



PL2S



Actions of Lifelong Learning addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia

PL2S-steps 2 & 3:

- D4.2 Identification of Learning Outcomes
- D4.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

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Executive summary

To contribute to the objectives of the project, an orientation on self-steered learning is important. The aim of this WP is building up a supportive infrastructure in HEIs for this kind of personalized lifelong learning services (PL2S). HEIs need to be able to deal with a diversity of learning goals of citizens. For this reason it is essential to 'practice what you preach': filling in PL2S for the own staff and students as role models for all citizens in their regions. PL2S takes a holistic view of the adult learner: learning styles, skills, competences, strengths and weaknesses and prior learning.

The WP centres on creating so-called 'do-it-yourself teams (DIY)' in HEIs for designing, testing and implementing the kind of PL2S that match the need of adult learners and the need for lifelong learning. In this way the HEIs will be positioned as sustainable, independent and self-managed lifelong learning-centres.

In order to learn how to deal with the learning-demand from society, the activities concentrate designing, testing and training of university-staff and students, making sure that they can sustainably offer PL2S in their own (regional) context. They will also act as role models for all citizens. The WP is a chain of 6 tasks (interlinked process-steps), all designed and tested by the partner-universities with their own staff and students during the project and sustainably managed after the lifetime of the project. This deliverable focuses on two strongly intertwined topics of:

D4.2 The Identification of learning outcomes:

The portfolio is essential for PL2S. A personal portfolio provides the basis for a goal-directed development and career-planning. Learning how to identify valuable learning outcomes is vital for HEIs. Therefore, the partners have designed and tested portfolio-formats, their HEI-staff was trained to fill in their own portfolio and act as teachers for portfolio-management and the partners designed and tested a general portfolio-training for guiders and counsellors of HEIs.

D4.3 The Assessment for/as/of learning outcomes:

Reliable assessment is the matchmaker between a portfolio (including a personal action plan) and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In PL2S an assessment-policy has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement of learners, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively. Therefore, the partners have worked on a manual for assessment-methodology (assessing of/as/for learning outcomes), formulating competence-profiles for guiders and assessors and followed a training for assessors and guides in order to incorporate these functions into their own PL2S-centre.

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Preface

Ruud Duvekot

The ends and means of development call for placing the perspective of freedom at the center of the stage. The people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved – given the opportunity- in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programmes.

Amartya Sen (p. 53, 1999)

Learning is more than ever important and valuable; people are encouraged to invest in their potential throughout their lives, taking into account their prior learning. According to policy papers all across the globe, this should concern all citizens, including the underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners with regard to higher education because everywhere ‘the learning society’ needs more higher-educated participation from all. In this respect, it is vital to dynamize ‘the learning ground’ by transmitting both learning responsibilities as well as learning opportunities to all people, regardless of their background. In doing this, not only the learning by the people themselves is dynamized but also the functionality of higher education institutes, like universities, needs to be widened in order to be able to respond to all learning needs. These learning needs not only focus on qualifications and certification but also on valuing learning in itself as a motor for personal development and empowerment. This brings about a need for personalizing learning since all learning in the context of the present ‘learning society’ always starts with the learner.

The learner understands how they learn best so they are active in designing their learning goals. The learner has a voice in how they like to access and acquire information, and a choice in how they express what they know and how they prefer to engage with the content. When learners own and take responsibility of their learning, they are more motivated and engaged in the learning process¹. Starting from this perspective, the aim of dynamizing the learning ground goes for all countries in the world. In the project “*actions of lifelong learning addressing multicultural education and tolerance in Russia (ALLMEET)*” the emphasis is on the situation in Russia where universities face even more challenges in opening up to the various learning needs in society as in the rest of the world.

The changes in Russia over the last decades affected all the spheres of citizens’ life. The transformation of the social and economic system has changed the transmission of the cultural heritage from generation to generation leading to a new set-up of norms and values and the promotion of new models of relationships. In this context, the multi-ethnic composition in Russian society is a complicating factor for emerging to a new equilibrium in which society regains its structuring role of the social and economic circumstances in which Russian people live, learn and work together.

In the project *ALLMEET* a major role for re-structuring Russian society lies in the hands of the universities, being a generally accepted, objective ‘social partner’ in society and in terms of expertise and networks the best equipped stakeholder for creating renewed capacity-building for Russian people. The general aim is to contribute to managing and respecting the diversity of all ethnic groups within Russian society by focusing on individually and collectively integrating functions of learning as a cultural, social and economic activity. The crucial question for the consortium *ALLMEET* is how to further develop and implement the function of learning – especially on the level of higher education - as an effective way to integrate learners from different target groups effectively and quality-assured into lifelong learning at higher education levels? This question relates to several national priority areas linked to personalizing learning and the question of accessibility/functionality of higher education (HE).

¹ Personalizing Learning needs to be perceived as learning **by** the individual and not as learning **for** the individual. See: <http://barbarabray.net/2012/01/22/personalization-vs-differentiation-vs-individualization-chart/>

With this question in mind, the project ALLMEET aims at building up a supportive infrastructure in HE by offering Personalized Lifelong Learning Services (PL2S) in order to meet different learning needs in society and to facilitate (life) condition of target groups that have difficulties in reaching out to opportunities HE can offer to them.

The concept of PL2S adopts a holistic view of adult learners, taking into account their previous learning experiences, learning styles, skills, strengths and weaknesses. EU-partners will offer their expertise for training so-called 'do-it-yourself teams (DIY)', which are integral teams able to design, test and implement the kind of PL2S that matches the local lifelong learning need of individuals and social groups. In this way higher education institutes (HEIs) will be positioned as sustainable, independent and self-managed lifelong learning-centers for the citizens and target groups in their regions. Through the PL2S-centers, the Russian HEIs will act as innovative agencies on issues related to migration, social cohesion, intercultural education, human rights and individual empowerment. They will cooperate with civil society, policy and decision makers, offering their tailor-made services to develop a culture of dialogue and peace. Together the HEIs will create Intercultural Education Platforms for exchanging knowledge through the organization of seminars, workshops, counselling services and training courses addressed to researchers, students, representatives of ethnic groups, associations, trainers, policy makers, administrators, practitioners and social workers.

This handbook 'Building Personalized Learning' is about creating a common theoretical background on concepts regarding personalizing learning. It is the first book in a series on personalizing learning that is produced for this project to fill in the need to articulate and ground the features of personalized learning in higher education. It is both a result of the project ALLMEET as well as an agenda for further exploring and paving the way for personalizing learning, not only in higher education but also in other qualification-levels and – even better – in contexts of work, volunteering, citizenship, inclusion-activities and leisure. With this book, the first step is made in showing that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture, and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the methodology that underpins personalized learning.

Reference

Sen, A. (1999), *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Introduction

The world needs to speed up its development of knowledge, strengthen its demographical, social and economic opportunities and face globalisation and individualisation. Lifelong learning provides a chance of preserving existing standards of life on the one hand and creating innovation and opportunities for all citizens on the other hand. Lifelong learning is at the heart of the solution for Europe's problems since it affects all countries, citizens, institutions, institutes and standards for learning/working/life. This focus on lifelong learning is in this respect becoming more and more important in Europe, proven by the important role it plays in the Europa 2020 strategy. This includes the Commission's views as well on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (Com2012/485).

Looking at the present stage of participation of its citizens to lifelong learning – especially in higher education - there are still main deficits apparent:

- a. research on lifelong learning strategies is still marginal; the challenges have only been addressed in research on adult learning groups. Moreover, it has hardly been addressed in university teaching.
- b. Mainly in and via lifelong learning strategies the opening up of the university still has to be fostered and systematically developed,
- c. Personalizing learning by means of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has to be further improved and implemented in lifelong learning-policies and –curricula of universities, both for the groups of young learners (for preparing their lifelong learning-challenges) and adult learners (for maintaining their lifelong learning-perspectives).

The project *ALLMEET* aims at contributing to solving these deficits in a holistic approach by (1) opening up and widening access to higher education (HE) programmes for all learners, (2) fostering the personalized dimension in HE-curricula and research-programs on adult learning, (3) providing lifelong learning services that help citizens in articulating their learning needs. In this way *ALLMEET* aims to have impact on the challenges by further developing and implementing a lifelong learning-culture in academic study and research programmes that will strengthen the position of (future and existing) professionals on the labour market and in social and citizenship activities. Access to and tailor-made learning opportunities on HE-levels for all is at the heart of the problems countries face on the one hand. On the other hand it is also the field where solutions may be found.

The creation of a sustainable lifelong learning-culture in HE is at the heart of the project. This needs, first of all, a shared and acknowledged concept of personalized learning. Secondly, it needs a build-up of learning services within HE that incorporates both a basic program for practitioners to prepare for and to strengthen their personalized approach in the lifelong learning arena as well as services to reach out to the learners needing or wanting to enter HE.

Strengthening VPL-systematics is at the heart of creating a personalized learning concept in HE. VPL aims at helping practitioners to explore pedagogies and practices and develop their own practice, within their own organisational context, for their own specific purposes. VPL is also about making a personal inventory of learning outcomes so far and being able to decide on the need for further learning. Moreover, VPL-systematics are suitable for practitioners (professionals in HE and all learners) operating in lifelong learning contexts and wanting to enhance learning opportunities and VPL experiences.

This book provides the building-blocks for enhancing such a HE-based approach towards VPL-enhanced personalized learning strategies in different chapters:

1. (inter)national policy developments. Since the 1970s the development and gradual implementation of RPL-systematics can be observed in the international context.
This chapter aims at clarifying *'the why'* of VPL:
 - why has it been developed and only gradually been implemented so far?

- why is it that the time's ripe for full implementation on national and sector-levels?
- 2. When implementing VPL on a national and sector level it is of great importance to be aware of the complex nature of the VPL-systematics, the critical success factors and its reaching out to a variety of perspectives.
This chapter presents **'the how'** of VPL by analysing best practices of VPL-systematics in different countries. This analysis is finalized with the formulation of the four main models for VPL-steered learning-strategies for personalized learning.
- 3. This chapter presents **'the what'** of VPL. Main purpose of this chapter is to answer the question 'What to do when implementing VPL in the HE-arena?'.
First the stage is set for both conclusions as well as critical success factors regarding the implementation of VPL-systematics in the HE context. Then the challenges for the HE sector are formulated in combination with a roadmap for the further implementation of VPL in the HE-arena.
- 4. The toolbox for setting up VPL in a HE-context contains a number of existing methods, tools and designs for capturing the learning reality of target groups for VPL-enhance personalized learning in this project. Every university can apply these tools themselves in their own national context and develop its target-group orientation for lifelong learning.
- 5. The template for a personalized portfolio provides insight in the main task for offering Personalized Lifelong learning Services in a PL2S-center: assisting and guiding people to build further learning options on their own learning history.
- 6. The final chapter covers another essential expertise that needs to be embedded in a PL2S-center: being able to match adequately people's life history with flexible and tailor-made learning opportunities in HE.

Lifelong Learning Policy and Valuing Learning since the 1970s

1

An individual perspective under construction²

Throughout history people have prepared thoroughly for strengthening and practising their skills to and in a profession. This has been true from the Middle Ages right through the industrial age, and this is not different in 'the (present) learning society'. Prevailing systems of education and training however do require continuous adjustment and even innovation, because they are part of the changing socio-economic and socio-cultural landscape. Where once, simply completing a qualification was enough to gain and hold onto your place in society and on the labour market, in ever more cases this no longer holds. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to 'the learning society' flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, trade unions, schools, universities, employers, authorities, etc. These actors are all tied together in the social-economic structure of society. These ties were always there, but never before in history the individual – or the citizen – got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in 'the learning society'.

Valuing Learning is the process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning and as such the organising principle for lifelong learning strategies. It aims at the recognition and validation of prior learning (VPL) and further development of people's potential. Personalizing learning is about this process of valuing learning because it encompasses both taking stock of one's talents by retrospective analysis as well as the prospective features of potential building by investing in oneself by means of shaping new learning opportunities. These learning opportunities can take any form, can be organized in any context or environment and are always outcome-steered.

It is the systematic of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on people's own demand. And since learning is ever more connected to success, VPL is centred on individual choices & decisions and competence-based, outcomes-steered lifelong learning within the context of 'the learning society'. VPL in this perspective is a process-oriented approach for recognizing and valuing what people have learned so far in their lives. The VPL-process aims at linking these personal learning experiences to further development steps or – in other words – to personalized lifelong learning-strategies. VPL is not designed to highlight the lack of competences but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing competences and the view that 'someone's glass is already half filled'.

Preceding the awareness of this systematic, in 1972 Edgar Faure presided over the International Commission on the Development of Education (ICDE), reporting to UNESCO on the world of education of today and tomorrow. The work of this Commission can be seen as the starting point for the long journey that policy-making on lifelong learning has taken since then. The commission focused on the question how to ensure '*a constant exchange of ideas between man (sic) and his social environment, and [to] offer to everyone the opportunities of the learning society*' (Faure *et al.*, 1972, back cover). This approach connects the personal ownership of learning to the collective context of a lifelong learning society. Personal ownership can be seen as an individual's entitlement to access to and co-construction or, more dynamic, co-makingship of learning opportunities in a context of continuous dialogue between individuals and society's organisations and institutions.

² This analysis is an enriched version of: Duvekot, R.C., Lifelong Learning Policy in The Learning Society: the promise of Faure? In: Harris, J., Wihak, C. and Kleef, J. van (eds.) (2014) *Handbook of the Recognition of Prior Learning. Research into Practice*. Leicester, NIACE, pp. 63-84.

The policy journey of lifelong learning since 1972 can be represented as a pendulum swinging between social and economic objectives, top-down initiatives and bottom-up practices, and supply-oriented and demand-led learning. With these themes in mind, this chapter describes and analyses international research and literature that focuses on the evolution of VPL within lifelong learning policy in the broader context of the 'learning society'. This chapter will provide a map of the policy journey towards the acknowledgement of the social and economic value of 'personalized lifelong learning' and VPL.

The main question to be answered is whether the time is now ripe for the work of Faure's commission to move from policy to practice and be implemented in the present learning society.

The learning society

The concept of 'the learning society' originated in the period of social change and economic growth of the 1960/70s which created much employment and better life conditions for all people.

The UNESCO and the Council of Europe initiated the idea of 'permanent education' as a cultural-political structuring principle for the educational field to serve as a universal, coherent and integral system with the sole purpose of meeting lifelong the educational and cultural needs of everyone, in line with his/her abilities.

Permanent education refers in this way to enabling man to integrate freely and independently in the changing society and to participate actively in the evolution of society (Ommen, 1969, pp. 20-21). This idealism was influenced by the ideas of Ivan Illich concerning the need for 'deschooling society' with its plea for self-directed education, supported by intentional social relations in fluid informal arrangements (Illich, 1971) and of Paolo Freire on learning as a developmental and dialogical process of action-reflection-praxis of and by people – teachers and learners (Freire, 1970). Also the 'Education' project of the 'Plan Europe 2000' of the European Cultural Foundation in 1971-1973 on the permanency of education was influential. This project was built on the principle that each individual at any time in life after the compulsory schooling period should have the right 'to take up promotional studies (a higher level), professional training, complementary studies, recycling or *general and cultural developmental studies*' (Schwartz, 1974, p. xv).

Together, these concepts, principles and ideals evoked a growing need for social participation of all in society and for skilled labour. Research and literature underlined the attention in national government's policies for the pre-conditional role of education in maintaining and enlarging this rise in 'social and economic wealth'. Education was equated with lifelong learning and a significant and relevant means of transforming social and political life for this purpose (Gelpi, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1994).

The concept of 'the learning society' was built on the notion that learning was important and valuable for all and that people needed to be encouraged to invest in their potential throughout their lives, taking into account their prior learning. The ICDE set the tone in the debate by articulating: "*If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future.*" (Faure et al, 1972, xxxiii).

This vision was based on four assumptions:

1. The world community had common aspirations, problems and trends, despite differences of all kinds between nations and peoples.
2. The belief in democracy, to which education was the keystone.
3. The total fulfilment of each individual is the aim of development.
4. Only lifelong education could shape a complete human being.

Education, therefore, could no longer be considered as a period preceding - and distinct from - active life. Every kind of experience should be used to acquire further knowledge; education should no longer be restricted to formal schooling, nor limited in time. School, while remaining the essential mode of delivery for transmitting organized knowledge, would be supplemented by all components of social life, institutions, working environment and leisure, as well as by the media. In addition to no longer being based on teaching and on the precedence of the teacher over the learner, education would in fact replace the 'teaching' approach by the 'learning' approach, the learner - particularly during his adult life - directly assimilating the knowledge provided by society. A social configuration which accorded such a place to education and conferred such a status on it deserved a name of its own: 'the learning society'.

The assumptions of the ICDE resulted in an on-going debate on the challenges this learning society poses to us all (Schon, 1973; Husén, 1974; Delors, 1996; Edwards, 1997; Jarvis, 2008). These contributions share a set of common principles for 'the learning society':

1. there's more to learning than just education,
2. lifelong learning is a necessity since initial qualifications aren't a structural guarantee for careers,
3. acquiring competences isn't restricted to formal learning but also entails informal learning and non-formal learning; all these forms of learning have to be considered as valuable learning,
4. society can be seen as a social and economic structure in which learners have a learning attitude, implicitly and/or explicitly, and in which learners have to take up their responsibility in this too, lifelong,
5. access to learning needs to be lifelong, open and democratic, regardless of status, gender, age, philosophy, special needs, heritage or any other personal feature.

In such a learning society VPL is suggested by almost all contributors to the debate as an important cornerstone of lifelong learning-strategies by operationalizing these strategies in bottom-up steered learning-processes. In this sense VPL serves individual perspectives and challenges the education and training system. This is the social context in which the empowerment of the individual can come to full bloom. Empowerment refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life. It implies a sense of ownership and control over resources, decisions and focuses on the expansion of assets and capabilities of people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan, 2005).

Empowerment changes the nature of learning and challenges the learning system to design learning-strategies in different settings and for different purposes. It entails learning which Giddens and Beck perceived as *reflexivity*, which is an expression of the transition to the modernity of *The Learning Society* (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). In their view modernity is characterized by the requirement placed upon individuals and institutions to reflect upon what they know in order to make their choices about who they are and how they behave. Giddens accentuated this theme with his notion of 'reflexive modernity' - the argument that, over time, society becomes increasingly more self-aware, reflective, and hence reflexive. In this perception, lifelong learning is a key characteristic of modernity in which meaning and identity are grounded in the self (individual) as the primary agent of change in the learning society. VPL therefore supports positioning 'the self' as a co-maker of the lifelong learning process.

This co-making of learning fits well into social development as one of the so-called instrumental freedoms that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the overall freedom that people have to be able to live the way they would like to live. Therefore, it is vital for people to have access to all forms and phases of learning in order to shape their own destiny (Sen, 1999). Sen acknowledges in this way the relevance of the permanent education principle. Between individuals and their access to learning stands a variety of organisations, institutes and relationships, all acting as 'partners in learning' in their own image of society. Democratisation of learning is clearly seen by all theorists as a vital strategy for realizing the concept of 'the learning society', even when they are having different images of what this democratization in reality entails. The bottom-line is that "without democratisation of all actors, the learning society will continue to generate ever greater inequity and exclusion, and become ever more unstable" (Field, 2006, p. 171). It's precisely with this broad perspective in mind why the evolving importance of VPL in lifelong learning policy as a potential bridge to learning opportunities for all – and as a promising precondition for personalisation of learning – is worth analysing.

Setting the scene

Defining lifelong learning remains an issue to be solved. In the literature a common definition much used, is the one by the European Commission: "*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*" (EC, 2001, p. 9). In this definition lifelong learning is perceived as a conscious act or behaviour of individuals. However, there must be more to lifelong learning, since learning also gives meaning to the society as a holistic feature of a society in which people live, work and learn together, self-conscious and autonomous or not, and agreeing on and settling themselves in its institutions. Therefore we are more inclined to support the definition of Jarvis. He addresses the holistic character of lifelong learning as an individual and social process: "*Every opportunity made available by any social institution for, and every process by which, an individual can acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and sense with global society*" (Jarvis, 2007, p.99).

Defining VPL is also problematic because of the different abbreviations and meanings attributed to it. For this chapter Recognition of Prior Learning can best be defined as the instrumentation of "*the process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning* (Cedefop 2008). This kind of valuation shows the real human potential (of the person) on the basis of the analysis and valuation of personal competencies; it even adds lifelong learning as a personalised learning strategy to existing, institutionalised learning roads. It is not designed to highlight the lack of skills and competences but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing skills and competences : in other words, rather than being half empty, the idea is that the glass is half full! (Werkgroep EVC, 2000). In this sense VPL is focused on empowerment and opening up individual perspective(s) by means of designing personalised learning strategies. It can make the (public and private) system more customer-driven with this focus on personal development objectives. Organisations benefit from this since individuals can always be developed within their organisational context, which makes the circle round again and turns personal development into a collective effort with collective gains.

Developments in the 1970s

Thoughts on lifelong learning already existed early twentieth century in the industrial age. It concerned elitist learning for the happy few and disciplining learning for the majority (Willis, 1981; Thompson, 1982; Regt, 1984). In literature, education, teaching and learning were used as synonyms. Early twentieth century however, the perception also grew that education had a task in educating adults, predominantly based on humanistic ideals of improving living conditions for people in general (Dewey, 1916). This concept, however, would only come to full bloom in the 1970s, in a different world, as a strategy for social and economic growth.

The 1970s marked the transition from the industrial age to a knowledge-based society with a need for flexible and transferrable skills and competences while re-shaping its labour and learning relations. The UNESCO was the main messenger of this new conceptualization of lifelong learning (Holford et al, 1998) in this transitional context. Although education and learning were still treated as almost equal terms and the institutional role wasn't challenged, the face of learning changed from a school-based and formal experience to – also – out-of-school experiences in life and work. The main difference with the industrial-age related focus, was in the motivation for stimulating lifelong learning. "*The aim of education is to enable man to be himself, to become himself. And the aim of education in relation to employment and economic progress should be not so much to prepare young people and adults for a specific, lifetime vocation, as to 'optimise' mobility among the professions and afford permanent stimulus to the desire to learn and to train oneself.*" (Faure et al, 1972, xxxi-ii).

