Minutes of the Peer Learning Activity:
Skills Assessment and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

Bonn, December 4ᵗʰ and 5ᵗʰ 2018

Ernesto Villalba-Garcia – Skills and Validation. Evidence-based introduction from the European view (CEDEFOP, Thessaloniki)

In his presentation, Ernesto Vilalba-Garcia talked about the work on Validation in Europe which was initiated by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Cedefop cooperates with the European Commission and the Member States to develop validation systems. In this context, the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning is regularly updated to give an up-to-date overview of validation practices and arrangements across Europe. Also, European guidelines on validation have been published and are now in their second edition. This work is based on the fundamental assumption that all learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the individual and for society and that formal education needs to be complemented by validation of non-formal and informal learning. There are 30 countries in Europe that award full or parts of qualifications and only 14 countries in Europe that award certificates that are not linked to formal education. From Ernesto Vilalba-Garcia's point of view, it is a problem that there are still too many certificates obtained through validation that are not equivalent to formal education certificates. The most common requirements for becoming part of the assessment staff are relevant professional training, work experience, qualifications specific and non-specific to validation. The biggest target groups for assessments at the moment are adult learners, low-qualified individuals, workers, and unemployed people. The most frequently used tools for validation are portfolios, tests and examinations, declarative methods or a combination of those methods.

CZ: Expert Jan Bruha. National Intitute for Education/Czech Republic

Jan Bruha gave a presentation about the bridges between formal and non-formal education provided through validation in the Czech Republic. There is a strong focus on formal education in the Czech Republic. The majority of the people do not feel a need to upskill due to the low unemployment rate, despite the fact that they often pursue a profession they have never been trained for. The National register of qualifications defines the process of recognition of skills and knowledge. The register defines what is needed to pursue an occupation or a segment of an occupation. The qualification and assessment standards are developed by sector councils, which bring together employers and employee representatives as well as the National Institute for Education, the National Council for Qualifications and relevant ministries. The qualification standard is a list of the skills required for a specific work activity or activities in a particular occupation. The assessment standard is a list of criteria and procedures for validating the skills

required in a particular occupation. The assessment procedure is carried out by an authorised person/institution who has been granted authorisation by ministries under which the given vocational qualification falls. Some assessment standards require the presence of a jury and the certificate is delivered by the authorised person or the jury. These certificates allow someone to start a business. However, only schools can award formal certificates based on vocational qualifications. In order to get a formal education certificate, the interested person has to complete the final examination for the corresponding formal education programme of study. New vocational qualifications are proposed by sector councils.

World Café 1 - Bridges between formal and non formal education through validation

World Café 1 started with Jan Bruha answering the question of how effective the non-formal education system in the Czech Republic is, in the sense that people who acquire non-formal certificates are able to get better jobs. Jan Bruha answered that employers still prefer formal education and are often times not aware that a non-formal system exists. The added value of the non-formal certificates is that certified people are allowed to start a business. There is no focus on non-formal education because of a low rate of unemployment and almost no migrants staying in the country. There is also no financial support for validation. The World Cafe continued with an introduction of each participant and a brief summary of the link between formal and non-formal education and the state of validation systems in their countries. There is a very diverse landscape in terms of validation systems. Finland, Romania, and France have a very integrated system based on the philosophy that non-formal and formal education should lead to certificates and diplomas that are recognized as being equal. Portugal and Greece have specific problems of early school leavers and focus their programmes on basic education for adults. There are also cases where non-formal education plays almost no role, for example Liechtenstein. Then there are cases like Germany and Austria, which are still at the beginning of creating a working Validation system, and where the validation of immigrants is seen as an important challenge. There are also cases like Italy and the Netherlands with well-established validation systems but with low demand from the population, as some people do not feel the need to upskill or have no information about the possibility of validation and upskilling. The participants agreed that many differences in the validation systems occur because of very different country-specific contexts, like the amount of immigration, general education level and the rate of unemployment.

