

POLICY BRIEF

This note summarises the results of a Peer Learning Activity, which has been prepared by an independent expert. The report is based on a peer learning activity where policymakers and practitioners from a number of countries exchanged ideas and experiences on an issue of shared policy interest. This report reflects the opinions of the participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or ENQA-VET position.

Peer Learning Activity

On Quality Assurance procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Countries taking part: CY, CZ, EE, ES, DE, IT, LT, MT, NL, RO, SE

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the peer learning activity (PLA) held in Malta in November 2008 and brings together the contributions of participants from 11 European countries reflecting on quality assurance procedures for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside the formal system (full PLA report is available on the Network's website at www.enqavet.eu).

POLICY CONTEXT

In Lisbon, 2001, ministers in charge of education and training in the EU agreed to make Europe **“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”** by 2010. Education and training are crucial to economic and social change. The flexibility and security needed to achieve more and better jobs depends on ensuring that all citizens acquire key competences and update their skills throughout their lives. Lifelong learning supports creativity and innovation and enables full economic and social participation.

PLA OBJECTIVE

Rationale for PLA on Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a key role in this context as a result of its direct link to employment and social cohesion. Within VET, validation/recognition of learning and training that takes place outside formal education and training bodies is crucially important for individuals, companies and society in general as **Validation of informal and non-formal learning** helps:

- To improve access and **mobility** of individuals, both in to and within education and employment.
- Promotes **‘efficiency’** within VET by helping to ensure that individuals are able to access tailored learning avoiding repetition of learning already achieved.
- Promotes **equality of opportunity** because it represents a chance for individuals to achieve recognition for their skills and competences, regardless of where these were acquired.
- Facilitates the development and implementation of strategies for **lifelong learning**.
- Addresses **sectoral needs** because it can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, for example in relation to skills shortages or in order to comply with regulations regarding professional qualifications.



Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) provide an opportunity for policymakers and practitioners from one country to learn from the experiences of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe through direct contact and practical cooperation. The objective is to share best practice and engage in a process of reflection on the implications for policy making. This sharing of experiences with other systems, is of particular importance in **delivering quality assurance in VET.**



The PLA on Quality Assurance procedures for recognition of prior learning (RPL) impacts in two ways:

It promotes shared approaches and mechanisms to **validation of non-formal and informal learning**, which ensures greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels improving access and mobility of learners and workers within education, employment and Member States.

It provides **clarity on the role of national authorities in QA procedures** in relation to standards used for validation/recognition and a more rapid organisational learning in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning, which realises lifelong learning in Europe materialising its effective human capital stock.

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

from PLA on Quality Assurance procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning:

- is pre-determined by **cultural tradition, economic situation, approaches connected to formal learning, legislation** and **standing of institutions** within Member States.

- is seen as a **tool for developing competences** and a **vector for new developments** in **educational policies** aiming to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the validation of non/informal formal learning.
- can lead to **further developments and implementation of NQFs** as the validation of non/informal learning is easier from a learning outcomes based perspective/approach.

Some difficulties in relation to validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning:

- 1) **more complex** than the validation process for formal learning¹;
- 2) **requires more quality assurance (QA) aspects** due to its complexity;
- 3) depends on the management of **the identification and assessment phases**.

**POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS**
At European level

- Create a trusted environment based upon **transparency**, open and wide communication and planning monitoring and evaluation.
- Establish common **quality indicators**.
- Put the RPL system **in the context of ongoing European developments** (credit systems, EQF, etc.).
- Need to **create consensus** across Member States.
- Provide all **relevant stakeholders** with information and guidance services for acting in an integrated and accessible manner.
- Increase efforts of **effective coordination** between public and private services and networks.
- Common and applied terminology.

At National level

- Develop **quality indicators** to support measuring the effectiveness/efficiency of RPL.
- Develop **national standards** and **quality criteria** for RPL within formal education.
- **Involvement of all interested parties** (social partners, learners, assessors, providers, etc) to create consensus and trusted environment.
- Integrate RPL into **national qualifications systems**, which should match the European guidelines and frameworks.
- **Strengthen the role(s) of the industry** and **services sector**, special attention to multinational companies with matured company system training.
- **Collect feedback** from providers, individual/learners, employers and other social partners.
- **Ensure legislation is non-conflicting**
- Improve the **benchmarking activities** and select the adequate benchmarking partner (phases, approaches, regional).
- **Appoint a national authority** and allocate a substantial budget to support development and implementation of RPL.
- Address the issue of **financing the RPL** process at system level.

At Enterprise level

- **Provide newly trained employees.**
- Facilitate ongoing **staff qualification upgrading**.