Whereas the UNESCO stressed the social importance of learning for all citizens and 'to be oneself', the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was more inclined to support economic growth with an open eye for the value of non-institutional learning situations for attaining educational opportunities to everyone. Lifelong learning, as a pillar of the knowledge economy, was defined as *recurrent education* in order to support economic growth and strengthen training-opportunities of employees, especially attuned to the employability of the workforce. Employability emphasized the ability of workers to get and keep their jobs with lifelong learning being the strategy to maintain one's employability. Recurrent education meant being able to fulfil the ever changing needs for skills and competences on the labour market.

The social premises of Faure were rejected strongly: "*if the individual is a pawn in work, leisure and neighbourhood activities, it is an illusion to believe that he will be able to take his future into his own hands via his education*" (OECD, 1973, pp. 11-12). An economic approach was needed to make sure that recurrent instead of permanent education would act as a long-term planning strategy and not as an agenda for political and cultural change. "*The concept of 'recurrent education' intends to propose a concrete framework within which a great part of the individual's lifelong learning can take place. It differs from the concept of 'permanent education' by making the principles of alternation between education and other activities central to the definition*" (ibidem, p. 12). Where UNESCO stressed the need for individual freedom and choice, OECD focused on the learning itself as a commodity for the economy. OECD incorporated both formal as well as informal education as the main drivers of their concept, with 'education' as the provision for learning, enabling people to acquire new knowledge and to put the facts and experiences people absorbed in organized and unorganized learning situations into the context of their working life.

In the shadows of this debate, literature offers a kaleidoscope of (inter)national initiatives in many countries, taking stock of both propositions:

- In the United States, the Carnegie Commission already in 1971 recommended linking lifelong learning to out-of-school learning experiences, specifically for qualification purposes. It was argued that greater value should be placed on non-institutional learning such as training in industry, in the military and through apprenticeships. Recommended was that credit be given for this learning and that more opportunities should be given to older people to re-enter higher education (ILO, 2005). This was apart from its focus on lifelong learning, also an early adaption of VPL.
- The European Commission reframed the different proclaimed lifelong learning strategies in 1976 by publishing an intriguing report on the development of permanent education in Europe (Janne & Schwartz, 1976). The report advocated progress towards greater equality of opportunity in education and training by means of accomplishing similar advances at all levels. The aim was to move towards a more democratic society in which every educational policy would fit into the framework of general policy. Permanent education should cover in a coherent and integrated fashion, all the stages of human life and not just working life alone. This inclusiveness of learning moved beyond the scope of the concept of recurrent education. It even promoted the idea of individualization and assisted self-education as strategies for learning. This idea wasn't about the adult teaching himself but more about learning as a collective activity.

Neo-liberalism in the 1980s

With an open eye to the social objectives of Faure, many national governments embraced the concept of the knowledge economy. It was the decade of neo-liberalism, catching hold of lifelong learning. Education policies served to convert national school systems from public into market-driven services, and to transfer power from local authorities to central governments (Gillard, 2011). Lifelong learning meant the need to complement the initial, formative (vocational) education with continuing education of workers and integrating it in public and private human capital investment. This was, however, mainly to support labour market policies through more efficient connections of school and work and through literacy purposes (CEC, 1985). The further development of this role of education was to be for long an exclusive domain of national governments.

Literature on the 1980s shows that national strategies were crucial for developing and embedding lifelong learning policies in the practices of working and everyday life. The main road was a variety of top-down steered and centralized actions by national governments and an almost exclusive aim of supporting the economy. Within this trend, the awareness grew that there was more to learning than just 'the classroom' and methods for recognition or validation prior learning were introduced in these years. Most methods were initiated by legislation and based on new pedagogical insights, as the following examples prove:

- New Zealand – driven by the neo-liberal market principles - was the first country in the 1980s to establish a national qualifications framework (NZQF) with its own authority: the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. It established a comprehensive framework that attempted to encompass all mainstream qualifications, including higher education qualifications. The NZQF provided a foundation for lifelong learning policy with its focus on flexibilizing learning pathways by designing learning-outcomes based qualifications (Young, 2001).
- The United Kingdom (UK) under the stewardship of Margaret Thatcher began a series of legislative reforms culminating in the Education Reform Act of 1988 (ERA, 1988). This Act transferred powers away from local education authorities and shifted the focus of adult education away from services for all social groups to a focus on basic skills with particular reference to disadvantaged groups and employment (Fieldhouse, 2006).

Breaking ground for Valuing Prior Learning

Overlooking literature and research the case of VPL is clearly linked to the above mentioned developments in the 1980s. France was the first country to introduce legislation with respect to validation. It already had a law since 1934 for individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience. In the 1980s the rationale for recognizing skills and competences for all professions was based on the high unemployment rates, particularly among young people and those lacking qualifications. Since 1985 it became possible for people to get access to all education-levels on the basis of their *Bilan de Compétence*. This 'bilan' or 'balance' is a personal

dossier with all the proofs of someone's professional and personal learning experiences so far. These experiences might have been obtained in- and outside the learning system. With a portfolio-assessment someone can get formal accreditation of these experiences for obtaining a specific certificate or even a diploma (Duvekot, 2007, pp 149-160). The importance of the validation of experience and skills has since then been confirmed through a number of subsequent policy initiatives and laws. Supporting systems such as the *Répertoire National de la Certification Professionnelle* (National Repertory of Vocational Certificates) were to be set in place on a national level, with collaboration from all stakeholders and support for implementation at regional level.

Since the 1970s, the implementation of VPL (or Prior Learning Assessment-PLA) in the United States had been exemplary and peculiar. There was no national PLA-policy but many practices of such PLA existed. The processes were (and are) used to establish credit against college courses. This practice came to the fore with the establishment in 1974 of the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL), linking learning and work by means of PLA. It was defined as "*a method whereby learning gained through an individual's life experience is considered as credit toward a college degree program. As this learning can come from a variety of sources, including work, hobbies, military service and family responsibilities, this credit may be given depending on the criteria established by the PLA-offering institution. Prior Learning Assessment can be administered through exams, portfolios or curriculum evaluation*" (ILO, 2005, p. 51).

PLA has been used since the 1980s mainly as a process by which colleges evaluate for academic credit the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom (or from non-college instructional programs), including employment, military training/service, travel, hobbies, civic activities and volunteer service. A study of graduation rates in 1994 of PLA students and non-PLA students, found that those who completed PLA went on to finish a bachelor's degree or higher at a higher rate than those who had not completed their portfolio for PLA (Freers, 1994).

In England the development of VPL was influenced by David Kolb's approach of experiential learning (1984). He stated that for learning to take place, people should progress from experience, via reflection, to theorisation, thence understanding and application of their new knowledge in another sphere. Reflection is crucial in being able to extricate the learning gained from experience. This learning cycle, based on a concrete experience, reflection on this experience, turning this reflection into a generalisation and applying this generalisation back into new situations where new experiences could in turn be enhanced and accumulated, contributed in England to the development of methodology for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). In this way people could provide themselves the basic material for further learning. Later VPL came to the front with its focus more on prior certificated or vocational learning and less on experiential or informal learning (Fraser, 1995).

These national initiatives demonstrated the pendulum for lifelong learning policy swinging between social and economic perspectives. It needed an open mind for incorporating learning outcomes acquired formally, informally and non-formally both in learning systems as well as in social and labour systems. Above all, VPL was practiced in different countries, with various drivers and outcomes. The question of ownership of learning by the individual was however not raised yet in practice, unlike the question of access to qualification systems or frameworks.

Learning: The Treasure Within (1996)

The 1990s would see— again - a major change in policy-making. The *Maastricht Treaty* of 1992 (Maastricht Treaty 1992) set the tone for this change. It arranged education to be more than a national issue in Europe. It provided space for the development of an European education policy aiming at assisting the development of European citizenship, knowledge exchange within the European (vocational) education and training and integrated education policy for supporting social and cultural goals. The European Union was to play from that moment on an active, supranational role in education policy by providing exchange programs and opportunities to study abroad, developing innovative educational projects and including a framework for general issues, such as the issue of international recognition of (prior) qualifications. This final issue was to be the spring board for the policies on VPL.

This treaty wasn't however yet the major breakthrough towards a more integrative interpretation of the lifelong learning concept. This only occurred in 1994 by widening the focus on lifelong learning towards the so-called human dimension of learning by the European Round Table of Industrialists. They called for lifelong learning not

to be treated anymore as 'a poor child in the education chain' but rather as a shared responsibility between individuals, employers and the government. Both employers as well as governments were encouraged to create the necessary, sustainable framework for the enlarging the availability of adult education programs, a reliable system for transferring credits between institutes of learning and a multi-faceted cooperation between learning institutions, business and local authorities to facilitate access to adult education (ERT, 1994).

At European level this challenge was answered with the *White Paper on education and training* (EU, 1995a). It provided a contribution by acknowledging - amongst others – the value of acquiring competences acquired in non-formal and informal situations. These competences were deemed essential for optimal performance on the labour market and in social functions and most of all in favour of individual entitlement of learning as was announced for 1996 to be the European Year of Lifelong Learning: "*The aim is the promotion of personal development and sense of initiative of individuals, their integration into working life and society, their participation in the democratic decision-making process and their ability to adapt to economic, technological and social change*" (EU, 1995b, p.2).

The change of mood in favour of linking economics with social approaches to lifelong learning, was affected by a strong linkage with work-based learning outcomes. UNESCO, therefore, continued to adhere to its broader view of lifelong learning. In 1996 the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century chaired by Jacques Delors was installed. This commission published in 1996 its report 'Learning: The Treasure Within'. It brought the social approach again to the fore. Lifelong learning was defined "*as the adaptation to changes in technology and as the continuous process of forming whole human beings -their knowledge and aptitudes , as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act . [-] Learning Throughout Life is a continuous process for each human being and adapting or adding to his or her knowledge and skills, and his or judgment and capacities for action*" (Delors 1996, pp. 21-22). The emphasis was clearly tuned (again) at the autonomous development of the individual.

Delors cum suis based their views on education in general and their focus on the continuously developing individual in particular on a future scenario in which education was to be based on four principles (ibidem, pp. 86-97):

- *Learning to know* - mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge.
- *Learning to do* - equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments.
- *Learning to live together , and with others* - peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion.
- *Learning to be* - education contributing to a person 's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.

The OECD embraced the idea of lifelong learning as the strategy for the 21st century. In 1996, the OECD education ministers agreed to develop strategies for 'lifelong learning for all, based on the concept of learning from the cradle to the grave (OECD, 1996). This concept included formal, non-formal, and informal learning:

- **Formal learning is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional.**
- **Informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience.** The idea is that the simple fact of existing, constantly exposes the individual to learning situations, at work, at home or during leisure time for instance. It typically does not lead to certification.
- Non-formal learning is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) but with an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.

The general acceptance of 'Learning: the treasure within' in those years should to be seen against the background of the favourable development of the global economy. What European Union, OECD and other national/international organizations envisaged was their concern about the global economy, the workplace and

individual learning with the objectives of making sure that as many people as possible would be able to participate and perform accordingly to the standards of the knowledge economy.

The rise of VPL in Europe's pendulum, 1995-2005

The generally adopted broad approach of 1996 to lifelong learning was paramount to the need to adapt to the (again) changing social conditions in the late 1990s. In particular, the trends of globalization, the development of the information society and the rapid scientific and technological progress led to this need (CEC, 1995; Janssens, 2002). It simultaneously led to the recognition of the added value of international education policy, in addition to and equivalent to national education policies and can be understood as a harbinger of the activating role that international organisations could play in the learning arena.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 is a good example of this role (Harris, 2011). It meant the creation of a European Higher Education Area in which national authorities would raise awareness on the need for a knowledge society, promote mobility in Europe by creating similar diplomas in the Bachelor-Master levels and organize the transfer of credits through the European Credit transfer System (ECTS), the exchange of students and lecturers and, lastly, independent quality control (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Although mainly engineered for economic purposes, the declaration would help open up the learning world to VPL as a method for validating prior learning outcomes. The economic approach was associated with the socio-integrative character of education because it focused on providing learning opportunities to every citizen as an integral part of independent and lifelong education. The introduction of the notion of learning outcomes is crucial for getting a grip on the impact VPL can have on learning processes. Learning outcomes can be defined as *"the set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal"* (Cedefop, 2008).

The coupling of lifelong learning with higher education was broadened in 2000 to the entire education sector when the EU Member States agreed on the 'Lisbon Strategy' (CEC, 2000). This strategy aimed at creating the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment. VPL was strongly embedded in this agenda with the focus on valuing learning and improving the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning.

The quantitative targets, however, soon turned out to be too difficult to achieve due to economic hardship from 2001 onwards. The initial optimism gave way to pragmatic realism and the Lisbon Strategy was revised in 2005 (CEU, 2005). The emphasis again was placed on economic growth with lifelong learning focused on strengthening a flexible labour market by stimulating personal development in the spirit of employability and less on the development of the individual for social and/or cultural purposes. Within this pendulum between social and economic objectives, however, much attention was paid to creating support for recognition or validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences (Bjørnåvold, 2000). Policy aimed at initiating a strategy for VPL at national level, with a set of general principles for VPL, formulated by an expert group (EC, 2004):

1. The overall aim of validation is to make visible and value the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired. The purpose of this validation may be formative (supporting an on-going learning process) as well as summative (aiming at certification).
2. Validation of non-formal and informal learning must first and foremost serve the needs of individual citizens. This means that individual entitlements have to be clearly stated, in particular in relation to issues like privacy, ownership of validation results and right to appeal.
3. Institutions and stakeholders face certain responsibilities when they initiate validation, for example in terms of providing proper guidance and support.
4. Confidence is a necessary pre-requisite for successful development and implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This requires well-defined standards, clear information on the assessment-process and the purpose of validation and how the results will be used and information on conditions for validation such as time and cost involved as well as support/guidance provided.
5. Impartiality is a crucial feature of validation and relates to the roles and responsibilities of the assessors involved in the validation process. It is important to avoid undue mixing of roles as this will negatively

affect overall confidence and credibility to validation results. Impartiality can be strengthened through training and systematic networking, something that needs to be promoted by validation providers.

These principles were to be finalized in 2009 as basic principles for the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning (Cedefop, 2009).

In the same period other measures were taken to support the general goals of the revised Lisbon strategy: a Europass system with a focus on the transparency of qualifications and competences, a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EC, 2005). The latter being a decisive cornerstone for making learning accessible for all, due to its focus on learning outcomes. It paved the way for VPL as the bridging instrument for linking people's prior learning outcomes, formally, non-formally and informally acquired, to any standard like qualifications, function profiles and social functionality. Moreover, it was to be supportive for making learning more personalized since learning outcomes first of all needed to be recognized and valued on a personal level before they could be linked to the standards in society.

Swinging all over again, 2004-2010

The OECD committed itself to Europe's renewed Lisbon 2005-strategy with a re-orientation on the personalized nature of learning. VPL was considered to be inseparable from personal and societal application of lifelong learning when looking at the new strategic features of lifelong learning (OECD, 2004):

1. Lifelong learning approaches the supply and demand of learning opportunities as part of an integrated system that incorporates the whole personal life cycle and all forms of learning.
2. The learner takes a central place here. Demand-driven learning, focused on meeting the learning needs of individuals is the key.
3. Self-motivation is absolutely crucial, in other words learning to learn.
4. The learning process in itself can serve various purposes: from personal development and knowledge acquisition to economic, social or cultural benefits.

The importance of recognizing skills, including prior learning and previous experiences was also highlighted by the International Labour Organization in its Recommendation on Human Resources Development (ILO, 2005). The value of VPL not only laid in getting access to learning opportunities in education and training systems but also in the workplace where the nature of learning was more focused on personally updating and upgrading for the sake of employability. The focus on personal development was in all contexts for the bigger part tuned in to the context in which learning was or should be taking place, for purposes of qualification and certification or personal development.

This focus was taken further in studies of the OECD on personalizing education (OECD, 2006) and on bridging national qualifications systems and lifelong learning (OECD, 2007). Both studies expressed that the social and economic role of lifelong learning had been elaborated thoroughly in an approach based on learning outcomes, competence-steered learning, opportunities for recognition and transfer of competences and credits. A strong focus on the personal nature of learning, both in terms of prior learning as well as future learning was to be chosen. VPL was to be embedded in policy, aiming at providing individuals with an opportunity to validate skills and competences which hadn't been formally recognized before.

OECD's swing towards VPL and the individual entitlement of learning was completed in a worldwide review of twenty-two countries (Werquin, 2010). The advantages of recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes, taking stock of existing policies and practices were explored. The benefits for all stakeholders in VPL were clearly pointed out: for individuals, employers, trade unions, learning providers and governments. The outcomes were reflected in recommendations for strengthening, improving and promoting VPL, therewith allowing it to realise its full potential for making visible the human capital people already have. The challenge for lifelong learning policies was to find the right balance by developing recognition processes that can generate net benefits to both individuals and to society – and its organizations – at large.

Meanwhile in Brussels, the European targets for lifelong learning were once again evaluated with the EU 2020 strategy as the outcome (EC, 2010). It is the new long-term strategy of the European Union for a strong and

sustainable economy with high employment, labour mobility and competitiveness as targets. The strategy holds the view that continuous learning opportunities should be offered to all European citizens. In practice this means that everyone should have an individual learning pathway that is adapted to the personal needs and interest in all stages of life. The content of learning, the way of learning and where learning takes place may vary according to the learner and his/her learning needs. Lifelong learning should support in this view both learning for employability as well as for purely personal development and/or second-chance education. This means that learning is still considerably dominated by economic reasoning but the upper hand is slowly shifting to the individual level, which opens up opportunities for individual ownership of learning goals and offers for tailor-made learning. The EU 2020 strategy is therewith embarking on a mission in which learning systems in education and training, and other constraints (fiscal, legal, customer-orientation, etc.) more effectively than ever are positioned for actual use by the learners.

Conclusions

Overlooking the period, research provides information on a huge amount of policy initiatives taken on lifelong learning and VPL since the 1970s. The objectives of pursuing lifelong learning for all were not so much the issue; it was rather an ideological battle fought over the strategy for learning in society aiming at social change and participation or at economic growth and competitiveness. In times of prosperity the social objectives were given more attention and in economic dismay the focus changed to employability and the mobility of labour.

What has been achieved is within the pendulum of economic or social perspectives, a strong focus on learning instead of solely education and training, together with a focus on all citizens instead of only the young ones and on linking learning within and outside of the prevailing learning systems. The need for giving lifelong learning broader commitment by expanding the participation of more stakeholders than just 'the teacher' or employer with the citizen/worker as object instead of subject has been changed. Partnerships of learning have widened due to the acknowledgement of learning taking place anywhere, anytime and anyhow. This also brought about a growing importance of the professional roles of (independent) guidance, assessment and counselling in lifelong learning strategies. These roles are focusing more and more on not just qualifications and certificates but also on learning for personal development, upgrading, updating or just for enjoyability.

There is also progress in the fields individual ownership of learning by making learning more accessible to all, although this still mainly is a top-down steered process within national qualification systems. The next step, moving towards the perspective of sector, corporate and/or regional frameworks for learning outcomes opening up to individuals is yet to be made. Recent policy initiatives especially focus on opening up these domains. It however also entails that in the sense of ownership of learning, the citizen still needs to cover a lot of ground for making use of his/her individual entitlement on learning opportunities. Knowing what your prior learning outcomes are and for what purpose you want to further develop yourself is a relevant question to be tackled by the citizens themselves – supported by guiders and counselors in the lifelong learning arena.

Only if individual ownership of learning – meaning learning perceived as a bottom-up steered process - can come to full bloom in an open learning environment, the approach of Faure's commission might be realized fully. The world of the 1970s isn't of course comparable with the present age but VPL as a supportive instrument for the citizen as well as for realizing an open learning society has the power to bring Faure's approach closer to a practical reality. A lot of effort still has to be made for this approach to be fulfilled. Least of all worries is convincing governments and policy makers on national and international levels on the potential benefits of VPL-steered lifelong learning policies. The biggest challenge is to convince the other stakeholders embedded in the practicalities of learning within sectors, organisations, institutes, etc. to fill in their responsibility in the VPL-process; this goes for employers, trade unions, learning providers and – above all – for the citizens themselves.

The agenda for this is already set in various policy programmes of international and national organisations:

- the Europe 2020 Strategy with its focus on building a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. VPL is embedded in the 'flagships initiatives'. This importance of making the skills and competences gained through life and work experience visible was confirmed in 2012 in a broad public consultation (EC, 2012).

- The OECD Skills Strategy (OECD 2012) in which ‘validation-principles’ are crucial for achieving the goals of the programme of filling in the need for skills and competences on the labour market.
- ILO’s G20 Training Strategy with a validation-focus in the holistic approach to skills development of wage work or self-employment (ILO 2010).
- UNESCO Guidelines for Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (UIL 2012).
- *The Council Recommendation on The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (CEU, 2012) recommending all Member States to have in place, no later than in 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to obtain a full or part qualification on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences.
- *The Education for All Initiative* aiming at bringing the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society” (EFA). In order to realize this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, UNESCO and the World Bank committed themselves to achieving specific education goals.
- The many national and regional initiatives that are apparent across the world in practices of education, training, social and citizenship activities, employability, human resources development and learning as personal development and enjoyability (Singh and Duvetot, 2013; EU Inventory, 2010).

This growing reality can be directly and indirectly supported by (1) implementing the VPL-process and (2) the open mind that VPL brings about by focusing on learning outcomes acquired in formal, informal and non-formal settings. VPL therewith offers a broad ‘window of opportunities’ by opening up (lifelong) learning opportunities for all, both summative as well as formative. Since learning is ever more connected to social success in this time of economic difficulties, the focus on VPL as a feature of the changing learning culture in Europe focuses on facilitating self-efficacy and competence-based & outcome-steered learning.