BE: Valérie Fontaine – Validation of skills in the French speaking community of Belgium

Valérie Fontaine spoke in her presentation about the cooperation agreement between the three governments of Belgium and the most important public sector training providers in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Their goals are to organize the accreditation of validation centres, to coordinate the supply of validation and promote its development, to establish the methodology for assessing and promote the recognition of the skills certificate delivered. The

skills validation consortium incorporates professional associations and public employment services to guiding and evaluate the scheme. Skills validation enables anyone aged 18+ and who does not have a diploma, to have professional competences in selected areas officially validated. The skills certificates are obtained by successfully passing a skills examination at a certified competence validation centre. There are currently 52 professions that can be certified in 51 competence validation centres in the French-speaking part of Belgium. The examinations are free, individual and confidential and interested people can get guidance before and after the examination in the competence validation centres. There is also a group approach to the examination where interested companies can arrange an examination for their employees at the company itself or at a validation centre. The certificates have several advantages for the candidates like an official proof of a skill for an employer and access to recognition in a profession. They also grant access to welfare allowances.

DE: Tina Rapp, West- German Chamber of Trade Association –Valikom Project

Tina Rapp gave a presentation about the Valikom project. Valikom is a joint project of Chambers of Skilled Crafts, Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Chambers of Agriculture. The project was launched with the aim of increasing skill visibility and thus increasing opportunities for applicants on the job market. According to Tina Rapp, many people in Germany acquire vocational skills and knowledge during their working life but are not always able to prove these acquired skills with a formal document. Therefore, the programme is aimed at those who have acquired vocational skills but have no formal documentation as proof. The reference qualifications in the validation procedure are always recognized as vocational and advanced vocational qualifications. The validation procedure is executed in four different steps. First, the interested parties receive information during a consultation interview about the procedure and get support in choosing the relevant reference occupation. The second step aims at giving a first overview of existing skills. In this step, the interested party completes a summary sheet which is a type of CV and a self-assessment sheet. The self-assessment sheet reflects the skills they have acquired relevant to the reference occupation selected. When these documents have been completed, the participant applies to take part in the validation procedure. The third step is the assessment. The documents are evaluated by the chamber to identify which aspects of the reference occupation should be part of the external assessment, which is carried out by experts. There are different practical means that can be used in the external assessment, like work samples, specialist interviews or trial periods in a company. The last step is the certification. Depending on the result of the procedure, the chamber issues a validation certificate that attests full or partial equivalence with the reference occupation. There are currently 28 different vocational qualifications in a wide range of sectors that can be assessed. Valikom is a relatively new project and the testing of the validation procedure just finished at the end of October 2018. The focus now is on enlarging the validation offer.

World Café 2 – Work Based Assessment and Validation

The second world Café opened with questions on Valikom. One question was how sustainable the Valikom project is as there have only been 164 validation procedures so far. Another question was what the basic requirements for participants are. Tina Rapp replied that advertising is an important part of working Validation Systems and there is hope for more candidates in the future as the project grows. Valikom aims at people who are above 25 years old, have at least some work experience and are able to speak German. Tina Rapp also noted that certificates can be equivalent to a vocational qualification, if the assessed person has the key skills required to carry out a specific job. In the next part of the world café, Valérie Fontaine described the situation with regard to work-based assessment and validation in Belgium. Self assessment is still quite challenging from her perspective as a lot of people find it difficult to give a correct overview of their competencies and skills. There is a strong focus on group validation in Belgium, which does not play any role in Valikom. Belgium puts an effort into convincing people that validation is important by hiring people that go out to sectors and companies. There is still a gap between formal education and non-formal education in the companies' eyes that needs to be addressed. Also, there are language barriers that can make it quite difficult for migrants to get access to assessment. Valerie Fontaine notes that validation is a lot easier for big companies to execute than it is for smaller companies. One solution to this problem is that big companies receive funding to validate employees of smaller companies.

