
A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

Luxembourg – By James Winter
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CONTENTS

Comment [CA1]: Table of Contents automatically generated from Headings

1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN LUXEMBOURG	1
By James Winter (ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.)	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector	1
1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector	6
1.4 Review of existing initiatives: Third Sector.....	7
1.5 Conclusions	7

1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN LUXEMBOURG

By James Winter (ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.)

1.1 Introduction

The system of education and training in Luxembourg has various peculiarities due to its unique contextual situation. The country's population is relatively small when compared to its European neighbours, totalling 451,600, of which the proportion of resident foreign nationals is comparatively high at around 38.6 per cent (174,200). The labour force in Luxembourg is 200,500, of which around 98,500 are foreign cross-border workers¹. Until very recently, the country has not had a university (this was created by the 'loi du 12 août 2003'). With regard to professional training it is also worth noting that Luxembourg's geographical position means that there are competing forces from border regions in neighbouring countries for recruitment of staff. The above factors combine to make the debate on education and training in Luxembourg particularly complicated.

The development and implementation of methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg are in their early stages. The Ministry for Education does have a 'dossier' and a person responsible for the area, but so far, there has been a low level of initiative at the state level. There is certainly very little legislation in place comparable with that in France, which led to the creation of the VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Experience*) programme. It has been reported that the government at some point in the near future will be putting in place a strategy for lifelong learning, based on 5 pillars, one of which will be a system of validation of prior occupational learning with the aim of accessing training schemes.² The Ministry of Education and vocational training part of the government's current programme states the need to improve the access to the current system of lifelong learning by providing validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, this has not yet been implemented, and in the meantime, legislation in the area remains thin on the ground.

1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

1.2.1 Public Authority Initiatives at National Level

The development of validation methodologies for non-formal and informal learning is currently very limited in Luxembourg. However, certain legislative measures recently adopted have opened the door to the potential evolution of such methodologies. Firstly, the National Action Plan for employment adopted in 1998 saw the creation of a form of skills assessment methodology which examined the competencies gained by a person via non-formal and informal means³. This process, known as the '*bilan de compétences*' or individual

¹ STATEC, 'Le Luxembourg en chiffres, 2004'

² Ministère du travail et de l'emploi 'Fonds social européen 2000-2006 EQUAL, Rapport d'Execution 2001'

³ Loi du 12 février 1999 concernant la mise en action du plan d'action national en faveur de l'emploi

skills audit, is used as a tool to help people evaluate their own skills and competencies, and hence match these to appropriate jobs or training programmes. The National Action Plan for employment of 2002 saw the creation of a similar tool for assessing skills, the '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP)⁴.

There are indications that validation of non-formal and informal learning is also being introduced as a way of accessing formal learning. The legislation creating the University of Luxembourg in 2003 includes an article allowing a prospective student to request a '*validation des acquis de l'expérience*', which is effectively a validation of non-formal and informal learning of the candidate, as a substitute to certification or other proof of having undertaken the formal education required for entry to the university⁵. Furthermore, the '*Règlement grand-ducal*' (17 June 2000) regarding the organisation of adult learning allows in certain cases, the admission to courses for candidates who do not meet the regular requirements, providing that they have relevant previous professional experience, which can be validated⁶.

The Current Situation

The '*bilan de compétences*'

The '*bilan de compétences*' or personal skills audit was created via legislation drawn up in 1998, that of the National Action Plan for Employment. Several articles in the legislation refer to the '*bilan de compétences*' and the cases in which it may be used. It is only available via the ADEM (*Administration de l'emploi*), to job-seekers. The '*bilan de compétences*' is used as a tool to explore the personal and professional skills of the individual concerned, and the skills required by the labour market, and is formative in nature.

⁴ Plan d'action national en faveur de l'emploi 2002

⁵ loi du 12 août 2003 - Université de Luxembourg

⁶ Règlement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes

Objectives of the 'bilan de compétences'

To establish and specify, for the individual concerned, ability and experience in the following areas:

- Knowledge – what the person knows: school and professional qualifications
- Know-how – knowledge that a person has regarding the workplace – technical skills
- Behavioural skills – self image, social interaction, communication skills, initiative, manners, motivation

With the aim of:

- Developing the individuals' skills in self-evaluation
 - Developing a better organisation of personal career priorities
 - Improving awareness of personal skills
 - Improving management of personal potential
 - Re-motivating the individual in case of loss of employment
 - Raising personal awareness for potential for self-improvement
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The methodology for producing a '*bilan de compétences*' is via a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and observation of the individual being assessed. The assessments are conducted by third parties on behalf of the '*Service d'accompagnement personnalisé demandeurs d'emploi (SAPDE)*' section of the ADEM.