But, regardless of all these favourable circumstances for lifelong learning, it’s of little or no importance when people themselves are not encouraged or encourage themselves to focus on their lifelong learning-process. It is as Peter Jarvis stated: “... many societies have introduced policies and legislation for lifelong learning. But it is not possible to legislate for people’s learning, only for their education” (Jarvis, 2008, 28). The next step in developing and implementing lifelong learning therefore has to focus on activating the learning individual. It is the people themselves who learn and not policy or learning facilities. This perspective of stimulating and facilitating lifelong learning by people themselves – in true bottom-up steered learning processes – should be opened up by VPL. Let’s examine therefore the diverse ways of VPL for creating self steered lifelong learning as an added value to the already existing ways to activate lifelong learning. It’s especially with this focus on the learning individual that we might understand that the ‘promise of VPL’ is here to stay. Active participation of individuals in decisions about form and content of lifelong learning and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies thus becomes a clearer perspective and paves the way for supporting personalized (lifelong) learning.

So, the approach designed by Faure has yet to be fulfilled. Does it still hold value? The answer is – looking at the extensive evidence in policy-initiatives and enhanced by VPL – yes. Taking all policy initiatives and the growing implementation in practices into consideration, the final step seems to be aiming at the biggest treat of Faure’s approach: realizing individual ownership of learning, embedded in the collective function of learning within the learning society. After all, Delors himself stated when recently reflecting on ‘The Treasure Within’: “*Lifelong learning is about work and life, success in work that benefits the community, and the future of our young people [-]. But on a deeper level, it is about knowing oneself better [-] gaining a kind of self-esteem to help us deal with the risks and constraints of life, and acquiring the ability to take control of our own lives.*” (Delors, 2013, p. 329).

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Breaking ground for personalizing learning

Introduction³

Throughout history people have prepared thoroughly for strengthening and practising their skills in a profession; this has been true from the Middle Ages right through the industrial age. And this is no different in the modern learning society. The prevailing systems of professional training and education do require adjustment and even innovation, because they are part of the changing socio-economic and socio-cultural landscape. Where once upon a time, simply completing a qualification was enough to gain and hold onto your place in society and on the labour market, in ever more cases this no longer holds. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to the learning society flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, trade unions, schools, universities, employers, legislative and regulatory bodies. These actors are all tied together closely in the social and economic structure. These ties have always been present, but never before in history the individual – or the citizen – got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in the learning society (Delors 1996, Hargreaves 2004, Duvekot 2006).

It is the systematic of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on people's own demand. And since learning is ever more connected to social success, this means focusing on empowerment and personalized control by means of VPL as the main feature of the changing learning paradigm in the present context; a paradigm that is centred around individual choices & decisions and competence-based, outcomes-steered lifelong learning within the context of the learning society. VPL is in this perspective a process-oriented instrumentation for recognizing and valuing what people have learned so far in their lives. The VPL-process aims at linking these learning experiences to further development steps or – in other words - to a lifelong learning-strategy for everyone in their given context. In this perspective, VPL is not designed to highlight the lack of competences but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing competences; in other words, rather than being half empty, VPL takes the view that 'someone's glass is already half filled' (Wg EVC 2000).

The crucial question is how to activate VPL as an effective instrument for linking competences and credits in lifelong learning that appeals to individual learners and other stakeholders in learning and working contexts? VPL is presented in this chapter in its process-oriented framework. It covers the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in achieving their goals in the lifelong learning-arena where the learning needs of the individual, the facilities from the learning system and the demand for competent people from the prevailing socio-economic system are negotiated. After all, learning is supposed to be established in general in an open dialogue between teachers, employers and learners.

The aim of the framework is to show the potential of VPL in dealing with a diversity of learning goals as a matchmaker between these main stakeholders in lifelong learning processes. This will help in demonstrating how and where to set up interventions for strengthening VPL as a matchmaker for the sake of creating time- and money-effective and - above all – efficient, tailor-made, applied and enjoyable lifelong learning-strategies on a win-win-win-basis for all stakeholders. Isn't it after all – as stated by Paolo Freire decades ago – that learning above all is a personal and social process that makes sense

³ This chapter is an adapted version of: Duvekot, R.C., Breaking ground for Validation of Prior Learning in lifelong learning strategies. In: Duvekot, R.C., et al (2014). *The Power of VPL*. Vught, EC-VPL, pp. 21-39.

"because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing — of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't." (Freire, 2004, p. 15).

The three learning modes

The development of the systematics of the validation of prior learning (VPL) can best be understood as a confirmation of this shift towards empowerment as facilitated by personalised learning strategies. The understanding grows that the role of the learning system changes from an institutionalised learning system with uniform learning paths and little room for personal input, into a learning system characterized by flexible and more personal steered learning (Duvekot et al 2007). In England this is referred to as 'personalized learning' or the tailoring of pedagogy, curriculum and learning support to meet the needs and aspirations of individual learners (Hargreaves 2004-2006). The same goes for the labour system in which the general norms on the functioning of workers are focused more and more on facilitating their further development instead of controlling labour top-down. One could even say that VPL is about democratising learning and working and, to stay in the terminology of Giddens, enhancing the reflexive character of learning itself.

The starting point of VPL is that initial training for a career no longer suffices. It is important to acknowledge that competences (knowledge, skills, attitude, aspirations) are constantly developing. This means recognizing that someone always and everywhere - consciously and unconsciously – learns through:

- *formal learning*, which occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to qualification or certification.
- *non-formal learning*, which is learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) but with an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.
- *informal learning*, which results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.
(Cedefop 2009)

Goals and preconditions

Lifelong learning above all means 'Validation Learning', i.e. validating *the Learning* that is constantly taking place and learning *the Valuing* in order to start up stimulating and developing lifelong learning in an effective and efficient way. Validation of Prior Learning in this respect is not only a process underpinning lifelong learning strategies but also the organising principle for designing these strategies.

Evidence for this approach comes from the European research project "Managing European Diversity in lifelong learning 2005-2007" (Duvekot et al, 2007). The project aimed at showing the outline of the learning society by analysing case studies in the profit, non-profit and voluntary sectors in eleven European countries. The analysis supported the vision that 'Validation of Prior Learning' is as much a principle as a process, giving true evidence of the transition from the present knowledge society towards the learning society. Society changes to a learning society where the need for a good balance of power between the main stakeholders in lifelong learning - individuals, organisations and the learning system - will be reshaped and the learner will get a real say in designing lifelong learning strategies. The main changes of this transition can be reflected on five levels:

- a. Economically, aiming at getting and/or keeping a job (employability),
- b. Socially, aiming at motivation, reintegration, self-management of competences and personal development (empowerment),
- c. Educationally, aiming at qualification, updating, upgrading or portfolio-enrichment by means of creating output-oriented standards focusing on learning outcomes and learning made to measure,
- d. A fourth level on which the change is having its impact, can also be distinguished, the civil society, aiming at social activation, voluntary activities, societal awareness & reintegration and citizenship (activating citizenship),

- e. On the macro-level finally, authorities and social partners are responsible for organising the match between these levels by means of legislation, regulations, labour agreements, fiscal policy, training funds, etc.

‘Validation of Prior Learning’ as an organising principle of lifelong learning reflects the change towards a learning society in which the individual learner has and takes more responsibilities for his/her own, personal learning process. It also means that the individual learner changes the existing ‘balance of power’ in learning processes because he/she will be steering lifelong learning too with a portfolio. In this portfolio, the learning outcomes that he/she has achieved are documented together with the relevant evidence. In many cases the portfolio even encompasses an action plan for personal development. Such portfolios create a new balance within learning as a process and contribute to the individual’s social identity; above all, they show the road-map for personal development in the context of the organisation and the society.

The emphasis on learning outcomes is in line with the development of common structures of education and training across Europe and is associated with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Thus Valuation of Prior Learning as such contributes to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour between countries and between sectors. At national levels, learning outcomes are made a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks in order to innovate Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE), to stimulate economic development and to promote social cohesion and citizenship. These goals of ‘Valuation of Prior Learning’ are shown in Figure 2.

The Goals of ‘Validation of Prior Learning’	
<i>Individual</i>	Stimulating self-investment in learning; showing learning outcomes; building up a learning biography or portfolio
<i>Organisation</i>	Building up competence management and facilitating employees’ self-investment and articulation of competences; designing lifelong learning strategies in Human Resource Management
<i>VET/HE</i>	Matching learning to real learning needs; offering learning-made-to-measure; focus on learning outcomes; facilitating lifelong learning strategies
	Activating citizenship; transparency of learning outcomes in the civil society; linkages with other perspectives (qualification, careers)
	Concerns policies of governments and social partners and their responsibilities for creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning through laws and regulations

Source: Duvekot et al, 2007

Important preconditions for creating a learning society in which these benefits come to full bloom:

1. A transparent, output-oriented knowledge infrastructure;
2. Creating trust by (a) focusing on the already available quality-system based on the judgement of the existing assessment processes used by schools, colleges and universities and (b) prospective quality-management by introducing external peer-reviews on quality-issues for the future;
3. A transparently structured education sector, that allows a flexible flow of participants from one layer of sector to another, both intra- as well as inter-sectoral;
4. Universal, transparent and interchangeable procedures and reports on the competences that have been valued;
5. Close relations between educational institutions and their associates/partners (enterprises, government institutions, institutions in the field of (re)integration of unemployed into the labour market);
6. Creating possibilities for developing and executing individual tailor made learning paths;
7. Facilities for financing flexible tailor made individual learning routes, such as an individual learning account;
8. Clear communication to citizens about the technical and financial arrangements for education and ‘Validation of Prior Learning’;
9. Development of an individual right for portfolio-assessment and career-advice.

Terminology

The international commonly used term for validating prior learning is Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). The authorities, as well as the social partners and schools prefer this term because this approach mainly focuses on the summative effects of recognizing and assessing prior learning. The most important element in an APL-strategy is the assessment of the competences that are collected in a portfolio with the goal of getting exemptions or a diploma. The portfolio is in this context mainly a showcase of only the competences that matter for the standard itself; all the other personal competences are irrelevant. The choice for a specific standard is in practice more steered by the availability of an actual standard than by a free, personal choice. This is because most of the times a school - as the keeper of the standard(s) – tends to look more to the best chance of success when measured against any given standard than to the best match of a standard and personal ambitions. So, in effect, APL is more steered by standards, and as most standards are kept by schools (upper secondary and higher vocational levels) this shows that APL really is strongly steered by schools.

With Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) the primary focus lies on the identification and validation of the competences that someone might have obtained in any period in his/her life and in any kind of learning environment. In this context the portfolio consists of all personal learning experiences. Only after collecting all the relevant, personal competences together with their proof, a choice is made by the person. In this way the personal ambitions are better articulated and depending on the personal goal a specific choice for the kind of accreditation or validation is made. VPL, therefore is more personal steered and might involve not only summative but also formative goals.

It is interesting to see that, in several countries – Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland - a shift occurs in the focus of lifelong learning strategies from APL towards VPL. This is due to the growing awareness on the real learning problems, namely how to make people invest in themselves if the necessary infrastructure is available (funds, methods, instruments and functions). With VPL 'the job might be done' in a bottom-up way. VPL is more and more seen as the real matchmaker as a bottom-up steered approach to (lifelong) learning, compared to the more top-down strategy of APL.

When looking at both terms – VPL and APL - VPL stands for the process of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). Validation goes a step further than accreditation and validation since it means a validation (or valuation) of prior learning measured against any learning objective and not just formalized standards; it can cover for instance also a validation for the sole aim of self-validation or justification of an activity. VPL therefore is covering both the formalized, top-down orientation of APL as well as the bottom-up process of VPL. So, VPL can be seen as the real designation of developing, implementing and embedding lifelong learning in society, in the Learning Society so to say; VPL is for the sake of citizens as well as providers and organisations (profit, non-profit, voluntary work, labour-agencies, communities, etc). VPL is able to manage in a flexible way the diversity of goals all these parties and partners have in making use of lifelong learning strategies.

Competence is a central concept in VPL. Without a good understanding of this concept little can be achieved with VPL. 'Competence' means having adequate knowledge of how to act in a particular situation. Whether or not someone is competent becomes apparent based on how he/she acts (Lyotard 1988). In other words, a competence is the sum of knowledge and skill: knowledge is 'the knowing' and skill is 'the acting'. A competence, then, encompasses knowledge and skill as well as the personal methods used in applying that skill. It is essentially based on personal attitudes and ambitions. For this reason, a competence value is only partially fixed, as this value is mainly personal. The way in which a competence reaches a particular, personal value is also a part of that competence. For that reason, I prefer Cedefop's definition, which states that a competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: 1) cognitive competence; 2) functional competence; 3) personal competence; and 4) ethical competence (www.cedefop.gr; Cheetham & Chivers, 2005).

It might also be useful to define these four elements as meta-competences:

1. Cognitive competence is defined as the possession of appropriate work-related knowledge and the ability to put this to effective use.

2. Functional competence is defined as the ability to perform a range of work based tasks effectively to produce required outcomes.
3. Personal or behavioural competence is defined as the ability to adopt appropriate, observable behaviours in work related situations.
4. Ethical competence is defined as the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgments based upon these in work related situations.

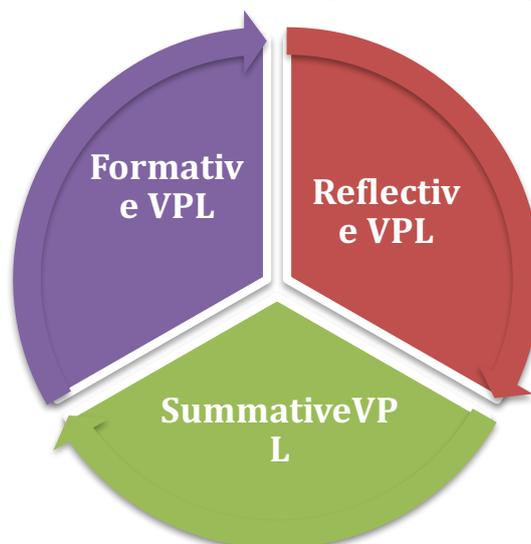
The 'personal competence' is particularly relevant, because it is this competence that 'colours' the generic description of a competence. It is only within this personal context that a competence can be identified, assessed, valued and developed (further).

Based on this concept of competence, VPL is particularly useful as an evaluation, not connected to the learning path, of the personal development of competences. This perspective, however, reduces VPL to a kind of intake assessment. It also turns the individual into a passive learner. VPL's potential as a vision on personal development, however, as well as an instrument, is much larger than that. VPL needs to be used on a much larger scale, especially in approaches geared more towards the individual. After all, VPL can motivate the individual to take more initiatives in personal development. Educational institutions, companies and other organizations can then fine tune their educational and personnel policies in line with this.

Three approaches

In particular, VPL makes it possible for a person to make an inventory of his/her competences, allowing those competences to receive a value and to be recognized; it is not a direct requirement that development steps are taken instantly, as this is up to the individual to decide. Recognizing and placing value on competences is also known as the *passive* or *summative* VPL approach. When VPL also stimulates further learning – that is, places a value on competences – this is called *activating* or *formative* VPL. These are the three main streams within VPL. A third form is focused on the person him- or herself and can be considered as a reflective form of VPL in which the individual is undergoing a process of self-valuation.

The modes of Valuing Prior Learning



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The methodology for Validation of Prior Learning takes many shapes and destinations. These can all be captured in three main modes:

1. **Reflective VPL**, takes the whole learning biography of an individual as the focus for building up a portfolio and action plan. Only after this is done, the individual makes a choice on taking action: which standard to link to,

which stakeholders to address, which learning goal, etc. A high level of (social) reflexivity can be defined by an individual shaping his/her own norms, desires and objectives. It refers to the notion of autonomy of the individual.

2. **Summative VPL:** building up a portfolio against a pre-set standard, with a one-dimensional goal; looking for access and exemptions.
3. **Formative VPL:** meeting up with a portfolio to a standard for deciding on what/where/how to learn further, or formulating a career-step with the portfolio as a starting point.

The essential difference between these approaches is that in a summative and formative VPL process the focus is on validating someone's development against a pre-set standard. Evidence for such a validation is collected in the form of 'a snapshot of someone's present status quo' through his/her diplomas, certificates, professional products, etc. The outcome of the VPL-process is official validation for learning accomplishments within a qualification or certificate. The award is captured in exemptions or (sometimes) in full qualifications/certificates. The formative process goes a step further than summative VPL. The objective is to further develop one's competence) on the basis of learning evidence and validated against a pre-set standard in learning (qualifications, certificates) and/or working (function profiles in systems for human resources management). In this sense, summative VPL can be seen as a part of formative VPL.

The reflective process is quite different from the other two forms. It is geared at enabling individuals to manage their own careers, articulate their own development needs and build up their own competences. Education and vocational training should respond to this, becoming more flexible and demand-driven. Formal systems such as qualification structures and vocational education will then have less of a prescriptive function in terms of personal development, and serve more as a reference framework and repertoire within which there is individual choice. These formal systems retain a function as pegs for defining the direction and level of personal development and the relevant external communication with employers, mediators, referrers, schools, etc.

From portfolio to *portfolio-loop*

The portfolio is the most important prerequisite for implementing VPL. Portfolios are used to plan, organize and document education, work samples, informal activities and skills. People can use portfolios to apply to school or training programmes, get a job, get a higher salary, show transferable skills, track personal development or more holistically, answer the question who they are and what their ambitions can/may be.

In general there are three types of portfolio:

1. A dossier portfolio is used to document proof for getting exemptions in a specific degree or qualification programme. The proof consists of professional products and behaviour results. This portfolio acts as a showcase for a summative APL-procedure. It is only filled with the necessary proof and is hardly steered by the candidate. Its nature is reflective, for the learning results that are of importance.
2. The development-portfolio focuses on broad, personal reflection. Its nature is reflective as well as prospective. It is filled with all relevant, lifewide proof of the candidate. Its nature is diagnostic for summative as well as for formative purposes. It is strongly steered and managed by the candidate (Tillema 2001).
3. The personal portfolio also aims at documenting learning results from the past. It can be used for any VPL-procedure and is highly (self-)reflective. The candidate first fills the portfolio with descriptions of his/her activities and achievements so far. Then he/she reflects on these activities by describing the personal competences that were necessary in the activity. This self-reflection can be strengthened by reflection from 'third parties'. The outcome of this process is a personalized portfolio that provides answers to questions like 'what are my strengths and weaknesses?', 'how can I build further on my personal achievements?', etc. Only then he/she might make up a personal action plan and decide to choose a specific developmental goal. Such a personal portfolio has a holistic character since it covers the person's lifespan and experiences regardless of external standards. (also see www.ch-q.nl/english).

By working with a portfolio most people go through a cyclical process: Which of my competences are strong developed or weak? Which of my competences fit in with my career- or learning needs? How to show my value to others? How to develop myself further? When asking oneself these questions by looking at the personal development-potential, people can decide which portfolio-type will meet their personal needs. In all cases, the

portfolio is taken as a starting point for new learning issues from a VPL-embedded situation. The entire process of validation, then, begins and ends with the portfolio since the new learning or development results will be added to the original portfolio. This enriched portfolio might at the same time be the basis for new development steps and start a new VPL process. This is known as the "portfolio loop" (Duvekot 2006 & 2007).

The VPL-process

VPL in general consists of five phases: commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences, recognition of personal competences, valuation and/or validation of these competences, (advice on the) development of one's competences and finally structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy (Duvekot 2005). Together these five phases constitute the VPL-process:

Phase 1: Commitment and awareness

An individual has to be aware of his/her own competences; of the value, he/she is giving him/herself to these competences and the value it has for others in certain contexts at certain moments. Being able to keep up your competences in a 'made-to-measure way' is vital for this understanding. A competence is actually to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from his or her actions. Society has a major interest in capitalising on this, whether through formal learning pathways in the school system during certain periods in life or through Non-formal and informal pathways in other periods.

For organisations, it is vital to understand that investing in people means investing in the goals of the own organisation. This awareness should culminate in setting specific targets for the investment in individuals and the support the organisation can give to this *human resource development*.

This phase consists of two steps: raising awareness and setting the targets for VPL within the specific context. This phase is the real critical success factor for VPL since if an organisation doesn't experience the necessity to think or rethink its mission and connect the results of this to the need to strengthen or even start up a pro-active form of human resource management. In general, this phase takes as much time as the other four phases together!

Phase 2: Recognition

Identifying or listing competences is usually done with the help of a portfolio. Apart from a description of work experience and diplomas, the portfolio is filled with other evidence of competences acquired. Statements from employers, professional products, references, papers or photos undeniably show the existence of certain competences. The evidence can be aimed at the profession or position the VPL procedure is developed for. In other cases it can be an 'open' portfolio or a complete overview. Evidence is sometimes aimed at valuation, in other cases at personal profiling. The participant compiles the portfolio him/herself, with or without help. This phase has a preparatory and a retrospective step. First the actual need for competences in the organisation in the different function-profiles is analysed. In the retrospective step, the involved individuals fill in their portfolios and acquire the necessary proof of their learning in the (recent) past.

Phase 3: the valuation or assessment of competences

Then the content of the portfolio is being valued or assessed, when necessary, followed by an extra assessment. This usually takes place by observation during work or by means of a criterion based interview. Assessors compare the competences of an individual with the standard that has been set in the given context. That standard will be used to measure the qualities of the participant. His/her learning path followed is unimportant, only the results count. This second step results in either a validation on an organisational, sector or national level in the form of certificates, diplomas or career moves, or in a valuation in the form of an advice on career-opportunities.

This phase needs different steps:

- Setting the standard of the specific VPL-process. It can in principal be any standard that meets the needs of the individual and/or the organisation, e.g. a national or sector qualification-standard or an internal standard. Together with the standard a choice can be made of the way the assessment will take place;
- The valuation itself, being the assessment of the portfolio and valuing it with correspondence to the given standard and targets of the organisation;
- The validation of the learning evidence within the given standard.

After this phase, the retrospective part of the VPL-process is concluded. The next phases concentrate on the prospective power of VPL.