Another part of the discussion centred around the assessors: who are the "experts" / assessors, how are they trained and how are employers involved? In Belgium, the experts are from the job or work sector and make remarks of a technical nature. The examiners come from training centres or adult learning schools. In Italy, the Regions provide evaluators according to the national standards of the Ministry of Education. They must follow a course of 90 hours on methodology, legislation, andragogy-type skills, etc. Direct involvement of employers is difficult. The Government presented new guidelines in early December 2018.

In Slovenia, the institute for VET is responsible for training the assessors. The 4-day training covers legislation, procedures, possible examinations, ethics, the validation tasks and one day is devoted to the portfolio and how to structure it. Assessors receive a licence, which must be renewed every four years following regular continuing professional development. Entry conditions require five years' experience in the area that they will assess and the mandatory level of education and training for the occupation, practice in assessing portfolios and that they go through a trial assessment. Juries of three assessors are used for the validation of certain occupations.

Ireland questioned the robustness of such training of assessors and the use of employers because in their case the assessment would be done by professional staff from the education and training sector. A lively discussion ensued from which it was concluded that the most important is that a team carries out the assessment. It was noted that in Luxembourg the team includes workers' representation to defend their rights. The portfolio in itself might be

evidence enough, but it is the job of the jury to look at the portfolio and judge if they need to go further in an interview with the candidate. The assessor must be able to look beyond the occupation in question and motivate, communicate, explore and guide candidates.

Luxembourg encourages the involvement of employers. However, even when they are involved they may be wary of their employees' motives, worried that they want to leave or have more wages, if they undergo validation. Some sectors, such as craft and building sectors, are creating their own system, as are some companies. Only in the social sector do employers send employees regularly for validation, because there is an agreement that they should employ a certain number of qualified people to stay registered. Norway has developed a good working relationship with companies that encourage their staff to upskill. Although the scale of experience is still limited in Ireland, employers are happy that validation helps them upskill and retrain staff, especially now that the crisis is over and skills are needed.

Selected Scenes from the film „Validation across Europe"

Day 2 started with selected scenes from the film „Validation across Europe", produced by the Italian National Coordinator for Adult Learning, with the cooperation of Belgium, France, Germany, Latvia and Slovenia. The film is available under the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQI1SP6Ik9M

IT: Expert Francesca Carta, ANPAL – PIAAC online Experimentation

Francesca Carta presented ANPAL's experimentation with PIAAC On-line to verify its suitability and test its use as qualitative profiling tool for users of the public employment service (PES) profiling system in Italy, to identify and fill the gaps in their soft and basic skills. PIAAC On-line is an assessment tool designed to provide individual-level results that are linked to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), which measures literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments. In addition, the assessment measures other non-cognitive dimensions, such as career interest, health and well-being, and also behavioural competences. The test is available in different languages and can be taken by people of all ages. The potential users are organizations providing adult training, educational institutions, researchers, government organizations or public and private companies. The PES profile contains a CV with individual characteristics, a quantitative profiling and qualitative profiling based on an interview on professional and work experiences. There are two different questionnaires to monitor the experiment. One that includes questions on the user's satisfaction with PIAAC On-line and one that includes questions for caseworkers on PIAAC On-line's usability and usefulness. The majority of experimentation users think that PIAAC On-line is easy to use. They find it useful to understand their strengths and weaknesses, as well as having a better understanding of their competences. But there are some problems with the excessive duration of the test procedure and it seems to be quite hard to understand the test results. The majority of the caseworkers don't think that PIAAC On-line should be adopted by PES for jobseeker and user profiling, but they do think that overall the tool can be useful to assess the user's literacy,

numeracy, problem-solving skills and career interests. The objective of the next step in the experimentation is to evaluate if and how PIAAC On-line could be useful to plan and customize training pathways.