The National Action Plan for Employment of 2003 introduced another level of this type of self-assessment, the '*bilan de compétences basses qualifications*', which is an assessment method for people with very few qualifications. It is divided into two parts 'professional skills' and 'social skills', since jobs requiring very low knowledge often place a lot of importance on criteria such as hygiene, health, and behaviour in the workplace.⁷

The '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*'

The '*bilan d'insertion professionnelle*' (BIP), is similar to the '*bilan de compétences*', with the specific aim of helping job-seekers to become more autonomous in their search for employment, in addition to providing a tool for evaluating their technical and social skills as well as competencies. It was created in 2002 via the implementation of the National Action Plan for employment of 2002.

⁷ Ministère du travail et de l'emploi, 'Plan d'Action National pour l'emploi, Rapport National 2003'

Objectives of the ‘bilan d’insertion professionnelle’

- To improve the job-seeker’s responsibility and autonomy with regard to becoming employed
- To put into practice in the most optimal way the social and technical skills which the individual possesses

Outcomes:

- Increased ability of the job-seeker (via better awareness of his/her abilities, career aims)
 - Definition of a realistic occupational ‘project’ which is transposable to the labour market
 - Defence of one’s ‘project’
 - Development of an action plan
 - Management of the action plan
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The basis for the preparation of the BIP is via group work, in which the job-seekers are encouraged to propose and discuss their career plan, and whether it is compatible with the job market situation. At the same time, the candidate is questioned about what he/she believes are his/her personal competences, and whether they are compatible with their career plan. The BIP is prepared in the form of a ‘log book’, in which the candidate notes what he or she has drawn from each session of group work, and uses these notes to modify his or her occupational project and plan of action.

The ‘bilan’ system for evaluating competencies is used to some success in tackling unemployment in Luxembourg – according to statistics from the ADEM, 50% of those that undertook a ‘*bilan de compétences*’ or a ‘*bilan d’insertion professionnelle*’ in 2003 are still in employment. While they are not the most concrete method for validating informal and non-formal learning, they do contain an important element which involves the evaluation of one’s skills and competences, which are requisite to a job-seeker developing a suitable strategy to re-access the labour market or recognise what fields of work he or she has the ability to work in. The ‘bilans’ therefore represent what could be described as an evolutionary step towards more ‘formalised’ validation methodologies.

Unlike, for example, in the French system, the ‘*bilan de compétences*’ and the ‘*bilan d’insertion professionnelle*’ are only available for the unemployed. There is no provision in the legislation for those who are currently working to apply to undergo a ‘bilan’. This may not necessarily be because those who are currently employed would not benefit from or wish to undertake a ‘bilan’, rather it suggests that there is the possibility to expand the scope of the ‘bilan’ system in the future should policy-makers see fit to do so.

‘*Validation des acquis*’ – the summative approach

‘*Validation des acquis*’ translates as validation of prior learning, and is mentioned in the legislation creating the University of Luxembourg (la loi du 12 août 2003). The legislation allows for the validation of prior occupational learning to be substituted for formal learning qualifications in certain cases when applying to study at the university. Furthermore, the

'*Reglement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000*' regarding the organisation of adult apprenticeships also contains provisions for admission to courses through a form of validation of prior occupational learning. While this does not represent a large legislative framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, it does indicate that at the national level, this method of assessing an individual's learning experience is formalised in certain instances.

Validation of prior occupational learning and the University of Luxembourg

Art. 9 of the law of 12 August 2003 creating the University of Luxembourg specifies the circumstances under which a candidate can use the validation of prior learning to demonstrate how they meet the knowledge and aptitude levels required in order to be awarded a diploma or other certificate. The awarding of such a validation is decided by a panel ('*jury*'), the composition of which is stipulated by the university rector according to the nature of the validation requested. The panel is primarily made up of teaching/research staff, although when assessing prior work-based learning, experts from the relevant private sector are also present.

Evidence upon which the panel bases its decision is a combination of a dossier submitted by the candidate, an interview with the candidate or, in certain circumstances, directly via observation of the candidate in their occupational setting, either real or reconstructed, if this procedure is allowed by the authority which delivers the certification. The panel also determines the scope of the validation, and in instances of partial validation, states where knowledge and skills in a certain area need to be evaluated by a complementary assessment.

Admission to adult learning courses via validation of prior learning

Legislation developed in 2000 regarding adult learning also contains provisions for the use of validation methodologies for admitting candidates onto adult apprenticeship courses. The completion of a successful adult apprenticeship in Luxembourg leads to one of the following qualifications:

- Certificat d'initiation technique et professionnelle (CITP)
- Certificat de capacité manuelle (CCM)
- Certificat d'aptitude technique et professionnelle (CATP)

Training takes place either through the Centre National de Formation Professionnelle Continue (CNFC), or in one of the technical Lycées.