Phase 4: the development plan

This phase of the VPL procedure aims at the development of the individual by turning the validation and/or advice into a personal action plan. On the basis of the valued competences and clarity about the missing competences or available strong competences, a personal development plan is made up. This plan is about learning activities that will be done in formal or non-formal learning environments, in work situations, during a change of position, by offering coaching or by creating an environment in which informal learning is stimulated. This phase has two steps. First, a match is made between the individual's development plan and the goals of the organisation. This match could be made by simply stating that any kind of individual learning is also for the benefit of the organisation. Mostly, however, the match will be agreed upon by making the personal development plan a formal part of the broader organisation plan.

Secondly, the actual learning or development of the individual will be started up. In this step, the individual learns/develops his or herself on a 'made-to-measure basis', which means learning/developing irrespective and independent of form, time, place and environment.

Phase 5: structural implementation of VPL

The last phase of the VPL-process focuses at the structural implementation of VPL in a personal strategy for updating the portfolio or in the human resource management (HRM) of an organisation. The results of a VPL-pilot have to be evaluated in order to show the way the implementation can take place on a 'made-to-measure basis'. An organisation should be able to use VPL structurally for the specific goals that had been set in the pilot. Any new goals should also be added easily to this new policy. The same goes for the reciprocity of setting learning goals by the individual him/herself in the dynamic learning society.

VPL offers a personal development-strategy in which the organisation-context and public/private services are crucial for keeping up with the speed of competence-development in the learning society. On the individual level this calls for filling in the five phases of VPL.

These five phases take in total ten steps as shown in the figure.

The process of 'Validation of Prior Learning'		
Phase	Step + question	Action individual
I. Preparation	1. awareness <i>Where and how did I learn so far?</i> <i>Which necessity is there for self-investment?</i>	Open mind to lifelong learning. Inventory of personal learning wishes. Start self-management of competences.
	2. setting targets <i>Which learning targets are relevant?</i>	Self-assessment. Personal SWOT-analysis. Formulate learning targets.
II. Recognition	3. setting a personal profile <i>how to determine the need for competences?</i>	Writing a personal profile. Choosing a portfolio-format.
	4. retrospection <i>how to describe and document learning outcomes/prior learning?</i>	Filling in a portfolio. If needed, portfolio-guidance.
III. Valuation & Validation	5. standard setting <i>what is the relevant standard related to the targets?</i>	Choosing a standard to refer to. Re-arranging the personal portfolio. Self-assessment. Inventory of career-opportunities.

	6. valuation <i>How to get valuated?</i>	Valuation of the portfolio. Getting advice on certification- and career opportunities.
	7. validation <i>How to get validated?</i>	Turning the advice into proper certification and career-evaluation.
IV. Develop- ment	8. prospection <i>How to set up a personal development plan (PDP)?</i>	Turning validation into a PDP for reasons of certification, employability, empowerment. Arranging learning-made-to-measure.
	9. implementing a PDP <i>Working on learning targets</i>	Executing the PDP.
V. Implementa- tion	10. Structural implementation & empowerment <i>How did it go? If ok, how to embed VPL structurally in a personal lifelong learning strategy?</i>	Evaluation of the process. Maintaining portfolio-documentation.

Source: Duvekot, 2005.

In the figure a few elements are crucial:

1. **Raising awareness** of the necessity and opportunities of lifelong learning for individuals in any given context is the heart of the process of validating/valuing prior learning. Without this, learning will remain school- or company-steered and cannot effectively be based on individual talents and ambition.
2. In Phase II **the portfolio** is introduced as the red thread in the process. After learning targets have been set, the portfolio is designed and filled; its content is assessed and an advice is added on possible qualification- and career-opportunities; it is subsequently enriched by learning-made-to-measure and finally, the starting point of a new process in which new learning targets can be formulated. The portfolio, so to say, is on the one hand both the starting as well as the end point of the individual learning process. On the other hand any end point is again the starting point of a new learning process. This is called a *portfolio-loop*.
3. In Phase III **self-assessment** is the crucial element because without this a person can only partially become co-maker of his/her personal development. A person needs to be focused on his/her own prior learning achievements before making a link with a pre-set standard in learning or working processes. There are different methods available for self-assessment, such as the Swiss *CH-Q* instrument (Schuur et al, 2003). It is an integral system, consisting of methods for building a portfolio, (self-) assessment, career- & action-planning, quality control and accompanying training programmes. In general methods like CH-Q aim at personal development or career-planning and/or creating flexibility and mobility of the individual learner to and on the labour market. They create added value by revitalising individual responsibility or co-production by:
 1. providing the basis for a goal-oriented development and career-planning,
 2. the stimulation of personal development,
 3. the support of self-managed learning and acting,
 4. stimulating young and adults to document continuously their professional- and personal development
4. **The role of the assessor** is vital for starting up personal development in any kind of form. Reliable assessment is the *bridgebuilder* between a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In any given context, an assessment-policy has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively. Assessment in this broad context is the judgement of evidence submitted for a specific purpose; it is therefore an act of measurement. It requires two things: evidence and a standard scale. (Ecclestone, 1994). Evidence is provided with the portfolio (or showcase) of the candidate. The standard that will be met, depends on the specific objective of the candidate. This means that the role of the assessor is all the more

crucial because this professional has to be flexible with regard to the many objectives in order to be able to provide a custom-oriented validation and/or valuation. On top of that the professional should be able to use dialogue-based assessment forms. On the basis of the advice of such an assessor further steps for personal development will be set in motion.

The choice of a specific assessor role largely depends on the objective of the assessment, which can vary greatly. Assessments for formal validation of competences with certificates or exemptions for accredited training programmes demand the involvement of an assessor from an institution offering competence-based accreditation and adequate measures to guarantee the quality of the assessor. Assessments for accrediting competences at the company or institution level or merely to acquire insight into someone's competences do not require the involvement of an institution offering competence-based certification. In these cases, the assessor is also often a colleague, supervisor or the individual himself.

5. In order to guarantee **good 'quality' of the assessor** on the one hand and prevent the rise of a new quality control-bureaucracy on the other hand, it is recommended to formulate a 'quality-light' procedure for validation-procedures. A further advantage of a 'quality-light' procedure is that it is cost-effective and more transparent to candidates. Possibilities for organising such a 'quality-light' approach are:
 - any assessor should first design and fill in his/her own portfolio and personal action-plan; only then they can be given entrance to assessor-trainings,
 - a professional register for assessors should guarantee their assessment-competences and professionalism,
 - every two years a new assessor accreditation should guarantee professionalism by ensuring assessor quality. Assessor quality can be maintained by means of refresher and updating courses. This new accreditation could be carried out by an official national agency, and tripartite governing (authorities and social partners),
 - quality of assessors implies being able to refer to a standard for assessors: this standard needs accreditation in a given national application (a role for the government).
6. Regarding the **development-steps** one might say that, when following the personalized path of VPL, lifelong learning is extended to a wider range of objectives, not only from learning to certification but also from learning to empowerment and employability. This calls for a strong involvement of the different stakeholders. Stakeholders that are involved in establishing systems for validation should not only be 'educationalists' and ministries but also employers and trade unions. VPL calls for a clear responsibility of not only certification-systems but also from human resource systems.
7. Proper **evaluation** and **feedback** finally is necessary to structurally embed the process into personal behaviour.

Supporting VPL in practice

The central question of this chapter was 'how to activate VPL as an effective instrument for linking competences and credits in lifelong learning that appeals to citizens, strengthens their empowerment and also is beneficial to the other stakeholders in society?'. With this question in mind, we aimed at showing the potential of VPL as a matchmaker between these stakeholders and the critical success factors for developing and implementing VPL in a diversity of contexts. In all contexts the VPL-process follows more or less the same phases and steps. This can help in demonstrating how and where to set up interventions for strengthening VPL as a matchmaker for the sake of creating time- and money-effective and - above all – efficient lifelong learning-strategies with a variety of learning objectives and on a win-win-win-basis for 'me', 'my organisation' and 'my learning provider'.

VPL can in this respect best be explained in the following statements:

- VPL shows the real human potential on the basis of the analysis and validation of personal competences, documented in a portfolio.
- VPL is the process of assessing and valuating/recognizing personal competences within a specific socio-economic context and offering a personal development strategy.
- Organisations benefit from VPL since individuals develop within their context.

- The VPL process in general consists of five phases: commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences, recognition of personal competences, valuation and/or assessment of these competences, (advice on the) development of one's competences and finally structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy.

Crucial in practising VPL is acknowledging the self-managing role of the 'empowered' learning individual in making lifelong learning a reality! The active participation of individuals in decisions about form and content of lifelong learning and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies from work-based or school/university-based is supported by VPL for many perspectives:

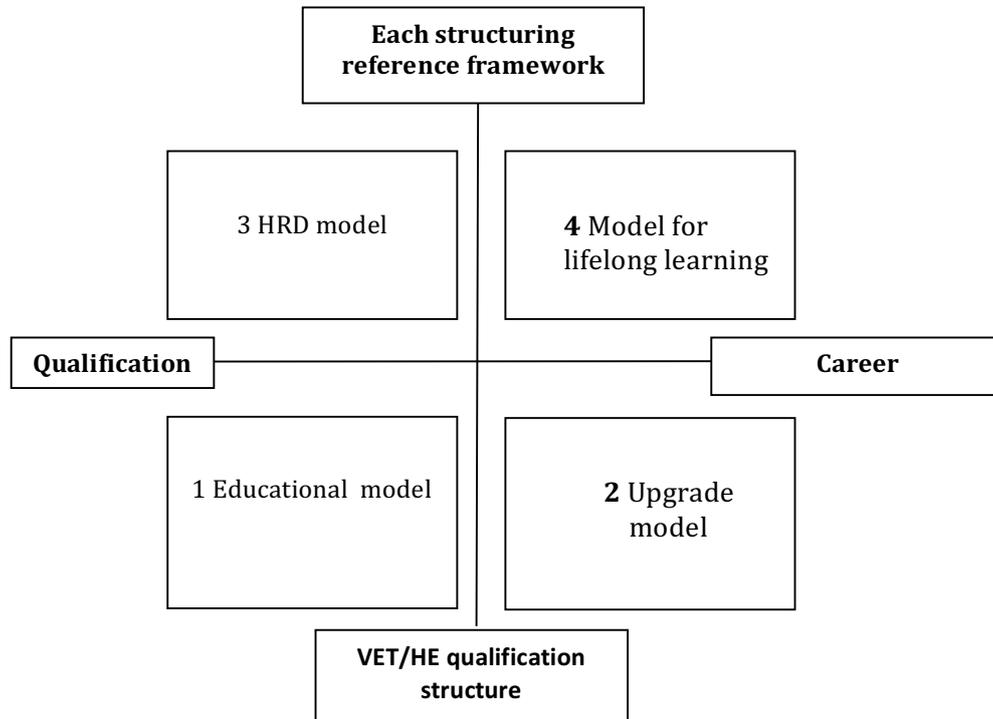
- 1 ... *for improving opportunities for empowerment and deployment*: improved empowerment and deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying VPL. It increases the opportunities for the individual in one's private life and on the labour market by highlighting the competences he or she already has and how these competences can be deployed and strengthened. This can apply both to those already in employment and to job seekers. For employers and trade unions, the emphasis lies on improving the employability of employees within the working context.
- 2 ... *for creating a more demand-led labour market*: improving the match between the learning system and the labour system is essential for the organisation of VPL. In order to improve deployability, labour market functions must be expressed in terms of competences. These competences must in turn be linked to a demand for learning. The learning system must be receptive, transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required.
- 3 ... *for making learning more flexible*: the validation of informally and non-formally acquired competences will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the accreditation of competences can lead directly to an award of or exemptions for qualifications. The validation approach can also make visible or recognisable existing competences and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The learner will not only want to learn in a customer-oriented fashion but will also know better than now how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.
- 4 ... *for optimising other forms of learning*: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since VPL also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. The validation of competences and qualifications will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification structure in professional education. The existing description of exit qualifications in the current qualification structure for professional education does not always tie in with the competences required on the labour market.

So, there's a lot to gain with VPL. Let's find out into more detail how VPL works in practice. The framework can be used as a model for this purpose when describing and analysing practical case studies in a diversity of contexts: across sectors, types of organisations and learning environments; with different target groups, personal approaches and goals; in the diversity of dialogues between the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. The 'practice' of VPL is revealed in four main strategies.

Four models for VPL-enhanced learning strategies

Recognizing Learning is intended to recognise and to value both visible and invisible skills of people. It is not focused on highlighting the lack of knowledge and skills but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing knowledge and skills. In VPL-practices this vision is always acknowledged; the 'face' of VPL may differ however and shows itself in four main models of Recognizing Learning as:

The 4 models of 'Recognizing Learning'



Source: Feenstra et al, 2003.

Procedures for Validating Learning are implemented in a variety of ways. Three steps can always be distinguished: identifying competences and raising awareness (recognition), assessing competences (assessment) and planning new learning activities (personal development). Possible implications of these procedures are promoting personal self-management of competences and personal development activities. Apart from that building bridges between non formal and formal learning and between education and the labour market in order to facilitate lifelong learning from the diversity of perspectives on the four models is at the heart of implementing Recognizing Learning as a principle in VET and HE.

Despite the diversity, a structure can be defined for the demand and supply sides within the broad field of validation-services. The structuring is based on *the objective* (what is the expected effect?) and *the context* (which reference framework or benchmark is applied?).

Interpreting these two lines as a pair of axes, gives us four fields in which Recognizing Learning can be used to serve a particular goal within a particular context: the four models of Recognizing Learning.

A short typology of the four models produces the following description:

1. Recognizing Learning as a bridge between VET/HE and the labour market: the educational model

The function of recognizing learning in this model is aiming primarily at providing qualification on the levels of VET and HE. The two most important forms in which this model occurs:

- Traditional exemption policy based on previously acquired qualifications, which looks only at prior formal education and the relevant certificates;
- Exemption policy based on broader evidence; competences acquired non-formally or informally are also assessed.

A proper quality of the qualification is the primary benchmark, as it must be *recognized* and *accredited* on the responsibility of the provider (the qualifying educational institution). The goals that applicants aim to achieve by obtaining qualifications, and whether qualification is the best way to reach these goals, are not the provider's primary concern. In this model, the provider supplies a good quality product: qualifications and diplomas for

competences acquired elsewhere. Development is offered in this sphere by providing a customized, educational package.

2. Recognizing Learning as model for acquisition of initial qualifications: the upgrade model

Recognizing Learning in this model focuses on the contribution made by accreditation and certification to obtaining or retaining employment. Forms that occur in this sphere are:

- Validation and accreditation of competences that have been acquired (formally and informally) in the context of the occupation pursued by the candidate. The procedure and tools used are tailored as far as possible to the individual work environment.
- Validation and accreditation of competences that have been acquired (formally and informally) in the context of the occupation that the candidate intends to maintain or pursue.

Recognizing Learning is tailored to the employment goals of the candidate. The competences in his/her specific context are tailored to that objective. Obtaining initial qualifications in an effective and efficient way is at the heart of this model: only the necessary training – if needs be – has to be formulated.

Providers select and design the way in which the whole process is shaped, and within that process educational institutes act as suppliers of all or part of the services. Development is provided by offering customized forms of both formal learning and informal learning.

3. Recognizing Learning as model for upgrading competences within any structured context: the HRD model

In this model Recognizing Learning is aiming primarily at the validation of competences (provision of diplomas, qualifications or partial certificates) outside the context of VET/HE.

People acquire competences that cannot always be related to existing VET/HE-qualifications in a variety of ways, in formal and informal learning and/or in work situations. Sector training institutes, company schools and voluntary organizations with a high professional content (sports associations etc.) are examples of organisations (or providers) that work with validation of competences based on other standards.

The aim of Recognizing Learning in this model is to upgrade individuals within their specific context in order to keep them employable and provide them with concrete career opportunities. The provider supplies a good quality product: certificates and diplomas for competences acquired elsewhere. Personal development is offered by providing validation and learning at the workplace.

4. Recognizing Learning as model for lifelong learning

The fourth model may be viewed as the integrated model within which the other three spheres are subsumed.

'Lifelong learning' outlines the situation of members of our society who are engaged in a process of self-development in line with their own development requirements on the one hand and the demands of their environment on the other. This model shows the learning individual who is developing himself or herself continuously and in that process makes use of the facilities provided for the recognizing the competences that he or she has acquired personally or professionally. He/she might also use them to make it clear what he or she has to offer to employment organizations and other collaborative efforts.

The many forms in which this model emerges are offered by providers (employment organizations, head-hunters for senior posts, employability coaching) who guide individuals in the development of their portfolios. Where necessary, teachers and trainers act to certify competences. The characteristic feature is that the development programme is determined and controlled by the person in question. While institutions facilitate and provide support, they do not set the direction.

Examples of VPL

Several good practices illustrate the way to act in the different modes of the VPL-enhanced learning strategies, for the benefit of employees and employers as well as learning facilitators and society as a whole.

The Rockwool Group in the Netherlands is the world's leading supplier of innovative products and systems based on stone wool. This case offers a good example of the HRD-model, using also the benefits of the Educational model.

Since the 1990s learning is a key element in the human resource management-policy of Rockwool. In the plant in the Netherlands this HRM-policy can be regarded as an ongoing process of linking learning and working for each

individual employee by means of competence-steered assessment methods and work-based development-programmes:

- Assessment is considered as a summative and a formative method for enhancing performance of not only the employees for the company but also of the company for the employees.
- Learning goals are oriented towards employability and qualification on the one hand for strengthening the working-processes, and on the other hand for creating empowerment and opening up internal/external career-opportunities for the employees.
- Development is focused on facilitating learning trajectories that are beneficial for employability, personal development and internal/external career-steps of the employees.
- VPL is the method for linking the potential of employees with the need for competences. It is utilised as a multi-targeted method for sustainable HRM.

On April 11, 2014 Rockwool was awarded in Rotterdam, the Netherlands at the 1st Global VPL Biennale the International Prize 2014 for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. (www.vplbiennale.com).

The International Women's Centre (IVC) in Den Helder, the Netherlands provides an example of the lifelong learning model (www.int-vrouwencentrum.nl).

VPL at the IVC aims at contributing to the emancipation, participation and integration of migrant women in the Netherlands. One of the activities of the IVC is a structured training for self-management of competences. The aim is to teach the women to get a good grip on their personal skills and competences for the sake of empowerment and to find their way in Dutch society. The outcomes of the training can be used for setting up career opportunities in further learning, in volunteering and paid work and for embedding their personal life in a country with different cultural customs. During the training the awareness of their personal values is strengthened.

The training is arranged according to the Swiss CH-Q method (a Swiss vocational qualifications programme that has developed tools to document skills). CH-Q follows the steps of the VPL-procedure: raising awareness, documentation, presentation, assessment and certification.

The main focus of CH-Q is to enable individuals to manage their own careers, articulate their own development needs and build up their own competences.

After passing the training and presenting their personal action plan, the students receive an approved certificate. The CH-Q training has been offered since 2009 and is successfully continued every year (see www.ch-q.nl for more detail). The training is offered twice a year; since 2009 45 women participated in the training; of this group, many found jobs (paid and voluntary work) or started up a study program at a VET-school or university.

A Danish case study focused on the Knowledge Centre Mid-West (Ecotec, 2007). The main focus of this Centre was to bring competence assessment into real life conditions and assess skills and competences in the workplace, where the competences can be demonstrated and where they are normally used. The main reasons for such a choice were: the fact that the vast majority of the target group (immigrants) did not have any previous work experience and the view that the best way to assess a person's skills was to do that in the workplace. Moreover, since most of the immigrants did not have any previous education, assessment by educational institutions was not considered to be as relevant as an assessment by companies. In this sense this is a case in which the HRD model is very functional with both the Educational as well as the Upgrade model supporting the success of VPL for the target group.

The unemployed immigrants are supported by consultants at the job centers for a workplace competence assessment. After the assessment period is finished, the immigrant is issued with a 'competence card', which describes actual competences as they are observed. The competence card can be used as a recommendation when looking for another job (or being recommended by a job consultant to on -the-job training).

Assessment, through observation, is carried out in the workplace by a mentor. The process is facilitated by an online tool, which specifies which skills and competences are to be assessed for a particular job. The tool contains descriptions for each job and specifies the range of skills that ensure proper execution of tasks envisaged by a given job function. The development of standards was based on the existing national occupational standards. However, the process of constructing job descriptions went further by breaking down the skills and competences into functions.

During the three to four week assessment period, personal competences, professional, language, computer and

basic skills are assessed in relation to the tasks performed. The reasons for prioritizing these competences was the fact that the employers often perceive immigrant workers as lacking key personal competences needed in a Danish workplace.

Due to the initial low or no level of education of the target groups, the types of jobs that are performed are those corresponding to an unskilled labour level, such as cleaner. In some cases, the skills acquired can correspond to qualification levels and are usually complemented by vocational training in an education institution. Whenever the qualification serves the purpose of getting a person into employment, this option is chosen. This is especially relevant to the social services sector where the demand for labour, especially at lower skill levels, is high and offers a very effective bridge into employment for immigrants.

During the assessment period the employers can be compensated with a wage subsidy for a learner. In many cases learners are offered further training in the company, where companies can benefit from training subsidies and a learner is paid a minimum wage for their work.

The system is also useful for other target groups that lack proper professional experience. It receives considerable support from employers who are, first of all keen to take on new trainees and secondly, satisfied with the new standardized tools that minimize their time spent on giving feedback while at the same time allowing for comparability of the assessment results.

In Finland, Koskisen Oy has been developing training and assessment methods in order to recognise and, at the same time, broaden the skill levels of its employees since the early 1990s. Their initiative has not only benefited the employees and the company itself but it has had a wider impact on the industry sector. This is a case (Ecotec, 2007) that shows how the lifelong learning model works in the context of profit-sectors. This is absolutely the case for the company itself. For the employees, employability was their primary target to be reached with the assistance of qualifications. But in the end, it turned out to be more a kind of an empowerment strategy for the employees since VPL helped them to learn and work on the basis of their own strengths and talents.

Koskisen Oy is a manufacturing company in the field of wood production. During the past 10 years some 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employees) have been able to validate the skills and the learning they have acquired at work and have obtained an official qualification.

The company offers 'in-house' training, which together with work experience provides employees with an opportunity to attain one of a range of nationally recognised competence-based qualifications (e.g. various wood production and management qualifications).