At VET-college level

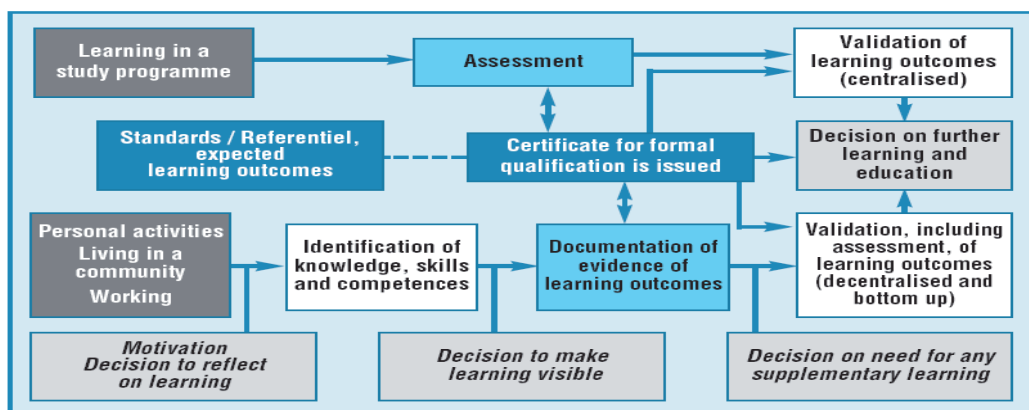
- Adapt school organisation to the **dynamics of workplace**.
- Upgrade the **training and role of assessors/trainers, counsellors, credit tutors**, etc.
- Recognition of non/informal learning in VET at **higher level**.
- Establish an **accreditation system** to become a service provider.
- Create a **structured and common approach to RPL**.

<p>ANALYSIS: reporting according to EQARF</p>	<p><i>The PLA on quality assurance procedures for RPL provides an interesting example for the use of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) as the instrument to exchange experiences and capture best practices.</i></p> <p>In many countries, the system for RPL is not developed or implemented and there are no policies or legislation reflecting RPL; these countries have not developed or have under developed NQFs and there are not specific and applied QA process and methods. For those participating countries reporting existing national measurements for RPL, the following emerged:</p>
<p>Purpose and Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, providers are responsible for the selection of the applied methods for identification of knowledge, skills and competences. • In several countries, the legislation defines the requirement for the service provider/qualified personnel. • The control of the service provider is country specific. In some countries the local and sectoral authorities have the right to control the service providers. • In many countries, the portfolio method is a common identification of non/informal learning methodology and it is seen as an important method for making learning visible (other methods: test and examinations, self-declaration, etc.).² • In most countries, there is a lack of national system of competences standards. • Social partners are often heavily involved in the planning process. • In all countries, measurable goals and targets are not established. • Often there is no information about financial planning.
<p>Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, there is a need to respond to the different expectations of the different stakeholders involved and match their interests by providing clear benefits. • There is a lack of funding, both public and private. • In those countries where the recognition system is implemented, the system is closely connected to the formal education/VET system. • In those countries where the recognition system is implemented, the qualifications system of standards is generally outcomes based.
<p>Assessment and Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of different mechanisms are in place in order to evaluate non/informal learning ranging from formative to summative approaches to validation. • The use of quality indicators is in general limited or non-existing. • In all countries, the monitoring system is not planned and is based on individual cases rather than systematic collected data and information. • In few countries, the assessment and evaluation of the validation framework and practice have been completed.
<p>Feedback and Procedures for Change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, feedback procedures are lacking. • In all countries, there is no detailed information about the result of the control of the services by providers.
<p>CHALLENGES for QA procedures for RPL</p> <p>Structural Challenges</p>	<p>Five major challenges were identified by participants in relation to PRL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For qualification frameworks at European and/or national level, the challenge is whether they will be able to operate as instruments for integration, making it possible to create learning pathways across education and training sectors and building on learning outcomes acquired in non/informal learning settings, including the workplace. • Develop overarching frameworks to incorporate qualifications that represent learning outcomes acquired in varying learning and educational settings (work, adult learning, etc). • Need to estimate the number of people involved in an RPL process considering the different sectors in addition to the costs that the procedure would entail.

Cost Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for financial support to maintain interest in further developing and implementing methods. • Achieve reliable and objective evaluation of the skills acquired outside the formal system without excessive investment of time and costs. • Identify the sources of financing and providing an effective and efficient response to RPL demand.
Challenges in relation to Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate sufficient quality mechanisms to ensure the procedure for RPL is valid and accepted in the job market, training systems and society in general. • Adequate quality mechanisms without increasing bureaucracy. • Development of quality indicators for the RPL.
Measurement Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valid measurements of learning outcomes in order to make informally acquired skills visible and usable both in the formal system and in the labour market.
Current demographic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing diversity of learners. • Society is rapidly ageing. • Immigrant's training needs.

(Endnotes)

- 1 The figure below shows the different process and states of valuing learning outcomes. The figure illustrates the connection between formal and non-formal systems and indicates that validation process for non/informal is more complex than validation process of formal learning.



Source: created by Jens Bjørnåvold and Mike Coles.

- 2 The **portfolio methodology** (a mix of methods) for identification of non/informal learning is applied for both formative and summative validation process:

- The **formative validation approach** is a complete validation process leading to a formal certification or qualification. The purpose of the formative assessment is to enable learners to extend their learning. It provides feedback to the learning process or learning curve and support personal and/or organizational improvement.
- The **summative approach** for identification and validation is the goal and is not linked directly to any formal recognition (certification) process. The purpose of the summative approach is to generate a statement on learning achieved and is related to the formalisation and certification of learning outcomes as result of which summative assessment is regularly linked to and integrated into institutional and bodies authorized to award qualifications.

Within participating countries the validation process contains elements of both formative and summative approaches, or at least there is a pathway from the formative approach to the summative approach.