Article 9 of the '*Reglement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes*' allows for 'dispensations to the normal admissions requirements for candidates who do not meet the conditions stated above, but who can demonstrate previous professional experience which can be validated'. In cases where such a validation is requested, the Admissions Commission decides whether to admit the candidate to the first, second, third or fourth year of the training scheme.

Recognition of validation methodologies from external countries

Luxembourg is unique in its size and geographical location, and it is to be expected that policy formation is influenced by policies of neighbouring countries. With regard to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, there are instances in the higher education sector in which institutions use the validation methodologies of other countries. For example, in the Centre de Recherche Public (CRP) Henri Tudor, a publicly funded science and research centre, the French system of ‘*Validation des Acquis*’ is used as a method of determining the skills which a candidate possesses in order to allow him or her to take up certain courses.

European Social Fund research projects

The CRP Henri Tudor has been leading two projects part-funded by the European Social Fund which are examining methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, particularly in the field of innovation. The first project was entitled ‘Innosertion’ and focused on the anticipative management of skills linked to innovation technology. This was followed-up by a related project called ‘Check-Up’ which focused on methodologies for the validation and development of skills bases aimed at helping the over-50s gain improved access to the information society.

Sub-national Initiatives

There are no initiatives at the sub-national public authority level in Luxembourg. The mandate of the Ministry of Education and Professional Training covers all areas of education policy, including lifelong learning. As stated above, validation of non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg is still in its infancy, and it appears that for the time being, most initiatives are being led at the national level.

1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

The principle private sector actors in the training and lifelong learning sector in Luxembourg are as follows:

- Chambre de Commerce (chamber of commerce)
- Chambre des Métiers (representation group for artisans)
- Chambre de travail/Arbeiterkammer – AK (representation group for workers)
- Chambre des employés privés, Luxembourg – CEPL (representation group for all private sector employees in Luxembourg)
- Institut de Formation Bancaire, Luxembourg –IFBL (Institute for training in the banking sector)

At the moment, these organisations are not significantly advanced in the development of methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In certain cases, they have expressed opinions on the subject and the possibilities for the future development of such methodologies.

For example, the *Chambre des employés privés* is in favour of the legislation with regard to using a system of ‘*validation des acquis*’ as part of the admissions procedure for entering higher education institutions. However, they argue that the scope for usage of this validation does not go far enough; in their view it appears to be limited only to the first year of study. They argue that this does not dovetail with European level developments in this area, and that validation of prior occupational learning should be available at all levels.⁸

However, the Institut de Formation Bancaire Luxembourg (IFBL), offers the services of its ‘Diagnostic Centre’ for the purposes of training those working in the banking sector, part of the role of which is to assist workers in this area to assess their skills and abilities relevant to working in the sector. One of the tools used by the Diagnostic Centre to achieve this, is the drawing up of ‘*bilan de compétences*’ similar to those described in section 2.1.2 above.

1.4 Review of existing initiatives: Third Sector

Examples of initiatives in this sector do not appear readily, and indeed the literature would suggest that there are none that exist. Again here, the only involvement regarding the development of methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are official positions expressed in reports. For example, the Christian-based NGO Caritas states that ‘A recognized system for the validation of prior learning would be advantageous to business, to the individual, and also to society as a whole’.⁹

1.5 Conclusions

The development of tools and methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg is clearly still in its infancy across all sectors of society. In the public field, where legislation does exist, it is very recent and its scope is narrow, making an effective assessment of its success difficult. At the national level, there are indications that a system of so-called ‘*validation des acquis*’ is in the process of being developed, elements of which are already being applied in the higher education field. However, there is very little guidance on the subject, and minimal evidence on how the tools created in the relevant legislation are currently being used. Its principle application in the admissions procedure for entering the University of Luxembourg is difficult to evaluate given that the university has only been in existence for one year. However, the introduction in recent years of the ‘*bilan de compétences*’ and ‘*bilan d’insertion professionnelle*’ to assist job-seekers in auto-identification of skills indicate that the state is developing tools which form the beginnings of such validation techniques, and could indeed be seen as precursors to a wider system of validation.

In the private and third sectors, there are few initiatives being taken in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning, with the main organisations in the private sector mostly continuing to focus on more orthodox methods of assessing skills and competencies.

⁸ CEPL, Université au Luxembourg (projet de loi) – Avis, 2003

⁹ Caritas Luxembourg ‘Defis sociaux 2004’

However, the fact that the main banking sector training institution has adopted the system of the '*bilan de compétences*' to assess the skill levels of its members suggests that other sectors may develop similar validation programmes in the future.

The future of validation methodologies of non-formal and informal learning in Luxembourg may depend partially on how well such methodologies are currently working. As is noted above, there has been some criticism that the current legislation concerning '*validation des acquis*' is too narrow in scope. However, signals coming from the Ministry of Education that validation of non-formal and informal learning is to be used in the field of lifelong learning in the future point to a possible widening of the scope of the current legislation.