The skills are assessed by a team consisting of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives. The assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. All the participants are required to possess 1-2 years of work experience.

The validation and certification has had significant individual, company and industry level effects, both for the employees as well as for the company.

The Welfare sector in the Netherlands finally provides a good example of VPL embedded in the HRD-model on sector-level, using the educational model for standard setting. In 2011-2012 a pilot project on VPL and tailor-made learning was initiated. The project focuses on the mobility/promotion from group leader to senior group leader in the Welfare sector. Prior work experience and learning outcomes are assessed and recognised in an VPL procedure, using both sector standards as well as HE qualifications (Ervaring, 2012).

An examination committee of the university evaluates the VPL-report of the candidate that he/she obtained in the APL-procedure as part of the intake for a qualification-programme (incl. portfolio and assessment). The aim of this evaluation is to either obtain directly the HE-qualification that is linked to the sector-standard for senior group leader or obtain a tailor-made learning programme, taking into account prior learning outcomes and filling in the remaining learning targets in the HE-programme.

Fifteen candidates from one youth care institute participated in the VPL-programme. Of these, 13 received an APL-report (or in formal Dutch procedure 'a national experience certificate' that is obligatory when accessing HE by means of VPL). This report is the basis for programming further development and learning for the candidate. On top of this, the candidates could also receive a sector-certificate if they complied with all criteria in the sector-standard. Only one candidate received this certificate during the pilot-phase.

The VPL-procedure was managed by an VPL-manager from the university, two portfolio-advisers (from the university and from the employer) and two assessors (internal-university and external-sector).

The exam committee from the department of Pedagogics (Professional HE) acknowledged the sector-standard as a relevant standard to match with the HE-standard of Pedagogics. A matrix for general comparison was designed and used by the exam committee.

Furthermore, all stakeholders also acknowledged the relevance and value of both standards (sector and national) and the steps in the VPL-process.

This project is interesting because it offers validation in higher professional education qualifications for experienced youth workers. Furthermore, because of the use of VPL in a multiple targeted policy for employability (formative) and qualification (summative). This multiple-targeted VPL is used at the welfare-institute for linking two purposes:

1. the purpose of addressing an employee's learning needs (knowing how to invest best in yourself),
2. for creating horizontal and/or vertical employability chances (knowing where to come to your best).

A UK case study on VPL for marginalised groups [students with 'special education needs (SEN)' and students aged 50-plus] (Murray, 2014) is an example of the educational model. The UK picture of VPL supporting access to HE is varied. Policy, practice and culture affect VPL at a national level and HE institutes view their own VPL provision, policy and practice positively.

The majority of individuals in the UK case study were able to report at least some level of success in regard to VPL. The data indicate two major focus points where VPL is applied at least some of the time in the UK HE institutes, resulting in some satisfaction for individuals: prior learning or experience reducing or eliminating entry requirements and allowances during the programme to ease individuals' progress through the degree.

The case study indicates that once equality legislation is accounted for, the UK government tends to devolve many of the VPL processes relating to access to HE to HE institutes. Whilst aspects of the VPL processes are evident in most HE institutes, there is a lack of consistency and transparency so that individuals attempting to access HE often find it difficult to navigate their way through the VPL processes. In regard to access to HE and VPL processes, an unequal power relationship exists between HE institutes and individuals, weighted towards HE institutes; this especially disadvantages marginalised groups who are likely to be in the greatest need of access to VPL processes in order to access HE.

The case of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences in Finland (Lepänjuuri & Burns, 2014) provides insights that addressing learning needs of learners in special education needs and 50-plus groups and applying VPL in HE can be challenging. It sets an example of the educational model in which VPL is both used for summative as well as for reflective purposes.

In particular applying VPL approaches to learners in the SEN group seemed difficult. This was due to them having had difficulties in the past which had led to patchy educational backgrounds and employment histories. It cannot be stressed enough that paying attention to guidance and inclusive pedagogical practices that value diverse ways of learning enhances everybody's learning but more so with these kinds of learners. Students with SEN may not always have a clear idea about their own learning needs and competences, and therefore discussions about individual strengths and abilities may offer a way to think of alternative ways to learn in HE. Dialogues and discussions with the tutor seem to be effective methods and, therefore, they should be used throughout the studies. This kind of approach puts students at the centre of learning and encourages them to reflect on their individual needs and competences more deeply.

However, the VPL system as a whole poses great challenges for HE institutes, pedagogical solutions and individuals. It requires particular flexibility from educational providers at the time when resources are already scarce. It is important to develop modules into which the VPL system is incorporated and make sure that these are up-to-date in order to guarantee a high quality VPL system. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the approach, idea, tools and methods of VPL are important elements in student guidance systems.

It is also useful to think about the steps of the learning process more widely. Our case describes this as follows: *"[Generally in education] it would be important to bring forward diverse types of learners and test, discuss and bring up alternative ways of learning. That is to say that teachers and students should consider together what the best way to learn is. Learning new things shouldn't be too difficult at beginning or otherwise one might give up. Clarifying things that's unclear, re-doing, recapping and practical application are important parts of the learning process. It would be good to gain positive experiences along the way."*

The same principles should be applied to all students; VPL methods and procedures are likely to be as suitable for all learners as they should be for SEN and 50+ groups. The successes or failures of these two special groups can offer insights into where VPL as a whole stands.

In Switzerland a case-study focused on a group of HE-qualified immigrant women, having difficulties in valuing their prior learning and competences in the local job market (Bednarz & Bednarz, 2014). The case analyzed three different aims addressed by activating an VPL path: *individual empowerment*, through the self-validation of competences, as a means for better planning redeployment and spend one's own skills and competences in the job market; *access to lifelong learning*, through the valuation of prior learning as a means for overcoming barriers and reducing the duration of a formal tertiary education path; and finally *access to an official qualification*, as a means for achieving visibility and accountability of skills and competences via validation of informal and non-formal learning. Different VPL modes, often coexisting ones, could be identified in the practices focused on:

- *reflective VPL* comes always to the fore, as far as the reflective elaboration of life, work and learning biographies of individuals is the basis for building up personal portfolios and for designing action plans
- *formative VPL*, enables learners decide what/where/how to spend their prior learning, both for valuing it in the job market, for further developing their profiles or formulating a career-step with the portfolio as a starting point
- *summative VPL* finally plays a central function, both in access to lifelong learning and to a qualification, where personal portfolios are built up against pre-set standards, looking for an official diploma or for exemptions.

The case study showed to which extent heterogeneity is the key word explaining how VPL actually works, confirming therefore the usefulness of multidimensional and multi-target approaches. Goals of VPL-users largely depend on the kind of VPL targets (empowerment, validation, certification), as well as from the positioning of the persons in the life cycle, by their biographical background and professional identity. Local learning cultures and traditions also play a fundamental role. Diverse dimensions and VPL modes appear to be integrated, and should be considered under the lens of crosscutting links: between personal and professional goals, formative and summative meanings of VPL, roles of education, training and experience in formal and informal learning settings, targets of empowerment (individual), social and institutional validation.

Summing up the examples

These examples show that large groups from very different contexts and with different objectives can use Recognizing Learning. The bottleneck for making use of Recognizing Learning is less the knowledge infrastructure or organizations and more the individual's unfamiliarity with Recognizing Learning. This means that it is primarily the transition to individual empowerment that is causing the present underutilization of Recognizing Learning as gateway to employability and lifelong learning strategies of social partners and schools/institutes. Additionally, the examples show that the reason for this does not by definition lie in authority relationships. The individual is given adequate leeway to arrange a personal track with the individual learning biography, even if that lies outside the individual's own professional column. This stimulation of the learner offers opportunities for capacitation at HE-levels since it's at this level where learning strategies come to full bloom, both in terms of looking backwards into a learner's biography as well as forward when formulating further learning tasks for learners in society. The HE-level is best situated to enhance this since the HE-level has the biggest potential for personal development and linking one's competences to the needs of society (in social, cultural and economic terms). It is the level that fits in best with the needs of capacitation in society and the network with learner providers for linking the learner's prior learning to efficient, further learning strategies. The sector reveals itself in this way as *the bridge builder* between learners and organisations by stimulating VPL-enhanced learning strategies.



Guidelines and a roadmap

Now we arrive at **'the what'** of Valuing or validating Prior learning. The main purpose of this part is to answer the question *'What to do when implementing VPL in the context of higher education institutes with linkages to national and sector levels?'*. Both conclusions and critical success factors regarding the implementation of VPL-systematics, as well as a roadmap for using general guidelines for this purpose, are offered. The roadmap is embedded in HEIs context and objectives with linkages to the national and sector VPL-policies.

VPL means that HEIs acquire a clear picture of the competence demands and requirements in society – and to be more precise in the learning needs of people, of individuals -, work on the formulation of their services and invest in their own 'human capital' as well. For the learning system above all VPL means acting as a 'listening' partner, initiating and offering VPL *and* custom work.

The citizens have to (be) prepare(d) for the exploration, identification and development of their personal competences so that they can work proactively on their empowerment, employability and career opportunities. VPL and custom work are outstanding tools with which the individual citizen can attain this enhancement if guided by transparent competence-based standards in the sector and supported by well-trained professionals (guides and assessors) and supportive actions from the HEIs.

Reflection on 'the what' of VPL

In order to be able to recognise the developments regarding VPL within the HE-sector and within the variety of goals and contexts more clearly, four different VPL-steered models for learning strategies were introduced. On the basis of these models the following conclusions – relevant for the HE sector's context - can be drawn:

1. VPL has everything to do with the potential of (lifelong) learning for learners and organisations in terms of employability and empowerment. A strong focus on the self-managing role of the 'learner' him- or herself is a crucial part in exploiting this potential to the fullest:
 - a. the learner can be in charge of putting together and maintaining the portfolio. The portfolio is the basis for the formation of a lifelong learning strategy. Guidance from the organisation is essential;
 - b. the sector/organisation is responsible for formulating the organisation's competence needs in transparent competence-standards (in terms of explicit learning outcomes) and to facilitate investment in its *learning* employees;
 - c. the learning facilitators (professional education and training) must be able to respond to the various learning needs of the learning individual, in other words be able to offer educational programmes that can be implemented custom-made with respect to learning objectives/forms/environments (blended learning).
2. Commitment is needed for the idea that the learner plays a key role in establishing, being able (or supported in being able) to co-design and -implement any learning strategy up to a certain level⁴. This investment in human capital calls for co-designing responsibilities for the learner him/herself. At all times the primary process here is the process of moving towards the desired learning goals, both in determining an individual's starting situation as well as during an individual's development course, leading to the expected (new) learning outcome.

⁴ 'a certain level' has a bandwidth from autonomous and self-helped till dependent and fully coached/guided.

3. The portfolio is a powerful way to give structure and content to this learner's responsibility of co-design. Guidance from within the sector and companies could be a welcome push in this direction by offering:
 - a. training in self-management of competences. This is a useful way to start the formation of the desired portfolio.
 - b. help in putting together a portfolio in the work situation. An expert on the subject, easily approachable, who can offer help in designing a portfolio, is of great value in actually realising portfolio formation.
 - c. self-assessment tools, for instance, to help determine the competence and ambition level of the learner. This could be of great use in determining goals and direction in the learner's learning objectives, of course with respect to the sector needs.
4. In the light of the different goals needed to make a start in sector-based learning strategies, further research is needed into the motives for and the design of learning strategies. The four models (educational, upgrade, HRD and lifelong learning) can then be taken up on the basis of their own dynamics in the dialogues between learner, sector/organisation and learning facilitators, in which the three main actors can deal with their respective responsibilities.
5. VPL as a bridge between the portfolio of the learner and the competence-based standards of the organisation, supported by professional education/schooling, only becomes relevant when concrete learning questions have been formulated, which then need to be answered by professional education/schooling. The basis for all learning questions is, after all, deciding what the starting situation of the individual is when being assessed against a sector-standard
6. On the basis of a specific learning question a learning trajectory can be offered that is adapted to the specific context; this could be a diploma trajectory but also personal enrichment by learning in the form of modules, action learning, distance education, work guidance or otherwise.
7. VPL may serve as a bridge between the competence needs of, on the one hand, the organisation and, on the other, the individual learner. This calls for two forms of VPL:
 - a. Synchronizing competence systems of organisations on the one hand, with their competence management or HRM, and on the other hand schools and institutes, with their competence-based curricula and training programmes. The goal of this synchronization is to determine which competences and learning programmes can best be linked to the determination of the learning needs of the learner in the assessment of his/her portfolio; in this way the portfolio of the learner can be fed and upgraded from within the HRM and the (professional) educational and training system. This form of VPL is top-down oriented and strives for a harmony between competence systems in the areas of supply (education/training) and demand (sector, organisations).
 - b. Through this synchronisation the learner can make clearer choices with regards to the strategies for enriching his/her portfolio. The validation that the learner seeks (dependent on the learning goals that prevail in the VPL-set-up) can then be supported by a personalized procedure. In this way VPL can provide concrete indications of what the most appropriate learning route for personal development is. In doing so, the learner can also make use of the competence acquisition that can be supported from within the own organisation or through external organisations. This form of VPL is bottom-up oriented and aims at creating a balance between personal and organisational development issues and links these issues to the most appropriate learning programmes and tailor-made designs.

Critical Success Factors (csf's)

Various critical success factors concerning the further implementation of VPL in the sector can be distilled from the policy-development and the practical evidence presented in this report.

Concerning the subsequent phases in the sector-driven VPL-process these csf's are:

Phase 1: Preparation and validation of competences

- Concentrating on marketing of VPL is highly important. The learner should be addressed especially, because if he/she fails to see the need for learning, there will be no learning at all!

- Collection of practical VPL-examples from all levels, i.e. on individual, organisational and systemic levels can assist in this marketing.
- Supportive infrastructure: communicate also existing, favourable legislation, financial arrangements and regulations for VPL.
- Educational awareness should be raised in an organisation or company: investing educationally in someone's potential always pays off.
- Communication and guidance on the why/how/what of VPL must be crystal clear to the learner. This is closely linked to the provision of well-trained guides within the organisation/sector.
- Self-management of competences is crucial: in the division of roles between those involved, the emphasis for the learner is on personal process management; for the organisation on the formulation of learning needs; and for the education/training institutions on the development of flexible learning-made-to-measure programmes. This step involves the creation of personal portfolio-formats and – possibly – structured portfolio-training and portfolio-guidance for employees.
N.B. The level up to which the learner is capable of - autonomously or guided - building-up his/her portfolio gives a clear image of the level self-steered learning that the learner is probably up to when it comes to design and implementation of the personalized learning strategy.

Phase 2: Recognition of competences

- A candidate must work with a clear portfolio(format). Depending on the goal and the context there are three main forms available.
- Training-programmes for self-management of competences must be offered. Such a training is very helpful in designing, filling and managing one's portfolio.
- Setting standards involves selection of a standard from educational or human resource systems by the candidate dependent on goal & context of VPL.
- The function of guidance should be strengthened, especially in the 'empowerment-model'.
- The accessibility of a chosen standard is extremely important in the candidate's self-management.

Phase 3: Valuation and Assessment of competences

- Transparency, uniformity, harmonisation and collaboration at sector level and creating linkages with national qualifications is important.
- Match competence systems from organisations and educational systems. VPL is the bridge.
- Impartial assessment must be safeguarded in the VPL procedures, so that an objective and independent assessment can take place.
- No distinction between diplomas acquired on the basis of formal, informal or non-formal learning needs to be the basis for the sector's learning culture.
- VPL should be possible at all qualification and function levels.

Phase 4: Further development of competences

- Organisations need to facilitate personal development plans, provide guidance and offer transparent competence management.
- Function-standards need to be formulated in terms of learning outcomes which are based on task-oriented competences.
- Education must value the workplace as a rich learning environment.
- The people need to self-manage their personal development programmes as much as possible, when being active in a VPL procedure. This ownership means that it is up to them to make choices in the degree of self-determination or external direction within their development. These choices range between 100% self-management of form and content of the programme (*empowering*) and 0% (*pampering*).

Phase 5: Anchoring VPL

- Organisations must ensure that their formulation of demands is effective. Clear formulation of demands means that there is clarity concerning (1) the competences that are present within the organisation, and (2) the required competences within the framework of the organisational aims. 1 and 2 can be combined to

ensure the development of (3) the competence demands within the organisation, and ultimately (4), an action plan for the validation and development of available and required competences.

- Research into the effects of VPL: research is needed into the added value of VPL, among other things focussed on its economic, financial and social effects.
- Integration of VPL in HRM-systems: there must be a better integration of VPL into HR policy and practice, aimed at enhancing employability and mobility, increasing voluntary participation and working towards achievable goals.
- Linkages with the NQF to enhance the role of learning within the sector.

Linking the HE's sector-policy on VPL to a national VPL policy

VPL-policy in the HE sector should first of all best be geared at the VPL-mode of further training/learning with linkages to formalized learning modules, certificates and/or qualifications. Utilization of the policy can than secondly be enhanced by giving more attention to creating dynamic HRD in universities, therewith enforcing the VPL-systematics for more purposes, namely of:

- Strengthening people's self-management of competences and their personal development within/outside work. This purpose especially strengthens people's motivation for learning.
- Linking people's personal/private developed competences to the public sector-tasks by focusing also on informal and non-formal learning achievements outside of the formal learning and working grounds. This purpose helps learners and organisations to understand the full potential of VPL.
- Re-training the sector-staff in sustainable talent management for:
 - o linking work-tasks in the best way possible to adult's talents,
 - o for taking care of designating further learning tasks to adults with high value for money (only training-tasks that are necessary)
 - o offering career-guidance by validating employees in their actual functioning.

This action helps creating a favourable sector-infrastructure for HRD that can be organisation- and/or learner-steered.

When tied in more closely to the objectives of a given national VPL-policy and taking notice of the state of the art of VPL in a specific country, the HE sector could make big steps in rolling out VPL society. This depends on acknowledging the value and the width of the learner's autonomous learning achievements and being able to link these achievements to HE-based learning strategies in which any model for VPL can be activated.

The recommendations for further implementation of VPL aim at:

- increasing the number and the quality of further learning programmes for adults ('provider quality'),
- increasing the number and the quality of staff for performing VPL, such as assessors and guides ('learner support'),
- developing a coherent VPL-system across the HE sector ('systemic approach'),
- creating a common VPL-language and understanding of the VPL-process ('advocacy').

The challenges for the HE sector

Taking account of existing policy and practice in specific countries, the HE sector faces a challenge when activating its VPL-policy. Big steps are possible when acknowledging the international and national recommendations and valorising the critical success factors. When tuning in to the different models for VPL-strategies, the HE sector can create its own momentum in society-steered VPL-practices.

It's evident that the HE sector itself needs to make clear how the practical use of VPL can come to full bloom in society. Relevant questions are: how to activate all stakeholders? Which problems and which ambitions can be made transparent? Who does what and with what motive? Which learning-demand is relevant and with which intended learning outcome? How does lifelong learning refer to the general framework that authorities and social partners are maintaining?

These questions relate to a high degree to national and sector priorities and the linkages to national guidelines for VPL. As the policy in general in EU member states is now, VPL is mainly focused on the educational model,

with linkages to formalized learning (modules, certificates and/or qualifications). There could however also be attention for creating dynamic HRM, therewith taking advantage of the VPL-systematics for enhancing:

- People's self-management of competences and their personal development within/outside work.
- Linking people's competences to their public sector-tasks.
- Re-training HRM-staff in sectors to be able to support/facilitate sustainable talent management for empowerment and personal development on the workplace by:
 - o linking work-tasks in the best way possible to worker's talents,
 - o taking care of designating further learning tasks to employees with high value for money (only training-tasks that are necessary),
 - o offering career-guidance by validating employees in their actual functioning and strengthening them in their career.

Some suggestions for formulating a HE-steered policy on VPL:

- I. The purpose of VPL should be broad formulated and linked to a division of responsibilities between (1) employers and their HRM-staff⁵, (2) trade unions, citizens (3) learning/training-providers and (4) sector-based VPL-professionals⁶ in HE such as assessors, advisors and quality-verifiers, both in learning and in working arenas.
- II. Broad purpose means utilizing VPL both in the learning/training fields as well as in the working/social spheres; this entails a broader focus on people's competences that just for training purposes; it's all about better work performance. VPL helps people to recognize their own potential and only thereafter come objectives concerning utilizing and strengthening their potential. This not only means a focus on qualification and credits but also a focus on designating new/other tasks in their present (and future) functioning.
- III. There's more to learning experiences than just job-related experiences. What to say of the potential value of people's competences developed in social activities, citizenship, volunteering, household management, etc.? What is needed, above all, is a strong focus on prior formal, informal and non-formal learning experiences! It's with this focus that impact can be generated for both employees as well as for employers.
- IV. The legislative context is secured but there should be transparent sector-regulation formulated for linking the sector's context, mission, functions and tasks to this legislation.
- V. If the policy needs to be "learner centred and developmental advocated", there should be mentioning of a VPL-process geared at the learner recognizing his/her prior learning experiences and documenting them.
VPL is not just about assessment; it's more about recognizing, documenting and (personal) valuing, before it comes to assessment and validation. Therefore after the portfolio build-up, it's time for assessment. In this order, the assessment can be more effective since the employee is more motivated and empowered by knowing his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- VI. The linkage from the sector to the NQF is the next step in VPL-process. This step has to be formulated, based on the sector's identity and its mission concerning sustainable HRD:
 - a. Linked to the sector's function- or job-profiles.
 - b. Including VPL-services: information/raising awareness, identification & documentation of learning experiences, portfolio-training and follow-up activities (training, job-rotation, tutoring, mentoring, recruitment, job-promotion, etc.).
- VII. Take notice that 'assessment' is more than merely "making a judgment". VPL is about empowering both organization and employees and creating dynamic learning organizations with responsible employees.
- VIII. In the support section the best platform for utilizing VPL to its fullest potential is a form of a regional VPL centre that functions as a platform for employees to get a better grip on their prior learning achievements and linking them to sector needs. This means support in terms of raising awareness and portfolio build-up. It is advised to master the technique of portfolio build-up also on the level of the sector HRM-staff.

⁵ Employers include managers of any kind of organisation active in society: public, private, volunteering, citizenship, etc.