DE: Brigitte Bosche, German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) – ProfilPASS

Brigitte Bosche from the German Institute for Adult Education presented the ProfilPASS which is a tool for assessing and documenting individual skills and competences mainly informally acquired. The ProfilPASS takes an open and resource-oriented approach that considers all forms and places of learning as relevant. There are different editions of the ProfilPASS available that focus on young people or people with limited language skills. The ProfilPASS focuses on competences gained from activities. The leading questions are what the user has done in his life and what the user has learned from these activities. There is also the possibility to get additional counselling from counsellors who are trained to work with the ProfilPASS. The ProfilPASS focusses on what people can do instead of what people cannot do. To Illustrate the ProfilPASS further, Brigitte Bosche gave an example of a woman that has been a dancer in a semi-professional dancing group. She described various tasks she had done while being part of the dancing group, such as organizing public performances, choosing costumes or setting up a website and social media. In this process, she could attain and extract different competences like the ability to organize things, being creative or being able to set up and maintain a website. This example shows that there are plenty of benefits for using the ProfilPASS to make personal competences visible, such as becoming aware of one's personal competences and improving one's ability to talk about competences and skills. The ProfilPASS was established in Germany in 2006 and is available in different languages. The main target groups are jobseekers, pupils, trainees, students, migrants and employers in companies.

World Café 3 - Assesment and basic skills

World Café 3 started with the question of whether or not ProfilPASS is suitable for migrants with low or limited language skills. Brigitte Bosches responded that the ProfilPASS might still be a bit challenging for people with low levels of language comprehension. Furthermore, she noted that it should be in the hand of the counsellors to assist the user or give them advice on additional language learning courses. Language barriers are seen as a challenge in general as many existing tools require basis language skills at level B2. Another question about the ProfilPASS concerned the procedure to have it translated into Czech, for example. The answer from Brigitte Bosch was that each country is responsible for the translation itself but you can get assistance in training your counsellors. The world cafe continued with questions about PIAAC On-line. One question was whether or not PIAAC On-line has already been used in the job-search field and if there are general plans to use it for validation. Francesca Carta responded that the testing phase is not yet over and that it is still uncertain if PIAAC On-line will be used for validation. Furthermore, there are large amounts of time and money being

invested to validation but general demand remains low. There was a wide consensus in the group that a combination of explorative tools with a focus on personal development objectives and tools with closed questions with a labour market objective would be ideal. Participants from Slovenia said that they were also testing PIAAC On-line.

DE: Katrin Gutschow – Skills assessment and validation in the year 2030

In her presentation, Katrin Gutschow talked about the possible future of skill assessment and validation. There are several different purposes of validation and assessment. Basically, individuals should be empowered to reflect on their skills and should be assisted to have their skills validated at their workplaces. This could lead to admission to an examination or course to acquire certification that is related to relevant standards of the formal system, if the user sees the need of upskilling. There are different methods for making learning outcomes visible. On the one hand, there are activity based methods and test-based methods to *show* skills and competences. On the other hand, there are biographical methods and self-assessment methods to *describe* and *document* competences. The typology of validation procedures can be separated into three different types. The first type is formal education that aims at providing certificates with formal qualifications. The methods of validation are mainly text-based and the standards are set by formal education and training institutions. The second, autonomous type is in the sector of non-formal education and training and aims at providing certificates that are without equivalence in formal education and training. The validation process here is mainly test based too. The third type is the supporting type in the sector of informal learning and aims at identifying, documenting and validating informal learning. Methods of validating correspond with the formative nature of the concept underpinning them. An important question to answer is if validation can be successful – both, from the perspective of the market and from the perspective of the individual. Two main goals should be reached by skills assessment and validation. On one side there are stakeholders like formal education and adult education institutions who are trying to increase the employability of an individual and on the other side, there is civil society and the world of work that are responsible for the empowerment of an individual. In general, the role of guidance is really important and there are still questions to be answered such as how to deal with part-qualifications and whether all assessment tools are fair. For example, use of E-portfolios could be problematic because people that are good with digital competences are better at using/creating them.