2018 update such data are not available.

The very low numbers can be explained by the high effort of the validation process in comparison to regular vocational training. The ABB stressed that potential users generally prefer to take part in part-time adult education through evening classes which allows them to keep their day job, rather than engaging in a long and demanding process of validation<sup>45</sup>.

**As noted in the 2016 update, Liechtenstein is in the process of developing a higher education monitoring system which will cover admission processes.** The vast majority (90%) of Liechtenstein's higher education students are studying outside of the country, while 90% of the students in Liechtenstein are non-nationals, usually from the neighbouring countries<sup>46</sup>. Currently the Department of Higher Education is collecting data on access qualifications which have not yet been integrated in the education statistics due to the challenges in the quality of the data<sup>47</sup>. The access data shows that only a few individuals have accessed higher education without formal qualifications<sup>48</sup>. Due to the data privacy reasons there are no publicly available data on the users of validation since they could be easily identifiable due to the small numbers. The data situation is expected to improve in the future. For instance Liechtenstein's education report, which will also cover validation, is currently in the pilot phase, with the first report scheduled for publication in 2020<sup>49</sup>.

According to the Department of Higher Education, the University of Liechtenstein is in practice implementing a ceiling to limit the number of validation applicants at 5-10% of the total number of students (600 maximum) although this is not explicit in the

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with the Foundation Adult Education Lichtenstein, 26/04/2018.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>44</sup> Communication from the Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 23/04/2018.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

university regulations or admission information<sup>50</sup>. The current data shows that the number of validation users is negligible<sup>51</sup>. The *de facto* cap is likely to reduce the number of possible validation applications for admission to university programmes.

Part of the solution to challenges in validation could be found in cross-border regional collaboration where higher education institutions work closely with the institutions in the neighbouring countries. Given the costs and efforts involved in the validation process<sup>52</sup>, the University of Liechtenstein has so far not expressed a demand or wish for such a cooperation.

#### 9.4.2 Validation users

The validation processes in initial VET are in principle serving adults with skills developed in the workplace that have not been recognised through formal qualifications. However, as noted above, in 2017, there were no candidates for VET validation<sup>53</sup>.

In contrast to the 2016 update, and as noted above, Liechtenstein now has data available on the validation users in higher education, if they have been accepted to higher education programmes. According to the Department of Higher Education, the low numbers suggest a lack of demand for validation<sup>54</sup>. However, given the data on applicants<sup>55</sup>, there may be significant latent demand.

Given the overall small number of individuals who have been involved in the validation of non-formal and informal education in initial VET or higher education, there is no clear pattern for the validation users in terms of age, gender, qualification level achieved, target group, citizenship status etc. and it is not clear to what extent the validation serves non-nationals or individuals with non-traditional backgrounds.

#### 9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

In general, Liechtenstein's validation system in Initial VET and higher education does not target disadvantaged groups. Currently, there are no specific initiatives to use validation to support disadvantaged groups such as low-qualified adults eligible for upskilling pathways, migrants, early school leavers, unemployed people, people with disabilities etc. Previously, the European collaborative projects such as the (now completed) AWICO (Assessment of Wider Competences) highlighted in the 2014 and 2016 reports, focused on individuals who are disadvantaged in the labour market and/or in the education system due to their low formal qualification level<sup>56</sup>.

Support for migrants and refugees is available through the general process of Initial VET and higher education validation, but the current system may disadvantage them given their low language proficiency (Cedefop, 2011).

In higher education there are no special validation procedures for migrants and refugees, although the process itself is aligned with the Lisbon Convention<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Liechtenstein Office for Vocational Education and Vocational Counselling ABB, 26/04/2018.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.erwachsenenbildung.li/Portal/UserFiles/files/awico.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018.

Currently the higher education participation by refugees is low, and the Department of Higher Education estimates that only 2 to 3 refugees are now studying in higher education institutions. This is partly due to the fact that Liechtenstein does not offer bachelor's programmes in English, whereas at Master level the refugees would enter through the standard application system. The Department is not aware whether their access involved any validation procedures beside regular recognition of access qualification of prior learning in another institution.<sup>58</sup>

## 10 Validation methods

There have been no significant changes in Liechtenstein on the validation methods since the 2016 update. The validation process in both initial VET and higher education is focused on a dossier/portfolio system as a basis for decisions by the validating stakeholders/institutions. The applicant's portfolio consists of documents and proofs of the individuals' knowledge, skills and competences acquired in different contexts, including especially non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The most frequently used methods in the VET validation are identified in the following table:

Table 10.1 Main use of validation methods in the key phases of the validation process for VET

|  | Identification | Documentation | Assessment |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------|
| Debate   |                |               | X          |
| Declarative methods                              | X              | X             |            |
| Interview  | X              |               | X          |
| Observation                                      |                |               | X          |
| Portfolio method                                 | X              | X             | X          |
| Presentation                                     |                |               | X          |
| Simulation and evidence extracted from work      |                |               | X          |
| Tests and examinations                           |                |               | X          |
| Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify |                |               |            |

Source: Cedefop (2011)

There is limited knowledge of the extent to which the needs of different target groups and different purposes of education, labour market and the third sector are taken into account in the validation process. While the validation in initial VET is characterised by personalised support, the take-up by users is low. In general, based on the Swiss experience, employers have high confidence in the VET validation system given the thorough methods, but the heavy procedures discourage participation in validation as manifested in the lack of interest in 2017.

Liechtenstein and Switzerland are using ICT-based methods for testing for validation in initial VET. The above mentioned AWICO computer-based test to assess key skills (personal skills, communication, teamwork, problem solving, and conflict resolution)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

has, however, been terminated due to the high costs involved in the updating of the system<sup>59</sup>. In higher education, ICT-based tests are currently not used in validation<sup>60</sup>.

## 11 The position of validation in society: visibility and trust

**As noted above, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a focus of national learning strategies or structures in Liechtenstein.** The strategic goal of promoting validation of non-formal learning in further education and lifelong learning has not been pursued although it is part of the National Educational Strategy for 2020 (Government of Liechtenstein, 2011a). There is no centralised system or a holistic procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning across sectors, apart from approaches for initial VET and higher education.

**Not surprisingly, take-up by users of the initial VET validation system is at a very low level.** By May 2018 only two people from Liechtenstein had completed the validation in initial VET, while in 2017 there were no new candidates. The demanding efforts and long time required for the validation process contribute to the lack of interest in validation, compared to taking part in adult vocational education.

**Validation in the higher education sector is a legal right in bachelor and further education master programmes, but based on the decisions of autonomous institutions which so far have not developed institutionally shared regulations and procedures in validation.** The limited take-up of validation is partly caused by the de facto cap for validation applicants in the University of Liechtenstein which ensures that the maximum number of validation applications for admission remains small, and the number of validation users modest<sup>61</sup>.

**The detailed and thorough validation process in the VET sector has gained the trust of employers, at least on the basis of Swiss experience.** Interest in validation among employers, trade unions and recruitment agencies is greatest in sectors which mainly employ low- or medium-skilled workers and often non-nationals (e.g. in cleaning, construction etc.)<sup>62</sup>.

**In general, however, there is limited understanding about the benefits of validation for the individual and the society.** There is no national push to include non-formal and informal learning in the NQF or prioritise validation, mainly because of the positive labour market and educational outcomes in Liechtenstein which implies that the majority of nationals have formal qualifications and the rate of early school leaving is low.

**There is scope for greater efforts in the validation of non-formal and informal learning, given the rate of change in the world of work, the important share of low skilled population, and significant migration flows which drive the economy<sup>63</sup>.** Liechtenstein is a highly industrialised country with 37% of total employment in the goods-producing industry in 2015 (Government of Liechtenstein, 2017b), which is subject to globalisation trends, including possibly relocation to low

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with the Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with the Department for Higher Education, 03/05/2018

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

wage countries. Currently, 15% of the population aged 25-64 lack qualifications. The low skilled population mostly consists of non-nationals who often populate the low wage occupations but lack a voice and power in society<sup>64</sup> to access skills upgrading which would make them more flexible in the labour market. To address these challenges, the Foundation for Adult Learning has recently launched a project which targets new groups of learners – migrants and women over 50 – to highlight the benefits of skills upgrading for individuals and society, to make the best use of skills and to further influence the national policy agenda<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Liechtenstein does not allow double citizenship.

<sup>65</sup>Interview with Foundation Adult Education Liechtenstein, 26/04/2018; see also see project presentation for [http://www.erwachsenenbildung.li/Portal/UserFiles/files/Projektpraesentation\\_Prezi.pdf](http://www.erwachsenenbildung.li/Portal/UserFiles/files/Projektpraesentation_Prezi.pdf)

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