⁶ Possibly based in a Personalized Lifelong Learning Centre (PL2S) in a university.

- IX. In terms of finance it is recommended to pay attention to making transparent when the 'return in investment' in VPL is paying its debts: getting insight in the revenues of VPL (e.g. less absence; higher productivity, etc.) and less money spend on low-effective training but more on high-value, personalized training on the workplace.
- X. (Possible) Grant policies should be accessible for more training objectives than just formalized objectives in terms of certificates/qualifications.
- XI. The issue of quality assurance could be facilitated by training a group of experts in accrediting the outcomes of individual VPL-processes.
- XII. The step 'assessment' should be performed by autonomous and accredited assessors to safeguard an impartial verdict on the value of someone('s portfolio).

The formulation of guidelines for VPL in HE is necessary for this purpose:

1. Guideline 1 - *To facilitate VPL processes that lead to national recognition for learners* - a focus on recognition in the workplace (empowerment and social inclusion) and on sector level standards.
2. Guideline 2 – *Offer approaches to portfolio assessment* – this is the core activity in the VPL process because without a proper portfolio, the assessment is not going to be effective. A focus on portfolio build-up is necessary in this respect.
3. Guideline 3 – *Financing of VPL* – has to cover all kinds of grants being offered in this respect. Maybe there are other/new financial opportunities to consider as well, like tax-reduction or Human Capital Accounting methods? It should also include the costs for supporting portfolio build-up and (re-)training of VPL-staff.
4. Guideline 4 – *Experience required by interviewer/advisor prior to the VPL process* - should include the following competences for assessors and advisors:
 - a. *Reviewing*

The assessor/advisor is able to adequately provide an assessment of the competences of the participant, using a number of common competence-based assessment forms such as the portfolio, the criterion based interview and practical simulations. He can apply these assessment forms integral within a VPL procedure. The assessor/advisor is able to perform an assessment on the basis of a standard (competence-profile), to assess the provided evidence of the candidate on the basis of the prevailing assessment-criteria and to assess answers of a participant using the standard.
 - b. *Observing*

The assessor/advisor is able to adequately observe the participant and to link an assessment-report to this observation, in relation to the standard that was used as a basis for the assessment..
 - c. *Interviewing*

The assessor/advisor is able, by using specific questions and interview techniques in an assessment-situation, to make the competences of the participant transparent and to compare these competences in the interview with the standard. The assessor asks questions to investigate the value of the personal learning experiences.
 - d. *Providing feedback*

The assessor/advisor is able to provide feedback to the participant in a constructive and motivating way and to indicate the results of the assessment, customized to the level of the participant. The assessor/advisor can explain and substantiate the decisions based on the assessment and indicate at which points the participant is competent.
 - e. *Written communication*

The assessor/advisor is able to write a clear, detailed and structured assessment report. The assessor describes the competences of the participant that are valid for the used standard. Personal characteristics are only added when applicable.
 - f. *Technical competence*

The assessor/advisor is technical competent and must have sufficient experience and qualifications in the appropriate discipline (professionally). The assessor can prove that he has sufficient technical skills and is willing to keep abreast of developments in the sector. The technical level of the assessor must be at least as high as that of the participant. The assessor is familiar with the assessment (VPL) procedure and objectives, the assessment tools and the methodology. The

assessor/advisor is familiar with the sector or company standards (job descriptions, qualification profiles) and has knowledge of the labor market and vocational education programs for the sake of the assessment.

5. Guideline 5 – *Criteria for developing VPL instruments* - needs to include identification/documentation tasks linked to portfolio build-up and a section of guidance on follow-up activities.

A roadmap for further action

With the above-mentioned suggestions for updating the sector-policy on VPL in mind, the sector can be strengthened and utilized to its full potential, with a focus on the core building-blocks of VPL: (1) portfolio build-up for VPL in all 4 models, (2) portfolio-guidance and –assessment and (3) anchoring VPL in the sector’s function-profiles and linking them to NQFs. For this purpose a roadmap can be formulated for moving from policy to practice:

- a. Use *the National Policy* in a given country as a starting point for designing a sector-based framework of VPL-systematics that favours the four main VPL-models, which will stimulate different learning-strategies within the sector.
- b. Personalize learning by putting the learner with her/his portfolio in the position of co-designer of career-opportunities. Offer – if necessary or appropriate – training-opportunities in portfolio build-up for groups of VPL-candidates. Offering VPL-candidates a self-scan for getting a good view of their chances for a successful VPL-procedure is in this respect also helpful in having the learners engaged and committed.
- c. Focus on learning outcomes instead of learning-input and secure that the VPL-process is portfolio-steered; i.e. recognition, assessment and development-steps are based on the assessment of the learner’s portfolio.
- d. Make sure the standards for qualification and sector-based competence-management are transparent and interchangeable between sector standards and national standards. The job profiles of the sector, the sector certificates and the qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework offer good reference material to set up levels in standards, both in education and training as well as in human resources management. This entails a focus on the specific sector needs for communication-strategies, tools and methods for exploiting VPL to its full potential for learner and organisation.
- e. Make sure the standards for qualification and sector-based competence-management are transparent and interchangeable between sector standards and national standards. The job profiles of the sector and the qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework offer good reference material to set up levels in standards, both in education and training as well as in human resources management. This entails a focus on the specific sector needs for communication-strategies, tools and methods for exploiting VPL to its full potential for learner and organisation.
- f. Ensure ‘trust’ in the VPL-process by making sure that the moderators are trained well and can ensure the quality of each assessment. In this case a code of conduct for moderators needs to be formulated concerning their impartiality, quality and experience.
- g. Both systems (qualification-standards & competence-management) must be linked in order for the individual to take a pick where, how and why to employ and enrich one’s portfolio,
- h. Moving from policy to practice is especially about setting up a training programme for assessors and moderators as well as a pilot for making these assessors and moderators accustomed to the sector’s needs in VPL. Piloting also has the advantage of being able to create role models for successful VPL-usage by learners. These role models can be used for disseminating the benefits of VPL for the sector and its organisations and workers/learners.
- i. Learning/training is about stimulating the main stakeholders to pick up their respective responsibilities:
 - a. Authorities, with a responsibility to create a favourable learning culture for VPL,
 - b. The learner, with a responsibility in portfolio-build up,
 - c. The sector/organisation, with a responsibility in filling-in competence-based HRM,
 - d. Education, with a responsibility in offering ‘learning-made-to-measure’.

In this way, VPL connects all stakeholders in lifelong learning strategies! Short-term goals are:

- Stimulating the awareness of the learning individual by offering courses in self-management of competences & portfolio-build up,



- Helping organisations to articulate their need for competences and embed this need in pro-active competence-management,
- Making a match between the already articulated demand for competences on the labour market and the already developed supply of competences in education/training/guidance,
- Preparing the development of new supply of learning-made-to-measure in order to make better matches with the learning-demand deriving from one of the perspectives of the VPL-models:
 1. VPL as an educational model for initiating a particular diploma-programme;
 2. VPL as an upgrade/update model for determining an individual's educational and training needs for obtaining initial qualifications,
 3. VPL as a HRD model for matching and upgrading employees' competences to match organisational aims;
 4. VPL as a lifelong learning model for supporting individual career-opportunities.

When the roadmap is followed, commitment amongst the stakeholders can develop fully. There will be plenty of space to build strong commitment for new ways of learning both within circles of government, education and amongst the social partners as well as the citizens. Commitment after all is the most essential precondition for making use of VPL and thereby changing the 'looks' of the formal learning and working systems. Commitment means that all parties involved will take up their own responsibility.

Finally, but not least at all, competence-based learning and VPL might contribute to making learning more a matter of fun again, since learning will be personalized and 'made more to measure'. The motivation of learners to learn and use their learning for fulfilling their tasks better will therefore be more empowered and inclusive. For employers, managers, HRM-staff, recruiters, teachers, trainers, guides, and others, this will as well be stimulating and inspiring. In this sense one could state that learning will not only be a matter of *employability* but also of *enjoyability*!

Toolbox: tools, techniques and methods

4

1. Terminology

Competence	an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: 1) cognitive competence; 2) functional competence; 3) personal competence; and 4) ethical competence.
CBI	Criterion Based Interviewing (CBI) is a style of interviewing often used to evaluate a candidate's competence , particularly when it is hard to select on the basis of technical merit: for example, for a particular graduate scheme or graduate job where relevant experience is less important or not required.
CPP	Critical Professional Practices (CPP) are practices in which the professional faces a professional problem of dilemma. Such practices occur on all professional levels.
Informal learning	learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.
Knowledge society	a society that creates, shares and uses knowledge for the prosperity and well-being of its citizens.
Learning outcome	statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
Learning society	a society in which learning is considered important or valuable, where people are encouraged to continue to learn throughout their lives, and where the opportunity to participate in education and training is available to all.
Level descriptors	A level descriptor is a statement that provides an indication of appropriate depth and extent of learning at a specific stage in the programme of study.
Lifelong learning	lifelong learning embraces all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.
Non-formal learning	learning that is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.
Personalizing Learning	Personalizing Learning occurs when the learner understands how he/she learns best so he/she is active in designing his/her learning goals. This learner has a voice in how he/she likes to access and acquire information, and a choice in how he/she expresses what he/she knows and how he/she prefers to engage with the content. When a learner owns and takes responsibility of his/her learning, he/she is more motivated and engaged in the learning process
Validation of learning	the process of assessing and recognising learning outcomes, including from non-formal and informal learning. Validation usually refers to the process of recognising a wider range of skills and competences than is normally the case within formal certification.

2. On competences

Competences focus more than any other descriptor on the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development). This application is of concern to the individual learner as well as to the qualification body (e.g. a school, institute or university). There is however an enormous number of definitions of competence or competences; it seems every organisation, school and university seem to prefer designing their own definitions. The main themes all these definitions cover are more or less general: descriptions of work tasks or job outputs and descriptions of behaviour.

A competence can best be understood as *“a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affect a major part of one’s job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development”* (Parry, S.B., “The Quest for Competences”, Training 33/1996, 48-56).

A competence manifests itself on the level of the individual in showing successful behaviour in a certain, context related situation. A competence is variable in time and is to a certain extent capable of being developed. A competence consists of an integrated complex of knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes, where personal characteristics and aspects of professional functioning also exert an influence on (the development of) competences in a certain way.

This definition entails that competences are focused on the individual and his/her ability to solve (professional) problems. Professional problems are solved by producing professional products. It is in these professional products that the level and existence of competences becomes visible. Professional products are products or services provided by a professional to a customer that meet predetermined quality standards with respect to the product or process and that directly or indirectly add value. It is in an outcome-based assessment-approach where the opportunity arises to link the results of professionals to learning programmes. Requirement for the learning programme is that the content of the programme is formulated in terms of competences.

Competences come in many forms and clusters. One way of understanding competences is by dividing them into generic and specific competences:

- **Generic competences** are **high-level transferable competences such as the ability to work with others in a team, communicate, influence and have interpersonal sensitivity. They can also be called ‘behavioral or meta-competences’ because they always play, regardless of the context, a role in someone’s actions. Generic competences can be strengthened and developed by means of learning programmes.**
- **Specific competences** are the **‘functional or dedicated competences’ that are demanded and used in the context and activities of an individual. These competences describe the application of competences in specific situations, such as application of marketing-skills for a specific firm or technical designs. Specific competences can also be strengthened and developed by means of learning programmes.**

When considering the general definition of a competence - *“an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: 1) cognitive competence; 2) functional competence; 3) personal competence; and 4) ethical competence”* - it might also be useful to define these 4 elements as meta-competences:

1. Cognitive competence is defined as the possession of appropriate work-related knowledge and the ability to put this to effective use.
2. Functional competence is defined as the ability to perform a range of work based tasks effectively to produce required outcomes.
3. Personal or behavioural competence is defined as the ability to adopt appropriate, observable behaviours in work related situations.
4. Ethical competence is defined as the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgments based upon these in work related situations.

source: Cheetham, G. & Chivers, G. (2005) *Professions, Competence and Informal Learning*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

3. The level descriptors of the European Qualification framework

The EQF is a common European reference system which will link different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together. In practice, it will function as a translation device making qualifications more readable. This will help learners and workers wishing to move between countries or change jobs or move between educational institutions at home.

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. Each level should in principle be attainable by way of a variety of education and career paths.

The EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences). The EQF shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. This process of shifting the focus to learning outcomes:

- supports a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provision,
- facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning,
- facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.

The EQF also recognises that Europe's education systems are so diverse that comparisons based on inputs, e.g. length of study, are impracticable.

The terminology:

- 'learning outcomes' means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- 'knowledge' means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- 'skills' means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- 'competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
Level 1	Basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or

	contexts within a field of work or study	problems in a field of work or study	study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields 	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

4. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

ECTS is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver programmes and award higher education qualifications. The use of ECTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes programmes and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the validation of qualifications. ECTS can be applied to all types of programmes, whatever their mode of delivery (school-based, work-based), the learners' status (full-time, part-time) and to all kinds of learning (formal, non-formal and informal).

ECTS

ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, validation and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.

ECTS credits

ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks. Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes. 60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a fulltime year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes. In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work.

Use of ECTS credits

Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course units, dissertation work, work placements and laboratory work). The number of credits ascribed to each component is based on its weight in terms of the workload students need in order to achieve the learning outcomes in a formal context.

Credits are awarded to individual students (full-time or part-time) after completion of the learning activities required by a formal programme of study or by a single educational component and the successful assessment of the achieved learning outcomes. Credits may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, as decided by the degree-awarding institution. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or timeframes (formal, non-formal or informal), the associated credits may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes.

Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme, offered by the same or another institution. This transfer can only take place if the degree-awarding institution recognizes the credits and the associated learning outcomes.

5. The generic model for VPL

Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) entails the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (competences or knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a specific qualification standard, in terms of credits or study points. This kind of validation typically leads to certification and/or qualification.

VPL is a vision on learning. The learning outcomes that people have achieved already in informal, non-formal and formal contexts are analysed in a VPL-procedure. VPL has advantages for individuals (students) as well as training institutes/universities. Individuals can be given exemptions by the examining board for those elements of the course of which the contents match the competences that they have already acquired and which are demonstrated in their portfolio. As a result of this the learning programme that these students need to follow can be adapted to their needs and in this way the details of the programme may be added in a more meaningful manner.

VPL-assessments are assessments for qualification. The assessors assess the evidence submitted by the candidate for qualifying decisions independent of the learning programme which provide the standard to which the candidate's portfolio is assessed.

For training institutes/universities VPL is interesting because the accessibility of the programmes is improved. Students that could not be admitted in the past because they did not possess the right diplomas or certificates can now use the VPL assessment in order to gain admission. Moreover, the course that the student still has to follow is determined on the basis of the VPL report – which makes the remaining learning programme more cost effective.

Instruments and portfolio

In a VPL procedure the following instruments are used:

- a. Registration form and introduction to determine if the VPL procedure is relevant for the candidate.
- b. A portfolio, with the following items:
 - Name and address of the candidate,
 - Candidate's motivation to go for a VPL-procedure,
 - Curriculum vitae: description of work experiences and education-history,
 - Motivation of the candidate regarding learning and/or working goals,
 - Self-evaluation or self-assessment, related to the standard used,
 - Evidence to support the self-evaluation (professional products).

In addition to the practical examples the portfolio may contain the following, if relevant:

- diplomas, certificates or testimonials of courses followed in which knowledge and skills have been acquired and which are related to the self-assessment.
 - assessment by third parties such as managers, clients and/or colleagues.
- c. An assessment interview, in the form of a criterion directed interview.

Reporting

The VPL report is the result of the assessment. It is written by the (independent) assessors and contains:

- the candidate's profile,
- justification and procedure,
- assessment per competence on three levels that relate to the standard that was used for the assessment: starting level, moderate professional level and professional level.

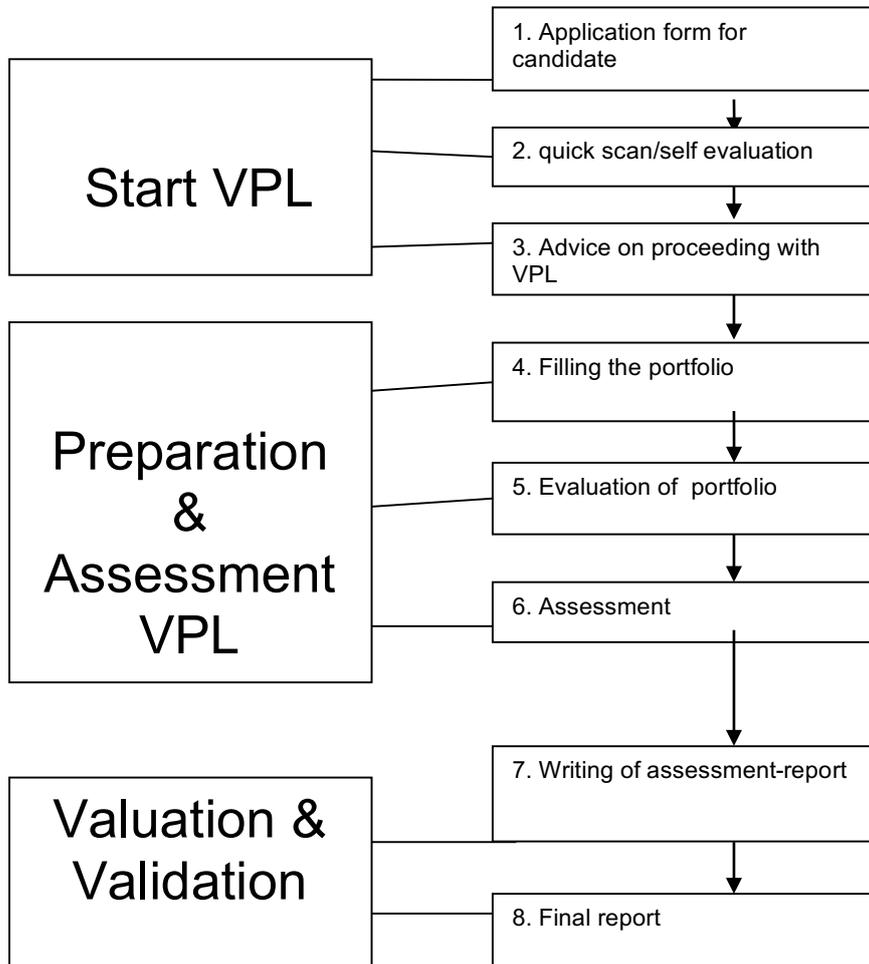
The VPL report is submitted as advice to the examining board of the training institute/university. On this basis the examining board decides on giving exemptions and a suitable learning programme (fast track).

Basic Principles of VPL

There are a number of basic principles underlying VPL:

- VPL recognises the fact that learning on the job or via other non-formal learning situations (learning through practical experience) can in principle deliver the same (professional) competences as learning within formal (classroom-based) situations.
- Validation means awarding certificates or diplomas on the basis of a generally recognised standard, such as the qualification structure for professional education. Obviously there are also other standards relating to the labour market which employers and employees regard as relevant. External legitimacy is the key requirement for validation.
- But validation also means valuing competences acquired elsewhere than in a working environment and/or used in other environments (such as voluntary work, private life)
- VPL is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within companies. It is an important means for realising permanent labour market suitability and deployment potential.
- For people already employed, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, VPL acts as a reliable yardstick for determining which skills and qualifications the individual employee already has. Based on this inventory, a tailor-made training or development path is formulated.
- Rational investment in training by companies and by society as a whole assumes an understanding of existing skills and qualifications, or the stock of skills and qualifications in the company, respectively. VPL procedures enable identifying existing skills and qualifications in order to be able to come to determine the investments needed in training.
- VPL procedures enable the visualisation the profitability of training by expressing the results of training efforts in terms of a general standard. As when calculating the value of other economic production factors, the identification of the value of skills and qualifications assumes a common and reliable standard in which this value is expressed.
- The provision of flexible or customised training courses assumes that we can gauge a person's existing skills level. VPL can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.
- The VPL assessment is designed to assess professional and/or societal activities. The assessment results provide valuable feedback on the content and methods of the formal learning paths. The training courses are given direct information about the degree to which they succeed in adequately preparing their students for professional practice. This effect is strengthened by the fact that a distinction is made between training and assessment.

The steps in the VPL-process



6. The competences of the assessor/guide

These are the competences of an assessor/guide. It should be noted that in order to be a good guide or assessor, both roles should become familiar to the trainee. It only takes a good guide if he/she know what the assessment is really about; and a good assessor needs to know how a candidate for an assessment is prepared best.

Reviewing

The assessor/guide is able to adequately provide an assessment of the competences of the participant, using a number of common competence-based assessment forms such as the portfolio, the criterion based interview and practical simulations. He can apply these assessment forms integral within a VPL procedure. The assessor is able to perform an assessment on the basis of a standard (competence-profile), to assess the provided evidence of the candidate on the basis of the prevailing assessment-criteria and to assess answers of a participant using the standard.

Observing

The assessor/guide is able to adequately observe the participant (if an observation belongs to one of the assessment-instruments) and to link an assessment-report to this observation, in relation to the standard that was used as a basis for the assessment.

Interviewing

The assessor/guide is able, by using specific questions and interview techniques in an assessment-situation, to make the competences of the participant transparent and to compare these competences in the interview with the standard. The assessor asks questions to investigate the value of the personal experiences (competences, knowledge and skills).

Providing feedback

The assessor is able to provide feedback to the participant in a constructive and motivating way and to indicate the results of the assessment, customized to the level of the participant. The assessor can explain and substantiate the decisions based on the assessment and indicate at which points the participant is competent. Note that only if this is part of the procedure, however, it may also be done by the guide.

Written communication

The assessor is able to write a clear, detailed and structured assessment report. The assessor describes the competences of the participant that are valid for the used standard. Personal characteristics are only added when applicable.

Technical competence

The assessor/guide is technical competent and must have sufficient experience and qualifications in the appropriate discipline (professionally). The assessor/guide can prove that he has sufficient technical skills and is willing to keep abreast of developments in the sector. The technical level of the assessor must be at least as high as that of the participant. The assessor is familiar with the assessment (VPL) procedure and objectives, the assessment tools and the methodology. The assessor/guide is familiar with the sectorial or company standards (job descriptions, qualification profiles) and has knowledge of the labour market and vocational education programmes for the sake of the assessment.

7. The STARRT-form

The STARRT-form has to be filled in for every competence that is assessed in a VPL-procedure.

STARRT-form for competence: _____

Title of proof: _____

Relevant for: _____

Describe (in short) the situation in which the proof of prior learning was produced by answering the questions below. Attach the actual proof to every STARRT-form/competence.

	Name of activity and/or context:
	Date of the activity:
S	Situation: describe the occasion and the goal of the activity
T	Task: describe the exact task you had and your personal role in it. Also describe whether it was a complex task or not, and how you can proof this.
A	Activities: describe the activity/activities you performed during this task. Be precise on your personal role.
R	Result: describe the result of the task.
R	Reflection: reflect on the impact of the result by the different participants (clients, employer, colleagues/etc.). What happened with the result?
T	Transfer: what was de "learning outcome" for yourself? What would you do the same in a next, similar task and what different? Why?
	References:

8. Testing methods of portfolios and interviews

Testing method	(Digital) Portfolio
<i>Goal</i>	A (digital) portfolio has or may have several objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assessment of the student - supervising the learning process of the student - presentation of the competences by the student (demonstration folder)
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - preview, reflection and provision of insight into the learning process - authentic picture of the student - room for individual profiling of the student - instrument for demand-driven curricula: based on the learning needs of the student - assessment through various sources that merge into the portfolio - instrument for supervision and assessment - valid - current - dynamic - content-orientated - focussed on learning to learn - rich in evidence of competence - interactive - longitudinal
<i>Function</i>	Summative and formative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Student, fellow student and course
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Student, fellow student, course and possibly field of work
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Continuous

Testing method	Criteria-based interview
<i>Goal</i>	The assessment of competences by means of past concretely observable behaviour and/or making explicit behaviour shown in the past for evaluation of and reflection on that behaviour by means of a direct questioning methodology (STARR: situation - task - action - result - reflection)
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reasonably valid provided it is structured and based on job analysis - Criteria are made known to the student in advance - Quality of interview is strongly dependent on the qualities of the interviewer
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Course and possibly student(s)
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Trained interviewers who can apply the STARR method.
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Using multiple criteria, feedback on actions and/or competences of the student.

Testing method	Masters viva / final project / (final) thesis
<i>Goal</i>	Test of competence at bachelor's level. Is the student competent to start?

<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Task is performed in an authentic context - Student is aware of the assessment situation - Very realistic manner of assessment - In general, the validity is relatively high - Student has the opportunity to demonstrate his competence himself - Labour-intensive - Contributes to the continuing development of the profession (innovative capacity)
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Course and student.
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Assessor of the course and if possible of the workplace.
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	A final evaluation, that concerns the combined evaluation of the following aspects: to what extent the student can function as an independent professional; to what extent the student is capable of critically evaluating his/her own product and him/herself.

Testing method	Orally (inter alia presentation)
<i>Goal</i>	Being able to present, reason and communicate orally about and discuss a topic.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low reliability - Difficult to ensure validity - Very strict rules about conduct and procedure are required - This testing method is generally not recommended due to its high degree of subjectivity - It is known in advance what the subject of scrutiny will be: the content, presentation as a skill or both - The oral examination is always used in conjunction with other testing methods
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Teams of teachers and possibly students
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Assessors
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Often oral immediately after the examination.

Testing method	Proficiency check
<i>Goal</i>	The test checks whether the student has the required skills, or can demonstrate that certain professional skills are correctly and adequately carried out.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training of observers increases reliability - Lists of criteria for the evaluation may be more detailed or more global in nature, depending on the purpose of testing - Validity can generally be sufficiently ensured - Duration of the assessment must be sufficiently long, this is a problem in the implementation - Labour-intensive
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Teams of teachers and possibly the field of work
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Trained assessors
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	A grade and an oral or written explanation. The feedback can be given by the assessors/teachers, fellow students and the students him/herself (reflection).

Testing method	Simulation
<i>Goal</i>	Measurement of one or more competences in a realistic but standardised situation.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simulated real working environment in role play - Directed at client-orientated competences - Standardised situation - Approximates the authentic situation - Requires a great deal of preparation - Different types of simulations: the simulator, the simulated interview, simulation by computer and simulation by actor (Bergsma, 2003).
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Course teachers and field of work
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Trained observers who assess using a list of criteria
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	A score that can be included in the portfolio and for the Personal Development Plan and Personal Action Plan.

Testing method	Work sample
<i>Goal</i>	Assessment of competence as well as knowledge and skills.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Task is performed in an authentic context - Student is aware of the assessment situation - Very realistic manner of assessment - In general, the validity is relatively high - High degree of acceptance for both the person to be assessed and the assessors - Development is relatively expensive - Considerable time is involved in conducting this, so the number of tasks to be performed is kept limited. This can distort conclusions.
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Course teachers and field of work, possibly student
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Assessor of the course and of the workplace, possibly the client or the patient
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	A final grade, that concerns the combined evaluation of the following aspects: to what extent the student can function as an independent professional; to what extent the student is capable of critically evaluating their own product; the quality of the product of the student and how this is perceived by others.

Testing method	Case study
<i>Goal</i>	Assessment of the level of knowledge and skills of a student by means of a problem or case description, which invokes the problem-solving skills of the student.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem or case study, drawn from professional practice - Generic higher vocational education competences are evaluated - Occupation-specific knowledge is tested - Can be part of a test of knowledge or OAT (Overall Test) - Stimulates multidisciplinary and creative thinking of the student
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Teachers/test designers using information from the field of work

<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Teachers/test designers and possibly the field of work and/or fellow students
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Result, usually in the form of a grade. Possibly a follow-on discussion or final interview with explanation of: quality of analysis of the student, quality of problem-solving, working method of the student.

Testing method	Practical “stations” examination
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<i>Goal</i>	The student demonstrates that in various controlled (simulated) settings, he has mastery of and can perform a representative set of skills and can answer briefly if possible. The student learns that skills are an essential element of the professional training. Practice of them makes perfect. The student also learns to work under pressure and, within a time span of 1-2 hours, to carry out a multitude of different skills. Assessment of knowledge (see above) can be included in a practical “stations” examination.
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<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Range of skills that the student carries out as instructed within a given time limit in a fixed number of rooms - A room is called a “station” - The skill performed is directly observed - A complete practical “stations” examination consists of a circuit of several stations (8-12)
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<i>Function</i>	Summative
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<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Teachers / test developers in consultation with the field of work
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	In each station, the student is assessed by an observer. The observer is a trained expert or a trained simulated patient using an assessment form. The assessments are completed on a scan form for automatic (or manual) processing.

<i>Feedback on the test</i>	An assessment on a 5-point scale: inadequate /moderate /adequate /more than adequate / good.
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Testing method	Test of knowledge
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<i>Goal</i>	Determining the level of student’s professional and subject-related knowledge.
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<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various manifestation forms: tests with closed questions or open questions, or with a combination of both - Can be administered both on paper or via computer - Language test - For large groups and closed questions, reliability and validity can be well mapped - With closed questions, reviewing the test can take place automatically, which then provides options for checking the reliability of the test - Often conducted at the conclusion of a certain study-period
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<i>Function</i>	Summative; may also serve very well formatively as a practice test.
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<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Teachers who are expert in the content/test designers for the course and possibly students or the field of work
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<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Teachers/test designers for the course
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<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Result, usually a grade calculated on the basis of the questions answered correctly and incorrectly. If possible, broken down by area of knowledge within the test. If automated, also a comparison with the results of the other students in the group.
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Testing method	Essay
<i>Goal</i>	Testing of knowledge, understanding, insight and application of knowledge.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reproduction of facts - Making combinations or applications of knowledge - Answers consist of enumerations, rationales, contentions, and argumentation - Key to answers is required - Reliability is tricky point: despite the answer key, multiple interpretations by the evaluators are often possible - Fast construction versus long correction time - Language test - Broad scope - Student must formulate answers him/herself
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Multidisciplinary team of teachers/test developers, where possible, under the coordination of an examination committee
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Teachers who are expert in the content/test designers for the course, who form part of the multidisciplinary team
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	The test results give the student insight into the strong and weak points by differentiation in separate scores.
Testing method	Overall test
<i>Goal</i>	<p>The overall test (OALT or OAT) focuses on five competences. The test measures to what extent the student:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. can <i>define</i> a new problem or aspect of a problem situation, using previously studied relevant concepts, models or theories; 2. can <i>analyse</i> a new problem; 3. can <i>synthesise</i> the results of the analysis; 4. can <i>substantiate</i> possible solutions or decisions to be taken; 5. can <i>evaluate</i> solutions or decisions.
<i>Features</i>	<p>The OALT/OAT has been developed in a problem-driven curriculum. The OALT/OAT measures problem-solving skills and has ten characteristics (Segers, 2002, p.141):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each test question is based on and refers to problem situations as described in articles; the articles in which the problem situations have been described are different in nature. 2. The test is based on a set of articles. 3. The articles describe a problem situation in its totality. 4. The problem situations have been discussed during the group tutorial sessions. 5. Problem situations are approached from the point of view of different disciplines. 6. The problem situations are studied during a period of independent study. 7. The test questions focus on key aspects of the problem situations. 8. Both closed and open question formats are used with both question formats focussing on a specific level of mastery. 9. The test is open book in nature. 10. The test is constructed by a multidisciplinary team.
<i>Function</i>	Summative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Multidisciplinary team of teachers/test developers
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Multidisciplinary team of teachers/test developers; also possibilities for co- and peer assessment



Feedback on the test

Result. Students indicate a need for discussion about the possibilities and limitations of the material learnt by means of variations on the problem task.

Testing method	360° feedback
<i>Goal</i>	Assessing competences that are central in the workplace, in final projects and project-based learning. These include social and management skills or verbal communication.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A direct manner of garnering information about behavioural skills - Use of multiple reviewers results in high reliability and validity - Time-consuming for many stakeholders - Dependant on the good intentions and discipline of the actors involved - Cannot be used for selection purposes - It only makes statements about the competences 'demonstrated' by the student in the current context - Written questionnaire that is completed by the student, persons in the workplace, the work placement supervisor in the workplace and possibly also the work placement supervisor of the educational institution
<i>Function</i>	Summative, provided it complies with requirements of reliability and validity. This test can also be used formatively.
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Coach and/or academic careers adviser
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	Everyone who "knows" the student (in that situation)
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Using multiple points of view, feedback on actions and/or competences of the student.

Testing method	Learning styles test
<i>Goal</i>	The student gets insight into his/her own way of learning. This insight can be used to shape the academic career (relationship with PDP and PAP, see above).
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reliability of existing tests is acceptable - Can be administered independent of time and place - Language test
<i>Function</i>	Formative
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Standardised test already tried, such as Learning Styles Inventory based on J. Vermunt
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	The student and possibly the tutor or academic career adviser
<i>Feedback on the test</i>	Direct written feedback on individual aspects of the learning style of the student.

Testing method	Personality test
<i>Goal</i>	To give insight into the personality of the student and by means of a portfolio, forge a relationship with the profession for which he is being trained.
<i>Features</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some predictive validity for some personal characteristics in specific situations - Easy and inexpensive to maintain - Risk of threat to privacy - Language test
<i>Function</i>	Formative, may never be used summatively from an ethical point



	of view.
<i>Those involved in the design</i>	Existing and tried personality tests. See inter alia the book What colour is your parachute? by R.N. Bolles (2003), where many tests are described.
<i>Those involved in the assessment</i>	The student and possibly the academic career adviser or coach

9. The European key competences for lifelong learning

Key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

Key competences are essential in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labour force, allowing it to adapt more quickly to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world. They are also a major factor in innovation, productivity and competitiveness, and they contribute to the motivation and satisfaction of workers and the quality of work.

Key competences should be acquired by:

- young people at the end of their compulsory education and training, equipping them for adult life, particularly for working life, whilst forming a basis for further learning;
- adults throughout their lives, through a process of developing and updating skills.

The acquisition of key competences fits in with the principles of equality and access for all. This reference framework also applies in particular to disadvantaged groups whose educational potential requires support. Examples of such groups include people with low basic skills, early school leavers, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, etc.

The eight key competences

The framework defines eight key competences and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of these. These key competences are:

- **communication in the mother tongue**, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;
- **communication in foreign languages**, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen;
- **digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT);
- **learning to learn** is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities;
- **social and civic competences**. Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;
- **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance;



- **cultural awareness and expression**, which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature and the visual arts).

The key competences are all interdependent, and the emphasis in each case is on critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings.

A European reference framework for Europe

These key competences provide a reference framework to support national and European efforts to achieve the objectives they define. This framework is mainly intended for policy makers, education and training providers, employers and learners.

It is a reference tool for EU countries and their education and training policies. EU countries should try to ensure:

- that initial education and training offer all young people the means to develop the key competences to a level that equips them for adult and working life, thus also providing a basis for future learning;
- that appropriate provision is made for young people who are disadvantaged in their training so that they can fulfill their educational potential;
- that adults can develop and update key competences throughout their lives, particularly priority target groups such as persons who need to update their competences;
- that appropriate infrastructure is in place for continuing education and training of adults, that there are measures to ensure access to education and training and the labour market and that there is support for learners depending on their specific needs and competences;
- the coherence of adult education and training provision through close links between the policies concerned.

10. The European language passport⁷

Replace with First name(s) Surname(s)

Mother tongue(s) Replace with mother tongue(s)		Other language(s) Replace with other languages		
Replace with language				
Self-assessment of language skills				
Understanding		Speaking		Writing
 Listening	 Reading	 Spoken interaction	 Spoken production	 Writing
Replace with level (e.g. B1) Replace with level label (e.g. Independent user)	Replace with level (e.g. B1) Replace with level label (e.g. Independent user)	Replace with level (e.g. B1) Replace with level label (e.g. Independent user)	Replace with level (e.g. B1) Replace with level label (e.g. Independent user)	Replace with level (e.g. B1) Replace with level label (e.g. Independent user)
Certificates and diplomas				
Title	Awarding body	Date	Level*	
Replace with name of certificate or diploma	Replace with name of awarding body	Replace with date of issue	Replace with level (e.g. B2)	
Linguistic and intercultural experience				
Description			Duration	
Using languages for study or training / Using languages at work / Using languages while living or travelling abroad / Mediating between languages (delete non relevant types of experience or replace with your own text): Replace with description of experience			Replace with dates (from - to)	
Levels A1-B1		Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Self-assessment grid		
	A1 Basic User	A2 Basic User	B1 Independent user	

⁷ © European Union and Council of Europe, 2004-2013 | <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu>

Understanding	 Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
	 Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.
Speaking	 Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).
	 Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
Writing	 Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.

Levels B2-C2		Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Self-assessment grid		
		B2 Independent user	C1 Proficient user	C2 Proficient user
Understanding	 Listening	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	 Reading	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Speaking	 Spoken interaction	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	 Spoken production	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	 Writing	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Template Personal Portfolio

Portfolio – explanation

The content of a portfolio of evidences/products/reflections gives an overview of your qualities and competences. It is a (well presented) overview of everything you are able of. It's the basics from where you can make show portfolios in the future. For a future employer, or for the intake in an educational program, or for a potential customer.

The following data and evidence are required in a personal portfolio

1. Front page
2. Content overview
3. Personal Quality Profile
4. Personal data
5. Overview of the results and evidence that show your qualities (formal and non-formal):
 - a. School and vocational training
 - b. Work experience
 - c. Other experiences
6. Written reflections on the developments and results written in your overview
7. List of the added evidence
8. Evidence

The results and evidence can be:

- Informal: descriptions of others, such as impressions of others, or for example a training certificate of a hobby, a video on which you show a performance, etc.
- Formal: diploma's, certificates, evidence of participation, study tasks or working experience
- Reflections: in your portfolio you gather results in which you show that you are competent to perform the key tasks of –for example- your occupation in several working situations.

All results are provided as much as possible with:

- A summing up of the competences, learning goals and performance indicators belonging to the key task (if appropriate)
- Feedback report of an executive / counsellor/coach etc. with date and signature
- Self-evaluations with date
- Positive assessment of your executive (for example) with date and signature.



Personal Portfolio

Name:

Date:

Content overview

[fill in all chapters]

1. Overview of personal competences and qualities

Name:

Date:.....

	Competence, quality
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	

Competences classification

You might use this scheme to classify your competences in the table above. You might also use your own competence classification scheme to arrange your various competences.

○ **Subject-based competences**

Are related to knowledge and skills of a specific subject or work domain

○ **Methodical competences (work approach)**

Competences that express something on the way you are doing things: I am able to organize well, I can plan well, I am problem solving

○ **Self competences (brainpower, personally related effectiveness)**

Competences that express something about yourself. I am disciplined, I am stable

○ **Social competences (interpersonal effectiveness, management)**

Competences that emerge in social situations. I am good in cooperating with others, I am empathic.



2. Personal data

Full name	
Date of birth	
Place (and country) of birth	
Nationality	
Address	
Country	
Phone number	
Email address	

3. Learning experiences

School and vocational training / refresher training (School levels, basic vocational education, refresher training).
 Write down learning steps in chronological order.

In the table below, fill in the schooling you have had from primary school onwards. Write down all your schooling, even studies you did not finish or do not regard as important. You can also mention here training courses, refresher training and other courses.

Period (year, month, week)	Training/schooling: type, level, institution	Description of the learning activities Job / role	Description of evidence and number of evidence in portfolio	Summary of the <u>most important</u> skills/competences I know..., I can..., I am capable of..., I have...



Period (year, month, week)	Training/schooling: type, level, institution	Description of the learning activities Job / role	Description of evidence and number of evidence in portfolio	Summary of the most important skills/competences I know..., I can..., I am capable of..., I have...



4. Work experiences

Write down your experiences with permanent appointments, part-time appointments, temporary work, work placements, holiday jobs and jobs on the side, transitional year, freelance work et cetera. Write down career steps in chronological order

Period (year, month, week)	Description of the company, institute, unit	Description of the activities Job / role (concrete!)	Description of evidence and number of evidence in portfolio	Summary of the most important skills/competences I know..., I can..., I am capable of..., I have...



5. Other experiences

Write down your activities in spare time, hobbies, voluntary work, club life, in private life, in tasks/activities in the family (unpaid activities).

Write down things done in tasks/activities and the private area in chronological order.
 Briefly describe the successive individual activities.

Period (year, month, week)	Description of the context in which the activities are taking (or took) place	Description of the activities job / role	Description of evidence and number of evidence in portfolio	Summary of the most important skills/competences I know..., I can..., I am capable of..., I have...

6. Transformations

Describe below which important transformations you experienced in the area of school and vocational training, work experiences or other experiences.

7. Reflection

Describe how you reflect on the various parts of this portfolio. For inspiration you can use the question below.

- What are your main skills? Do you have a specific theme or a significant category of skills/qualities?
- What are your future career plans? How are you going to use your qualities/skills to fulfil your plans?
- In what other way are you going to use your qualities?
- What qualities would you like to develop more? Why these? What are you going to do to develop those qualities?
- What are you going to use your portfolio for?
- What image will people have of you, if they read your portfolio?
- Is your portfolio complete? Why (not)?
- What insights did you get from the training as a whole? In what way could you incorporate these insights in your life or work?



8. Overview of evidence / documents

1. Update your list of evidence / documents regularly
2. Include all evidence gathered so far in the list

	Type of document	Date of submission	Organisation / company
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
Etc.			

Evidence

Add (copies of) all evidences as listed above.

Assessment in VPL-processes

In modern society it is of primary interest to enhance human learning potential, capacity and flexibility. It makes no difference whether one is working, learning or seeking employment. The emphasis is on the extent to which someone can contribute to society, in his/her (voluntary) work, social activities and private life. In order to be able to deal with people's learning potential, terms such as knowledge, skills and attitude are qualifying and are subsumed under the common denominator 'competences'. However, competences include more than that. They also implicitly refer to the talent to adjust to changing circumstances, flexibility or deployment potential.

A competence is actually to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from his or her actions (Lyotard 1988). Competences not only include professional competences but social and personal competences as well. Competences are in a continuous state of flux. Learning – and thus developing and using competences - begins from birth and continues throughout life. Everyone already learns lifelong, it only needs to be valued and guided.

The present society has a major interest in capitalising on this. It already takes place in part, since more formal educational pathways can be followed in the school system during certain periods in life. More non-formal and informal pathways are followed at other times in life. The validation of prior learning (VPL) is intended as the instrumentation for dealing with the diversity of these pathways.

In (stimulating) someone's development it is important to know the competences he or she already possesses. While people's knowledge used to be tested primarily by written examinations, methods are now needed to 'measure' people's competences. Testing someone's competences in relation to a qualification, certificate or curriculum chosen in advance is also referred to as *assessment*.

In an assessment, various methods can be used to test someone's competences. The portfolio is often used to collect evidence of someone's competences. For example, it may involve diplomas attained, but also a description of someone's work experiences, videos, photos and proof of professional products. To supplement a portfolio, a criterion-oriented interview is sometimes held with the participant in an assessment. In the interview, which is often based on a checklist, an extensive discussion is conducted with the participant about his or her activities (within or outside of work). Another popular supplement to the portfolio is the practical observation or the practical test. This examines how the participant performs in his or her normal activities or in a given work assignment.

Portfolio-assessment is also used a lot. Portfolio assessment is the systematic, longitudinal collection of student work created in response to specific, known instructional objectives and evaluated in relation to the same criteria. Assessment is done by measuring the individual works as well as the portfolio as a whole against specified criteria, which match the objectives toward a specific purpose. Portfolio creation is the responsibility of the learner, with guidance and support, and often with the involvement of peers and parents. The audience assesses the portfolio.

In this outline, the focus is on the central role of assessors and guides in promoting and supporting the process of validation of people's prior learning experiences for the sake of giving them access to their personal lifelong learning process. This role is explicated by presenting the way in which the professionalism of assessors and guides can be trained, enhanced and/or guaranteed.

The outline contains both a description of the necessary competences of the train-the-trainer and a description of the competences – to be trained - of assessors and guides. Furthermore, the chapter offers a model for developing, testing and implementing the training in a practical way.

The concluding reflection points out the major challenges that assessors and guides in validation processes should focus on. The proposed training model – enhanced by feedback from prof. Francklin Rivas from Universidad de Los Andes, Venezuela⁸ – aims at answering these challenges by offering a quality-assured, certified and embedded model for becoming a professional assessor and guide. The model provided an essential element for supporting the development of transatlantic lifelong learning programmes that are based on shared values for guidance and assessment in order to create accessible learning programmes within national learning contexts. The same model also builds strongly on the training-model designed for the EU-funded CAPIVAL-project⁹.

1. The central role of assessor and guide

The role of the assessor and the guide is vital for starting up personal development in any kind of form. Transparent guidance and reliable assessment are the *matchmakers* between a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In any given model for validating prior learning outcomes a policy on guidance and assessment has several functions: (1) providing information, (2) raising levels of achievement, (3) measuring this achievement reliably and (4) organising the assessment effectively.

The functions of assessor and guide may be considered as interchangeable. An assessor must also be able to guide, and vice versa. For both functions, the training is appropriate. However, there is one important difference. The main difference is that a guide - in addition to the competencies that apply to the assessor - has a different communicative role in the interaction with the candidate for a particular assessment: advising, steering and informing on top of the weighing and judging.

Assessment in this broad context is the judgement of evidence submitted for a specific purpose; it is therefore an act of measurement. It requires two things: evidence and a standard scale (Ecclestone, 1994). Evidence is provided with the portfolio (or showcase) of the candidate. The standard that will be met depends on the specific objective of the candidate. This means that the role of the assessor is all the more crucial because this professional has to be flexible with regard to the many objectives in order to be able to provide a custom-oriented validation and/or valuation. On top of that the professional should be able to use dialogue-based assessment forms. On the basis of the advice of such an assessor further steps for personal development will be set in motion.

The choice of a certain assessor role therefore largely depends on the objective of the assessment, which can vary greatly. Assessments for formal recognition of competences with certificates or exemptions for accredited training programmes demand the involvement of an assessor from an institution offering competence-based accreditation and adequate measures to guarantee the quality of the assessor. Assessments for accrediting competences at the company or institution level or merely to acquire insight into someone's competences do not require the involvement of an institution offering competence-based certification. In these cases, the assessor is also often a colleague, supervisor or the individual himself.

In order to guarantee good 'quality' of the assessor and the guide, it is recommended to formulate a quality-procedure for validation-procedures that is highly cost-effective and very accessible to candidates in order to have trust in the validation-process. Speaking about 'quality-trust' instead of 'quality-control' seems more appropriate for such a quality-approach. Possibilities for organising such quality are:

- any assessor and guide should first design and fill in his/her own portfolio and personal action plan; only then they can be given entrance to assessor/guide-trainings,
- a professional register for assessors and guides should guarantee their competences and professionalism,

⁸ Cooperation with prof. Rivas on the theme of training assessors and guides was established in the Alfa III Project "Transatlantic Lifelong Learning: Rebalancing Relations (TRALL)".

⁹ See: Duvekot, R.C. & J. Geerts (Eds.) (2012) *Handbook for the assessment and validation of pedagogical competences of adult educators*. Timisoara: IREA/Brumar. <http://www.irea.ro/en/images/publications/capival.pdf>

- every two years a new assessor and/or guide accreditation should guarantee professionalism by ensuring assessor quality. Assessor- and guide-quality can be maintained by means of refresher and updating courses. This new accreditation could be carried out by an official national agency, and tripartite governing (authorities, employers and trade unions),
- quality of assessors and guides implies being able to refer to a standard for assessors: this standard is developed in many international projects and already available; it only needs a specific context for national application.

2. Requirements for the trainer of assessors and guides

2.1 Competences of the trainer of the assessors and guides

A trainer who will train assessors should possess the following competences:

Managing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a clear structure to others by setting goals and priorities, by making (result) agreements and/or giving instructions and directions • Checks whether people are complying with the agreements and guidelines and takes action if necessary • Practices the necessary authority • Delegates effectively and clearly the tasks, the responsibilities and/or certain powers to others, thereby making good use of the diversity within a group
Presenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is able to comment and explain the topics/subjects clearly, understandably and correctly • Communicates concisely and exudes confidence and expertise • Trains in an enthusiastic and inspiring way, with effective use of humor • Is emphatic to the audiences and works in a corresponding style of presentation
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains the own expertise and skills if necessary and takes steps to further develop • Learns from mistakes and feedback • Demonstrates (actively and systematically) the working on own development
Guiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches, advises and/or motivates others, aimed at achieving goals and/or performing of tasks and assignments • Empowers others to achieving results and solving problems (independently) • Supports others actively in their development.
Commitment and conviction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes a powerful and positive impression in the contact with others • Puts ideas and opinions forward with convincing arguments • Convinces also on the emotional level • Provides clear and powerful direction to conversations, discussions and/or negotiations • Supports efforts to reach agreement on the outcome

Applying professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows, based on the own professionally/technical understanding, how to solve issues and problems • Shares, where appropriate, his knowledge and expertise with others
Attention and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows interest and understanding of the ideas, beliefs and emotions of others • Empathizes in the views and feelings of others • Listens well and demonstrates tolerance and kindness • Shows appropriate concern and support others when they have difficulties • Demonstrates self-reflection
Ethics and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows integrity and acts consistently in line with the norms and values of the organization, (professional) group and/or society • Takes into account the environment and respects differences between people
Management of the needs and expectations of the "customer" (focus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigates the needs and expectations of internal and/or external customers • Trying as much as possible to focus on these needs and expectations • Demonstrates a customer-friendly attitude • Keeps a close eye on the satisfaction of "clients" and takes action if necessary

2.2. Other requirements

Besides afore-mentioned skills, the trainer of assessors needs to function in different roles:

- Speaker:** In the training situation there is much interaction between the trainer and the group. There are also periods when the trainer has to explain issues in a more one-dimensional manner.
- Leader:** Sometimes in a group there is a resistance to certain activities. The trainer is able to persuade them to act anyway.
- Coach:** when the trainer conducts an interview with an individual student, it is important that the trainer understands the strengths and weaknesses of that person. Listening is an important skill. Giving personal advice is the next step.
- Organizer:** Trainers are often also responsible for coordinating training-programmes. In addition, there are often many practical issues concerning the training.
- Advisor :** The trainer advises the client about the courses that are appropriate for solving the problems facing the client's organisation.
- Developer:** The coach is responsible for developing new courses. The trainer must be able to develop his own course material.

3. Assessors & Guides Training

3.1 Target group

- Teachers and other persons working in the domains of learning/education and human resources management who want to become proficient in the role of assessor;
- Teachers and others who want to work with competency-based assessment methods such as the criterion based interview, portfolio and practical simulations;
- Teachers and others who want to work as assessor in VPL procedures.

Recommended group size:

- 10 participants. The maximum number of participants varies depending on the homogeneity (especially in terms of experience and knowledge) of the participants.

3.2. Entry Requirements for the participants of the training

- Familiarity with competence-steered functioning and evaluation;
- 5. A minimum of 5 years' experience in an applicable context (public/private; third sector; citizenship);
- 6. a minimum of 1 year experience in roles as guide and assessor;
- 7. Able to be present in all training sessions.

3.3 Objectives of the training

After the training, the participants should be able to:

1. know what is going on competency-based assessment methods, and they understand the concept of assessment in procedures for Validation of Prior Learning Outcomes.
2. apply the following competency-based assessment methods:
 - Portfolio-assessment
 - Criterion based interview-technique
 - Practice simulations (performance assessment)
3. have knowledge of the competence-profile and responsibilities of the guide and the assessor.
4. have personally experienced what it means to be assessed (composing a portfolio and undergoing the prevailing assessment).
5. know the different phases in the assessment process; they worked with the in their country prevailing assessment model(s), and they know the characteristics of this model and they can review the application within three competency-based assessment methods.
6. are themselves aware of their own assessment style and pitfalls.
7. know what the criteria are for writing a competency-based assessment report writing according to the nationally applied format.
8. are able to discuss an assessment report with a candidate.
9. [applicable for the *guiding function*] know how they can guide a candidate in preparing for the assessment, including offering a quick scan and helping to build up a good portfolio.

3.4 The competences of the assessor/guide

Below is a description of the competences of an assessor/guide. It should be noted that in order to be a good guide or assessor, both roles should become familiar to the trainee. It only takes a good guide if he/she know what the assessment is really about; and a good assessor needs to know how a candidate for an assessment is prepared best.

Reviewing

The assessor/guide is able to adequately provide an assessment of the competences of the participant, using a number of common competency-based assessment forms such as the portfolio, the criterion based interview and practical simulations. He can apply these assessment forms integral within a VPL procedure. The assessor is able to perform an assessment on the basis of a standard (competency-profile), to assess the provided evidence of the candidate on the basis of the prevailing assessment-criteria and to assess answers of a participant using the standard.

Observing

The assessor/guide is able to adequately observe the participant (if an observation belongs to one of the assessment-instruments) and to link an assessment-report to this observation, in relation to the standard that was used as a basis for the assessment.

Interviewing

The assessor/guide is able, by using specific questions and interview techniques in an assessment-situation, to make the competences of the participant transparent and to compare these competences in the interview

with the standard. The assessor asks questions to investigate the value of the personal experiences (competences, knowledge and skills).

Providing feedback

The assessor is able to provide feedback to the participant in a constructive and motivating way and to indicate the results of the assessment, customized to the level of the participant.

The assessor can explain and substantiate the decisions based on the assessment and indicate at which points the participant is competent. Note that only if this is part of the procedure, however, it may also be done by the guide.

Written communication

The assessor is able to write a clear, detailed and structured assessment report. The assessor describes the competences of the participant that are valid for the used standard. Personal characteristics are only added when applicable.

Technical competence

The assessor/guide is technical competent and must have sufficient experience and qualifications in the appropriate discipline (professionally). The assessor/guide can prove that he has sufficient technical skills and is willing to keep abreast of developments in the sector. The technical level of the assessor must be at least as high as that of the participant. The assessor is familiar with the assessment (VPL) procedure and objectives, the assessment tools and the methodology. The assessor/guide is familiar with the sectorial or company standards (job descriptions, qualification profiles) and has knowledge of the labour market and vocational education programmes for the sake of the assessment.

3.5 design of the assessor training

The basis of the assessor/guide training consists of six modules, each with a duration of half a day. The modular design allows, depending on the purpose and the (experience of) the target audience, to skip parts. A separate module is included for the guides in VPL-procedures.

Before the start of the training, the participants start making their assessor-portfolio. This portfolio is complemented and updated regularly during the training (and after!) by the assessor-trainee. It may eventually serve as the basis for his or her certification as assessor. Between the training sessions the trainee performs training assignments.

After the training sessions the trainee receives a certificate of participation and is a candidate for being an assessor/guide. Then the candidate-assessor/guide - if the portfolio is complete and the candidate has conducted enough assessments by him/herself – can complete the training with an external audit.

A candidate-assessor/guide has at least acted in two VPL procedures in the role of second assessor (and/or guide). From that moment the candidate-assessor/guide is eligible for the formal Certificate.

4. Training

Below is the content of the basic modules introduced, incl. the extra module for guide. See appendix 2 for an example of the content of the modules for the training.

4.1 Module 1: "Towards a competent assessor/guide"

- Introduction, goal and training programme
- The competencies and responsibilities of the assessor and guide
- Competence, competency-based assessment methods and competency tests
- Introduction: assessing competences (traps, observation techniques, methods, etc.)
- An example of a procedure in which competences are assessed against a credit-based standard.

4.2 Module 2: "portfolio assessment"

- Introduction "What is the portfolio"
- Inventory of experiences with assessing portfolios

- The role of the assessor and the guide in assessing the portfolio (assessor versus guide)
- The evidence matrix for assessing the portfolio
- Assessing the portfolio on the basis of the evidence matrix (exercise)
- Tips for portfolio assessment¹⁰

4.3 Module 3: "The criterion based interview"

- Background criterion based interview
- Characteristics of a criterion based interview
- Analyzing the characteristics of a recorded conversation
- The STARRT¹¹ interview method, incl. examples
- Listening – Summarizing – Questioning (LSQ)
- First plenary exercise with criterion based interview (carousel)
- Preparation and execution of criterion based interviews in pairs with changing roles
- Plenary feedback exercises
- Tips for criterion based interviews
- Homework: perform and record a criterion based interview according to the STARRT method.

4.4 Module 4: "Performance Assessment"

- Characteristics of a performance assessment
- Example of a performance assessment (on 'you-tube')
- The use of assessment-techniques in a performance assessment
- Practicing assessment-techniques

4.5 Module 5: "reviewing assessor experiences"

- Dilemmas of reviewing
- Reviewing and evaluating the own material (film clips with interviews)
- Giving and receiving feedback

4.6. Module 6: "The assessment report"

- Assessing and reporting findings in a final report
- Giving Feedback
- Looking back at the own log and looking forward to the assessor-certification process (audit)

4.7 Module 7: "The role of the guide" (optional)

- Differences, similarities and dilemmas in the roles of guide versus assessor
- Practicing the role of guide in difficult situations
- Going through the entire process of guiding, assessment by the assessor and aftercare

4.8 Homework Assignments and course folder

Before day 1: building the own portfolio, including two competences from the assessor profile.

Before day 2: adding two more competences to the portfolio
studying articles day 1
updating personal log

Before day 3: recording a competence base interview
studying articles day 2
enhancing and complementing portfolio with two competencies
updating log

Course folder

¹⁰ See the Toolobox (chapter 4) for examples of the different forms of assessment that candidates are trained for in the training.

¹¹ STARRT stands for: *Situation, Tasks, Activities, Result, Reflection, Transfer*. It is a standardized form for describing a particular learning outcome and also a format for interviewing a candidate on this learning outcome. See appendix 1.

Participants receive a course folder with background information and instructions and space to build their own portfolio and log.

5. Conditions

5.1 Certificate of participation

The participant will receive after completing the six basic modules of the training, a certificate of participation if the following conditions are met:

- The participant has actively attended all training sessions;
- The participant has actively prepared himself for the meetings by reading the material and recording interviews;
- The participant has much built up the portfolio as much as possible on the basis of assessment-experience and the feedback on these experiences during the training.

With issuing the certificate of participation the institution declares that the participant is competent and capable to start - with an experienced assessor – to perform assessments within the institution. Note that the official examination body is the only body that can award these certificates.

5.2 Participation in the audit (external certification)

Start-competent assessor/guides holding a certificate of participation, can prepare for the external audit. They can start preparing when meeting the following conditions:

- The start-competent guide has guided a number of personal assessment processes (more than 1) in his domain (portfolio, simulations, competence based interviews) in which the standard of the assessor/guide training is applied.
- The start-competent assessor has conducted a number of assessments (more than 1) in his domain (portfolio, simulations, competence based interviews) in which the standard of the assessor training is applied.
- The start-competent assessor has acted at a number of assessments (at least 2) as 2nd assessor.
- The start competent assessor has built up a portfolio in which the assessor competences are demonstrated and substantiated with evidence.

5.3 Required time investment

The diagram below shows the time required to participate in assessor training entails.

Activity	Number of meetings	hours for activity	Total hours
Training Meetings	7	4	28
Preparation for meetings	7	2	14
Filling in journal (log; progress-reporting)	4	1,5	6
			48 hours
Additional modules for assessor/guide			
VPL guide module	1	4	4
Participation in VPL process including preparation, reporting, evaluation	2	20	40
Write reflection report (and/or 360)	2	2	4
Audit / assessment of assessor/guide (including preparation)	1	8	8
			114 hours

5.4 Preconditions for certification

In order to train assessors and guides successfully and allow them to finalize the training with an external certification, the following conditions have to be met.

Participants are expected to:

1. Have sufficient time available to prepare and visit the sessions;
2. Have sufficient time available to practice as a guide and as an assessor within the assessor training and act as a 2nd assessor;
3. Build up a portfolio in which they demonstrate their competences in preparation for the audit (external certification).

The organisations of participants are expected to:

- Have a clear image of the alleged qualities of the participants on the basis of the internal profiles to be used as standards.
- Have the participants well informed before they start training and have clarified why the participants are registered as trainees.
- Participants are granted absence-of-leave during the training sessions and allowed time to do their home-work and practice the assessments.
- Preferably, several participants from the same team allow entering the assessor/guide-training.

6. Conclusions

‘The assessor and guide’ are presented in this handbook as the linking-pin between someone’s portfolio – as a personal learning biography and collection of his/her prior formal, informal and non-formal learning outcomes – and the supply (or offer) from a university of lifelong learning programmes. Concluding remarks from the perspective(s) on the value of the training model therefore necessarily stress this crucial role for assessors and guides in validation-processes to focus on. They, however, also need to bridge the gap between person-steered learning objectives and the flexible supply of lifelong learning.

The training model aims at answering these challenges by offering a quality-assured, certified and embedded model for becoming a professional assessor and/or guide. Moreover, it is clear that these two functions in the lifelong learning-arena are crucial for further developing and implementing any offer for lifelong learning in higher education.

It should be noted that the necessary competences to be developed for assessors and guides possibly need to be different according to various reasons such as the kind of organisation, country and the areas where the training is going to be held. Maybe the required competences of assessors and guides for each of the modules don’t need to be the same for an academic, industrial or financial environment. Also according the area and the subject to be covered in the learning process, it will be different needs for assessors and guides if those areas are related to technical, social or health areas, among others. For those cases where it’s desired to have a more accurate profile of the training model, the table presented in Appendix 4 can be used, where the competences and modules can be found in a cross table and can be easily set up to define the requirements for each module to be developed by the trainer for the assessors and guides.

In any case, a successful system for ‘validation of prior learning’ will be able to open up the traditional learning system. In answering this challenge, at least three preconditions will have to be met:

1. *An assessment standard aiming at ‘a qualifying effect’. Assessment standards must meet the requirements of validity, acceptance, feasibility and functionality. Standards must be the ‘property’ of employer and employee. Correspondence with existing national qualification structures for vocational training should be sought. This offers the best possible assurance of the civil effects of qualifications acquired through prior learning assessment procedures, ranging from admissions to and exemptions from particular training courses, to further steps in the career development path.*

This will help education systems to open up and to respond quickly to required changes. For example, the design of standards for assessment is increasingly competence-driven. The standards are linked both to the

competence requirements of professional practice and to the content of the supply of education and training. Cross-sector competencies important to employability can also be defined. The capacity to define these assessment standards will also encourage the development of course-independent tests and examinations. The existing tests are rarely course-independent. Finally, the development of a recognition procedure for assessors creates confidence in the value of the accreditation procedure.

An important condition to create such an open situation is that the standards are made more industry-driven. The labour market should preferably decide for itself which competencies are required for accreditation as a practitioner in a particular profession. This relates not only to knowledge but also to skills and attitudes. In this case, the accreditation must be integrated into the corporate strategy.

- 2. Quality assurances of the assessment procedures. In most countries, the government is directly or indirectly responsible for assuring the quality of the assessment standard. The quality of the standard can be controlled by establishing procedures for standard development and by using a programme of requirements for the design of standards (or qualification structures). The key quality criteria are validity, acceptance, functionality, transparency and comparability of structures.*

The quality of VPL affects various parties with an interest in the assessment results. The government must supervise the quality (validity, reliability and fairness) of the assessment results. It can delegate these responsibilities to third parties, but remains answerable for quality supervision. The design of the quality assurance system could include an auditing of the assessment centres' internal quality assurance systems (as in the case of ISO certification), together with a system of random investigations of the validity and reliability of assessment results, conducted by independent research institutes. Criteria for the quality of assessment results can be drawn from the general requirements for assessment: validity and reliability. Naturally, both concepts must be operationalised specifically for prior learning assessment procedures.

- 3. Accessibility of procedures. Prior learning assessment procedures must be accessible to individuals and companies. Accessibility is determined by the recognition and acceptance of the accreditation. It is also determined by the accessibility of the organisations that implement the assessment procedures and their affordability. Access to competence recognition systems is determined by the features of the system itself and by the availability of financial resources. Decentralised supply of assessments increases the accessibility of the system. 'Decentralised' refers to the regional distribution of prior learning assessment and implementation of the procedures at the employee's place of work or training course.*

Another condition for accessibility is that the system is workable and efficient for users. Time-consuming and bureaucratic procedures are disastrous to accessibility. The funding of prior learning assessment procedures is a fundamental condition for the use of the system. A decentralised and workable system that nevertheless costs the users too much will reduce access to the procedures.

To conclude, when these three conditions are met, commitment can develop fully. There will be plenty of space to build strong commitment for new ways of learning, both within circles of government, education sector and social partners. Commitment after all is the most essential precondition for making use of prior learning assessment and thereby changing the 'looks' of the formal learning system. Commitment means that all parties involved will take up their own responsibility. For the education sector, this will not be very easy since learning is traditionally more supply-oriented than demand-oriented. Competence-based learning and prior learning assessment will however make learning more a matter of fun again, since learning will be made more to measure. The motivation of the learners will therefore be much higher. For teachers and schools, this will then also be very stimulating and inspiring. In this sense one could state that learning will not only be a matter of employability but also of *enjoyability*!

References and further reading

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Appendix 1: The STARRT-form

The STARRT-form has to be filled in for every competence that is assessed in a VPL-procedure.

STARRT-form for competence: _____

Title of proof: _____

Relevant for: _____

Describe (in short) the situation in which the proof of prior learning was produced by answering the questions below. Attach the actual proof to every STARRT-form/competence.

	Name of activity and/or context:
	Date of the activity:
S	Situation: describe the occasion and the goal of the activity
T	Task: describe the exact task you had and your personal role in it. Also describe whether it was a complex task or not, and how you can proof this.
A	Activities: describe the activity/activities you performed during this task. Be precise on your personal role.
R	Result: describe the result of the task.
R	Reflection: reflect on the impact of the result by the different participants (clients, employer, colleagues/etc.). What happened with the result?
T	Transfer: what was de "learning outcome" for yourself? What would you do the same in a next, similar task and what different? Why?
	References: