

# European Inventory

on validation of informal and  
non-formal learning



Education and Culture DG



# Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in the Private Sector – A Compendium

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## 1.1 Introduction

This compendium forms part of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning<sup>1</sup>. The Inventory provides an up-to-date catalogue of good practices in validation and is an important reference for stakeholders. It is made up of 32 individual country chapters, six case studies, three ‘sectoral’ compendia (of which this is one) and an overall report of findings. The compendia (public, private and third sector) discuss key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches within the three different sectors. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation (in particular, practitioners), who will find the compendia have an eminently practical focus.

This Private Sector compendium examines the following issues in turn:

- Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Private Sector
- Private Sector VINFL in practice
- Rationale for involvement in validation initiatives
- Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives
- Methods employed
- Outputs / Outcomes and Impact
- Barriers to take-up
- Success Factors
- Conclusions

The findings within the 32 country chapters of the European Inventory have been analysed to inform the content of this compendium. Throughout, examples of initiatives have been taken from the country chapters<sup>2</sup>, to illustrate good practice and lessons learned in the implementation of validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) in the private sector. The aim is to enhance the exchange of experiences and to enable different sectoral stakeholders to learn from tried and tested initiatives in their field without needing to refer to the detailed individual country chapters.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/)

<sup>2</sup> Many examples are examined in more detail within the individual country chapters, all of which can be found on the European Inventory website

## 1.2 Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Private Sector

The 2005 Inventory noted that particular difficulties were encountered in gathering data on private sector activities and suggested that the scarcity of information might be a sign of lack of information / openness (e.g. as companies are reluctant to reveal their HR strategies) rather than lack of initiatives, an issue that the 2005 Inventory suggested be subject of further investigation in future editions of the Inventory. The individual country chapters of the 2007 Inventory focus in greater detail on validation in the private sector and each 2007 chapter gives a deeper overview of developments in the implementation of VINFL in the context of the workplace and employment, including activities carried out by individual companies, by social partners and collaborative activities supported by both of these actors, and / or other stakeholders. However, the lack of available data remains a problem in certain countries.

The country chapters of the 2007 Inventory reveal a great variety in the level of interest and activity in validation across the private sector. It appears that there is an increasing awareness in most of the countries of the importance of recognising individuals' skills and competences, although this is not always reflected in the implementation of validation practices.

In some countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) few (if any) examples of private sector initiatives were identified. For example, in Estonia, no specific instruments and methodologies have been approved for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning; a description of professional activities is mostly used in the form of a CV or statements from employers. In the Czech Republic, it was noted that although recognition of acquired non-formal and informal skills in the national labour market is considered important, no much formal validation or accreditation of these skills takes place.

In other countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Ireland) the private sector is very active in validation, either in delivering its own initiatives, or through working in partnership with (mainly) public sector actors. In Denmark, for instance, there has been a long tradition of VINFL in the private sector, with examples of usage dating back to the 1990s. In Finland, due to their integral role in the national competence-based qualification scheme, the involvement of social partners and individual companies in the validation of informal and non-formal learning is very strong.

### 1.3 Private Sector VINFL in practice

Individuals can gain a wide range of skills and competences as a result of their professional experience. To give an idea of the magnitude of this learning, a study commissioned by the German Ministry of Education and Training in 2003<sup>1</sup> showed that around 61% of all working people in Germany take part in one or several types of informal vocational learning. Self-directed learning via observation and practice in the workplace and via reading work-related texts, reference books or specialist journals was mentioned by 38% and 35% of those questioned. The third and fourth most frequent responses referred to on-the-job instruction or crash-course training by colleagues (25%) or supervisors (22%). Around one in six members of the German workforce takes part in work-related trade fairs or congresses, and about one in eight reported receiving on-the-job instruction or crash-course training from someone from outside their company.

VINFL aims to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired. It is a key instrument for the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. As such, it represents an important tool for recognising skills gained through professional activities and experience, as equal to those gained in a formal education setting. Further, validation can be used within the private sector to recognise skills and competences individuals might have developed in other settings (e.g. at home, through voluntary work or other third sector activities) which can be transferred to the workplace. Other benefits of validation are explored in more detail below, in the sections 'Rationale for Involvement' and 'Outputs / Outcomes and Impact'.

Within the country chapters of the 2007 Inventory, three different approaches to validation are evident in the private sector:

- validation *developed and delivered* by private sector stakeholders (individual companies and social partners) in relation to professional competences acquired through both non-formal and informal learning;
- *participation of private sector stakeholders* (including social partners) in public or third sector initiatives to validate informal and non-formal learning;
- validation of private sector activities (professional experience) through initiatives *delivered within other sectors* (generally, public initiatives). For example, under the

<sup>1</sup> Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX: Integrierter Gesamtbericht zur Weiterbildungssituation in Deutschland, BMBF, 2006, p. 188.

French national system of VAE, professional activities are eligible within the three years of experience required to undergo a validation procedure but assessment and certification is delivered, in general, by public education and training providers.

This compendium will focus mainly on the first two of the above scenarios (validation delivered by private sector organisations and their involvement in the development / delivery of other sectors' initiatives). Further information on the validation of private sector activities (professional experience) within public sector initiatives can be found in the equivalent Public Sector Compendium, in the overall final report and in the individual country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory.

## 1.4 Rationale for Involvement in validation initiatives

The research has identified some of the reasons for involvement of the main private sector stakeholders: Private Sector Companies, the Social Partners and Individual Beneficiaries. We will explore these in turn below.

### 1.4.1 Private sector companies

- *To recognise informal and non-formal learning in the workplace*

The workplace is an important setting for learning<sup>1</sup>. In Norway, a survey concluded that:

- employees regard their workplace as the most important venue for learning
- employers believe practice is the best way of learning.

We have already recognised that the skills and competences developed in the workplace deserve equal recognition to those developed through formal education. VINFL represents an important tool to facilitate this recognition.

Whilst much learning occurs in the workplace, its identification is problematic. The *VAI (Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs)* project, funded through the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, serves as an example. The project aims to identify, develop, test and fine-tune a methodology and a set of tools (the *VAI KIT*), suitable to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities existing within European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning.<sup>2</sup> Further details of this project can be found below.

- *To recognise informal and non-formal learning outside of the workplace*

Life-wide skills and competences, for example developed in the home, through voluntary and community activities or membership of a sports or youth club, can be transferred to the workplace.<sup>3</sup> Some employers are beginning to employ VINFL to assess the relevance and make full use of these skills.

In Finland, for example, a growing number of companies are making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system. They are using the broader framework of this system to recognise skills and competences that their

<sup>1</sup> [www.fao.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf](http://www.fao.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf). In New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning(RNFIL), Country Background Report 2006, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from a Leonardo VPL-2 Case Study Grid

<sup>3</sup> The Compendium on Validation in the Third Sector gives a more detailed observation of the validation of skills and competences individuals develop through participation in third sector activities and the methods used to validate these

employees have acquired at work and in other parts of life (in formal, informal or non-formal settings). A range of different companies have been identified which are active in this field. The companies / organisations range from public to private employers and social enterprises, from large to small businesses and from traditional manufacturing businesses to companies competing in new markets. For example, Fortum Gas, a leading gas company in the Nordic area, has extensive experience in providing employees with an opportunity to obtain an official qualification that matches the key competences they have learnt in the work place (in the field of chemistry and management). Are Oy, a family-owned real estate / construction company employing in the region of 1,500 workers (mainly in Finland, but also in Russia, Estonia and Latvia) has trained a considerable share of its employees over the past decade through the apprenticeship and competence-based qualification scheme. Continuing training and validation of prior learning have become a key HR and business strategy for the company.

- *To identify training needs / skills gaps*

Some methodologies enable employers to identify skills gaps and thus to tailor company training around this information.

Formative assessments enable an individual to identify the skills and competences they possess and any further learning needs they might have to develop these further. For example, in Greece, Aluminium de Grèce SA<sup>1</sup> has established a 'Continuing Progress System' where employees record their own existing knowledge, skills and competences through team discussions and through personal assessment processes. In this way, each employee is closely involved in determining their own and their teams' future skills needs, helping to set out the necessary training which then takes place either in-house or outside the company.

In a Danish study<sup>2</sup> of six enterprises that used 'Individual Competence Assessment' (IKA) to develop a corporate culture of lifelong learning, the employers noted that assigning tasks became easier on the basis of competencies rather than 'who makes the most noise'. They also felt that IKA allowed them to design training specifically according to their employees' needs and because it led to a new distribution of job assignments within the company, it resulted in less repetitive work for employees.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Based on information from the 'Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications', Fourth Follow up report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and on brief telephone discussion with the company's Education Dept

<sup>2</sup> The Ramboll Management Study

<sup>3</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

- *To support career development*

By recognising an individual's skills and competences, VINFL also helps to determine their 'potential'. It can thus be used as a tool to support career development, by enabling the individual and their employer to understand their skills gaps (see previous point) and how their skills and competences are and could be used and improved.

In Denmark, social partners within the production and service sector have further developed (subscribe to) the philosophy of LEAN production, which has a core element of competence development for skilled and unskilled workers. There is also a national framework for LLL i.a. aiming to move workers away from basic competences and to achieve more specialised competences.<sup>1</sup>

- *To award qualifications*

Another set of private sector methodologies aims at issuing qualifications or certificates based on competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal training courses, enabling individuals to learn valuable, transferable skills and competences, can be delivered in-house by private companies, by the social partners or by private training providers.

For example, the *Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)* operates a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects such as word-processing, databases, spreadsheets etc, based on the Chamber's own examinations. These certificates enjoy recognition by the enterprises who are members of the Chamber, but also from other private companies and public organisations.

- *To gain recognition for professional experiences in the form of access to and / or exemptions / shortened duration of education and training courses*

Validation of skills and competences developed at work can be used to facilitate access to education and training. Further, VINFL can also be used to grant exemptions and / or reduce the length of a formal education or training course.

For example, a collaborative project between four pharmaceutical companies and the Transport Training Board of Denmark offered an accelerated training programme for unskilled or semi skilled workers in the transportation field. Participants were allowed to

<sup>1</sup> Framework of Actions for Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications (2005)

complete the course in 4-12 months and importantly the school-based element lasted between 6-9 weeks, as opposed to the regular 50 weeks.<sup>1</sup>

- *In response to skills shortages/changes in skills needs*

We have already seen that VINFL can be particularly relevant for companies driven by technological innovation or affected by economic changes leading to skills shortages. By helping to support individuals in the recognition and development of their competences in working with new technologies, VINFL can overcome the problem of a lack of formal qualifications in certain sectors. It can also be a helpful tool to address economic changes such as skills shortages, or a downturn within a sector. Validation can help to identify people with the competences required and provides clear evidence of these competences.

The 'Investing in People' project, funded through the ESF Equal Programme, set up a validation initiative in response to a problem of unemployment in the Italian province of Macerata, resulting from the restructuring of private companies, particularly in the shoemaking industry. The introduction of VINFL to the area was felt to be an appropriate means of tackling some of the unemployment problems in the province relating to a skills mismatch<sup>2</sup> because the process identifies skills achieved through all types of learning i.e. formal, non-formal and informal, which may be unconscious to the individual but relevant to the labour market. This information could then be used to find new positions for the unemployed. VINFL therefore helped to address a change in the skills needs in the region. The project is examined in a detailed case study which forms part of the 2007 European Inventory and is available on the Inventory website.

- *To comply with mandatory certification requirements (e.g. EU or national legislation)*

In some industries and occupations, there are a growing number of regulatory requirements for individuals to have particular certificates or qualifications before being able to take up certain jobs. VINFL represents a way of attaining these qualifications by recognising an individual's informal and non-formal learning, on a par with formal education and training.

In Ireland, for example, it is noted that industries such as security, childcare, construction and hospitality, are generating demand for VINFL to enable existing workers to access newly required qualifications. This is in response to an interest in professionalising the workforce and more significantly for some, the need to meet new regulatory requirements for practice. In nursing too, the original requirement for entry into the profession has increased from diploma to degree level, which has created a need for VINFL. Now all

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the unemployed do not have the skills required by employers in the area

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that supply nursing courses in Ireland use VINFL to allow nurses returning to the profession to have their knowledge and experience recognised.

#### 1.4.2 Social Partners

Social partners' involvement in the development of private sector VINFL initiatives may also be motivated by some of the reasons we have listed above. Additional reasons for their involvement can be identified, such as:

- *To ensure the sector is represented in the development of (national) initiatives*

By participating in the development of national VINFL initiatives, social partners can make sure that the 'voice' of the private sector is heard and that their needs are taken into account.

For example, in Norway, the mandate of the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) which took place between 1999 and 2002 was first geared towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning for individuals wanting to enter into education. The social partners called (successfully) to extend the mandate of the Project to include the development of validation tools for working life as well.

- *To ensure consistency / transferability in the development of initiatives*

It is important that VINFL initiatives, whether developed on a national, sectoral or at individual company level, are transferable, to enable individuals to fully benefit from them. Social partners can help to ensure consistency and transferability in the development of initiatives by negotiating on behalf of and between large numbers of employers in different economic sectors.

In Belgium, for example, social partners were involved at both cross-sectoral and sectoral level, in collaboration with the public actors, in the definition of systems of references within the framework of the validation of competencies.<sup>1</sup> Developing initiatives in this way, to link in with frameworks of qualifications or standards, helps to ensure an element of transferability and sustainability – individuals are able to achieve evidence of their competences which is recognised on a sectoral or national level (thereby supporting mobility).

<sup>1</sup> Refernet (2005-2006), Accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Belgium, published by Cedefop

- *To help raise awareness / encourage wider take-up of VINFL within the private sector*

Social partners can help to disseminate the benefits of VINFL widely within the private sector. In France, social partners have collaborated with regional public bodies to raise awareness and provide information regarding VAE among their representatives. For example, information days have been held by the CRIS<sup>1</sup> (VINFL coordination centres) to inform and train representatives of the CFDT (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*) in the Centre and Loire regions.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.4.3 Individual beneficiaries

It is clear that individuals can benefit greatly from taking part in a validation procedure (whether this is implemented in the private, public or third sector) but each person will have a different reason to make use of VINFL. Again, some of the reasons listed above in **section 1.4.1** also apply to individual beneficiaries of validation, such as:

- *To get their informal and non-formal learning in the workplace recognised*
- *To get their informal and non-formal learning outside of the workplace recognised*
- *To identify their training needs / skills gaps*
- *To receive professional qualifications*
- *To gain recognition for professional experiences in the form of exemptions/shortened duration of education and training courses*
- *To support career development*
- *To comply with mandatory certification requirements (e.g. EU legislation)*

In Norway, for example, the social-partner based projects carried out under the national Validation Project aimed to be useful for the individual when applying for a new job in the labour market or when applying for admission to an educational institution. Throughout this compendium, our case study examples show how individuals have benefited from individual VINFL initiatives.

Another reason for individuals to take part in validation initiatives is to benefit from 'soft outcomes' such as improved confidence and self-esteem. These soft outcomes may then help an individual to gain access to formal education and/or employment, or simply to take

<sup>1</sup> *Cellule Régionale Interservices*

<sup>2</sup> *Les Entreprises et les acteurs socio-économiques face à la VAE, Actions, projets, animations des Cellules Régionales Inter-Services (CRIS), February 2006*

on more variety or responsibility within their current role. These benefits to individuals are explored in more detail in the Section 'Outputs / Outcomes and Impact' below.

VINFL can also be particularly useful to disadvantaged groups, e.g. the unemployed, older workers and people with disabilities. For example, the *Jernvilje project* was carried out in Northern Jutland, Denmark, one of the regions most affected by unemployment in the traditional industries. Here, validation plays a key role in helping the unemployed return to the labour market. The project involves the Metal Union, Aalborg Technical College and local employment authorities. They use the above-mentioned individual competence assessment (IKA) methodology to identify the individual's competences, which allows the individual to re-qualify and re-enter the labour market. The assessment is carried out quickly, before the individual becomes unemployed for too long. In total 85% of participants in this project have re-entered the labour market.<sup>1</sup>

The example below of validation projects in Flanders, Belgium, which have been implemented by VOKANS, an organisation set up by two trade unions, demonstrates how disadvantaged groups can be supported using VINFL.

#### VINFL to support disadvantaged groups, VOKANS, Belgium

vzw VOKANS ('*Vormings- en opleidingskansen*' - Vocational Training and Education Opportunities), was set up in 1990. The trade unions ACV and ACW form the basis of this non-profit organisation.

vzw VOKANS has been recognized and subsidised for some considerable time now as a vocational training and employment organization; it pursues the objective of increasing and sustaining employment opportunities for job-seekers and employees. VOKANS is running or has already conducted a number of projects on the recognition of acquired skills.

The '*competentiespiegel*' ('skills mirror') is directed towards recognition of various forms of acquired knowledge, abilities and attitudes from a non-formal framework, specifically for low-skilled women with little in the way of work experience of relevance to the labour market. These women will consequently be better screened and more efficiently steered towards labour-market-oriented training courses and thence towards regular employment.

The 'E=MC2' project pursues the objective of offering the unemployed or other groups more concrete prospects of employability. The e-learning method proposed by the project is based on the VINFL perspective. Through the application of the existing VINFL methods, attempts are being made to achieve two development goals: first, the professional development of the individual and, second, developing supply among organisations on the labour market. The project is designed to increase the motivation of

<sup>1</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

the beneficiaries and to enable them to develop new skills through e-learning (*e-learning van competenties - eVC*).<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.4.4 Sectoral trends

Initial analysis suggests that validation is more relevant / prominent among larger-sized companies, although a few examples of initiatives within small and medium-sized enterprises can also be drawn from our research.

In the new Member States in particular, the introduction of VINFL is generally led by larger companies, often those which are under foreign ownership. For example, in Hungary it is reported that companies which are currently working with VINFL are primarily West-European multinational companies which have introduced general international concepts amongst into their working practices across all countries. This is also reported to be the case in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic, among others.

It also emerges that certain sectors are more active in the implementation of VINFL. In Germany, awareness and demand for VINFL methodologies and procedures is said to be especially relevant for fields in which specific competencies are essential,<sup>2</sup> such as mechatronics, IT and multimedia, electrical engineering and the metal-working occupations. In Lithuania, the following occupations and industries are highlighted: metalwork; working with machine-tools; the furniture industry, the food industry, electronics and the chemical and construction industries. It can thus be inferred that validation is particularly useful in industries which are dependent on the use of technologies – as these technologies evolve over time, employees must also adapt and learn new ways of working. The 2005 inventory explored areas of use of validation in the private sector and highlighted the importance of VINFL in 'traditional professions', where employees tend to be less qualified and employers find it difficult to release employees for training, as well as in 'new professions', where formal qualifications have not yet been established.

Our case study of validation in the Netherlands processing industry<sup>3</sup> outlines the use of validation in a sector which is undergoing significant change. Due to a movement to lower cost countries, technological change and an increased demand for made-to-measure goods, the demand for lower skilled labour in the processing industry is dropping while the

<sup>1</sup> Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> ReferNet. Cedefop Thematic Analysis. Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. Report on Germany. May 2006. Cedefop.

<sup>3</sup> Please see the Inventory website for the full version of this case study

demand for higher skilled labour is showing an increase. Validation is thus being employed within the industry to motivate workers to improve their skills.

*Radiocom*, the National Radio Communications Company in Romania, serves as a good example of the importance of validation to help a company adapt to technological innovation.

#### Validation at *Radiocom*, the National Radio Communications Company, Romania<sup>1</sup>

The certification of competences (knowledge and abilities) is considered to be a necessity in the radio communications industry. The communications sector is subject to fast transformations and evolutions and there is a need for individuals to maintain the level of competence required by market conditions and changes in modern technology.

*Radiocom* is keen to maintain a high professional standard and at the same time, for its employees to acquire new competences. In addition, the company also allocates a special moral and material importance to the certification and validation of competences. Thus, the company has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios. Assessments are then conducted by internal assessors (specialists in the field of the respective occupation) who are certified as assessors of competencies by the National Adult Training Board.

Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies. These certificates have national recognition and are treated similarly to the study certificates obtained through formal learning. Individuals who partake in the validation processes thus benefit from regular performance assessment, as well as career and salary progression. For the employer organisations, the benefits are: achievement of better relations in the workplace, reduced time of the personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced in the system and reduced time for personnel to learn, know, work and monitor equipment.

<sup>1</sup> Information based on the text of an interview, supplied by a representative of the NATB (National Adult Training Board), Romania

## 1.5 Approaches to the development of VINFL initiatives

In this section, we will explore the methods of development of VINFL which have been identified from the country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory. These can be divided into 'bottom-up' initiatives, 'top-down' initiatives and those which result from a stimulus at European level (through funding programmes such as Leonardo da Vinci and EQUAL). We will also refer to the role of social partners in developing initiatives and explore the importance of partnership-working and consultation, as well as linking to national standards and qualifications.

### 1.5.1 Bottom-up approaches

In many countries, individual companies and social partners are developing VINFL initiatives, in response to identified need at sectoral or company level. In Ireland, for example, employers and the social partners are reported to be taking a more active interest in validation and are key drivers in taking forward much of the development of VINFL in the country.

In the Netherlands too, the number of individual companies - particularly larger enterprises - that have set up EVC procedures for employees is gradually increasing. Many of these projects started as small pilots, eventually leading to full-scale integration of EVC in human resources policies, yet there is also room for further development. In Romania, the 2007 Inventory country chapter indicates there are individual companies that are interested in developing validation methodologies and the scattered initiatives currently in place are said to show the need and potential for better developed and more standardised VINFL methodologies. Indeed, there are companies that have utilised the certification system of the Romanian National Adult Training Board to assess and certify competences of employees that have been gained in informal and non-formal settings. For example, the Romanian Commercial Bank had an assessment centre for the validation of the competences specific for occupations within the banking field. The Romanian Crafts Foundation<sup>1</sup> also promotes professional certification of competences, acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Moreover, there is evidence that bottom-up initiatives can have a knock-on effect on other stakeholders and thus help to encourage wider take-up of VINFL. For example, in Slovenia, most companies in the pharmaceutical sector have followed the example set by *Krka*, the country's largest pharmaceutical company, which was the first to implement standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning recognised at the national level (see below for further details). *Koskisen*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crafts.ro>

Oy, in Finland, which is also given as an example in more detail below, shows how a single company can influence others within the same industry to adopt validation methodologies.

### 1.5.2 Social Partner involvement

Social partners can play a key role in helping to introduce and promote validation within the private sector. This can be through implementing their own initiatives, supporting individual company or public sector initiatives, or by promoting validation among relevant stakeholders. There are many reasons for this involvement, as validation can bring benefits to the social partners themselves, as outlined in our previous section 1.4.2.

In Slovenia, for example, the Chamber of Craft (OZS) has been a partner in the process of preparation of two occupational standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- for truck drivers
- for people responsible for logistics in international freight / international truck traffic.

These two certificates were developed to certify the knowledge of people already working in that field for many years, but who did not have any official recognition.

In Italy, the enterprise associations (such as the National Craft Confederation or SME associations) have been devoting efforts to translate important pilot experiences of analysis and identification of competences carried out in single corporate contexts into the wider industrial system. There have been pilot projects at national and transnational level and the challenge now is to diffuse best practices and capitalise on what has been learned, promoting more extensive and homogeneous actions. Social partners, as representative 'umbrella' bodies can help to coordinate these actions.

The Portuguese social partners make efforts to inform companies and workers about the national Network of Centres for Recognition and Validation of Lifelong Competences and Qualifications, in recognition that the system gives them the opportunity to make progress concerning both career and new training directions.<sup>1</sup> This scheme now falls under the

<sup>1</sup> European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, January 2006, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

national *New Opportunities Initiative*<sup>1</sup> - by 2007 over 57,000 adults were engaged in a validation procedure at a New Opportunities Centre.

By helping to introduce formal agreements such as Collective Labour Agreements (CAOs), social partners can encourage wider take-up of validation. In the Netherlands, the national EVC (validation) Knowledge Centre offers an overview of sectors where agreed CAOs include validation. Currently, these are: (1) retail in potatoes, vegetables and fruit; construction; (2) child care, (3) the metal industry (4) legal assistance and, (5) welfare and social services<sup>2</sup>. These EVC agreements are often financed by the Training Funds (O&O funds) which have been set up to support the educational initiatives of employees. In contrast, in sectors where no EVC agreements have been included in the CAOs, the employee is much more dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved<sup>3</sup> and fund validation.

Another example of a national-level social partner agreement to encourage take-up of VINFL can be found in France, where the first National Collective Agreement on Lifelong Learning dates back to 2003. It was amended two years later when conditions on how to implement VINFL were added. Furthermore, on 15 February 2007, a national agreement on the development of VINFL was signed by the French Minister-Delegate Gérard Larcher, with employers' organisations MEDEF, CGPME, UPA, UNAPL and 16 professional sectors. The signatories confirmed their commitment to validation, an essential tool for the recognition of competences. Between 2002 and 2005 111,200 validation actions benefiting workers within the framework of the schemes for individual training leave were financed. During the same period, organisations at sectoral level also created numerous vocational qualification certificates (CQPs) to recognise acquired skills and competences,<sup>4</sup> of which 425 in 2005.

Social partner agreements containing paragraphs on VINFL can also be found in Scandinavian countries.

### 1.5.3 Top-down approaches

Where there are strong national policies or programmes in place to support VINFL, these can provide a stimulus for private sector stakeholders to become more involved in

<sup>1</sup> The recent 'New Opportunities' Initiative (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*), established within the scope of the National Employment Plan and the Technological Plan in 2005, defines a comprehensive qualification strategy for the Portuguese population, taking as reference the generalisation of secondary education as a minimum education level.

<sup>2</sup> *EVC en cao's*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: [www.kenniscentrum.nl](http://www.kenniscentrum.nl)

<sup>3</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>4</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

validation and to take it on in their own activities. This might be as a result of public sector funding to support private sector initiatives or through guidance and partnership-working in public sector programmes.

For example, in Norway, nine experimental projects targeting the labour market or working life were carried out under the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*), during the period 1999-2002. The Ministry of Education and Research was responsible for the Project, which was conducted by Vox, the National Institute for Adult Learning, in close cooperation with the social partners, the education sector and the third sector. The private sector projects were carried out by the social partners in different sectors, study associations and county administrations which cooperated with enterprises. Some projects were directed at specific sectors or industries, other projects were focused on a geographical area. During the Validation Project, internet-based tools were developed for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies, which are now known as 'competence passports'. The different Competence Passport tools developed are free for enterprises to use, unlike existing commercial tools for charting which work tasks an employee can do. For example, Vox has made a Competence Card available on their website<sup>1</sup>. Existing commercial tools for charting competence in work tasks are for use within an enterprise. The Competence Card tools can be used both within an enterprise and also by employees, when applying for a new job or when applying for admission to an educational institution on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning.

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) launched a pilot project in 2006 to identify and evaluate the experience of providers and FETAC in offering RPL. This project involved nine providers and participants included the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), the employer industry association for the construction industry. As part of its Performance Recognition and Enhancement Project (CIF/PREP) the CIF took part in the FETAC pilot project where it implemented an RPL process with employees (and owners) of small and medium sized companies in the construction sector. This project resulted in six construction company employees achieving FETAC awards on the basis of RPL for the first time in Ireland.

In Luxembourg, there are validation procedures in place for the formal apprenticeship schemes delivered by the professional chambers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. These apprenticeships are managed jointly by the Ministry of Education and the professional Chambers. Training takes place either through the Centre National de Formation Professionnelle Continue (CNFC), or in one of the technical Lycées.

<sup>1</sup> [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no)

National 'validation' bodies can help to encourage and inform the development of VINFL in the private sector too. In Iceland, for example, the work of the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has stimulated a number of industry projects carried out using methods to validate non-formal and informal learning, for example in the car mechanics and carpentry industries and the social work sector.

#### 1.5.4 Support at European level

A final stimulus for a number of transnational VINFL initiatives in the private sector is the availability of European funding for such work. Developing transnational projects on VINFL offers a major opportunity to test local/national validation methods and to disseminate methods and experiences at a larger scale. Our research identified a number of projects funded through, for example, the Leonardo da Vinci and EQUAL programmes.

In Greece, two projects took place within framework of the European Community EQUAL Initiative (under the first round of funding, from 2001 to 2005). These were "*Technomatheia*" promoting the distance accreditation of skills in SMEs and "*ENVI-E*" for the accreditation of professional qualifications in the environmental sector.

Another example is the *CAST (Competencies and skills in tourism)* project, a Leonardo project with two Spanish partners: BDF (*Balear de desarrollo y formación*) and the *Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma* (2003-2006). The aims of this project were to analyse what ICT professional competences are required in the tourist sector in Spain and other countries, what training in ICT is carried out and what training is needed. The end results of the projects were a methodology for the recognition, validation and accreditation of competences in the work place in tourism and a handbook for the harmonisation of professional competences in the sector. The project employed an accreditation methodology using a web tool (*CREDICAST*) and an 'ePortfolio'.<sup>1</sup>

The *VAI* project, which is examined in more detail below, was funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the Investing in People project, which is the subject of a case study within the 2007 Inventory, was funded by the EQUAL programme. Many other examples can be found throughout this compendium and the individual country chapters.

The EuroguideVAL project<sup>2</sup> which is developing occupational standards, training standards and training materials for professionals working in the field of validation, is also funded by the Leonardo programme. The partnership has undertaken research into professional practice in guidance and counselling, assessment and certification related to non-formal

<sup>1</sup> Contribution of BDF and information retrieved from the web. Retrieved September 2007:

<http://www.castsite.net/descripcion.asp?idioma=2&conexion=>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euroguideval.org/choix.html>

and informal learning in each country concerned (Estonia, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The results of this research have been used to identify the competences, knowledge and methodological approaches used by professionals working in these areas. The project aims to define a common European framework of competences for the initial and continuing training of these professionals.

European funding clearly represents an important stimulus for the development of VINFL projects in the private sector, since it offers a chance to pilot new ideas, before making any form of long-term commitment. This is important to help private sector stakeholders to overcome barriers to validation such as those listed below in this compendium.

Further details of EU-funded projects relating to validation can be found on the Cedefop Virtual Community website.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.5.5 Partnership-working, consultation and feedback

All three of the above methods of development demonstrate the importance of working in partnership and consultation with relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure buy-in and take-up of initiatives developed. Partnership-working can enable learning and good practice to be shared and can also help to increase the visibility, credibility and impact of a project.

A key issue is how to work in partnership in practice. The example below describes how the company *Freescale Semiconductor* worked in partnership with the regional *Points-Relais-Conseil* (regional VINFL information points) in France.

#### VAE in the company 'Freescale Semiconductor Toulouse'

In Toulouse, the PRCs (*Points-Relais-Conseil*) worked with Freescale Semiconductor to implement a project to provide information about VAE in the context of lifelong learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* – the French national validation system) on both a collective and individual basis for its employees. The project's priority target group was the 880 employees working as operatives but the communication campaign implemented as part of the project had the potential to reach out to the entire Freescale Semiconducteur Toulouse workforce, which totals 1900 people.

Following an internal communication campaign run by the company's Human Resources department from January to March 2005, the PRC developed two information tools relating to VAE within the strategy for lifelong learning at Freescale: one for managers and a second for employees. In June 2005, four information meetings were organised by the PRC and held at the Freescale Toulouse studio (one on a Saturday and one in the evening, in order to allow all employees the opportunity to attend), which were attended by 225 people. 11 on-site visits then enabled 48 Freescale employees to access information on an individual basis. Around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through the French national system of VINFL.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.trainingvillage.gr>

These activities were funded by the FONGECIF Midi-Pyrénées<sup>1</sup> and Freescale.

Evaluation of initiatives is also crucial to ensure the learning and good practice can be shared and developed. A good example of this is the organisation *FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvraagstukken* (Service in labour market issues) in the Netherlands.

#### Evaluation to inform VINFL, FCB, Netherlands

*FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvraagstukken* was set up by the social partners MOgroep, ABVAKABO FNV and CNV Publieke Zaak to support the welfare and social service sectors, youth care and child care services to function optimally in a changing labour market and society.

In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC<sup>2</sup>-procedures in the childcare sector to gain better insight:

- into the quality of EVC-procedures;
- into differences among EVC-providers; and
- to offer employers and employees experience with EVC-procedures.

FCB has undertaken an in-depth evaluation of the organised EVC-procedures to shed light on the motivations and satisfaction of the EVC-candidates, the quality of the procedures, and other aspects in order to make recommendations for the future use of EVC in the sector. A useful outcome of their evaluation for example, is the fact that considerable differences among EVC-providers have been identified, especially in the field of valuing experience. The identification of these differences through an evaluation enables experiences and learning to be shared among those actors involved and beyond. At the moment, the practice of evaluating EVC-procedures and making recommendations for the future is not yet usual practice in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>.

FCB continues to evaluate EVC-procedures, now in the Welfare and social service and Youth care sector, aiming to improve the quality of EVC-procedures. FCB also tries to stimulate the use of EVC-procedures by offering co-financing through the European Social Fund."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FONGECIF: Fonds paritaire interprofessionnel régional agréé pour la Gestion du Congé Individuel de Formation et du congé bilan de compétences.

<sup>2</sup> *Erkenning Verworven Competenties*- Recognition of Acquired Skills

<sup>3</sup> *Evaluation EVC-procedures Leidsters Kinderopvang en Peuterspeelzalen 2004-2006*, FCB. Retrieved 18 August:

[http://www.fcbwjk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatierapport\\_evc\\_ko\\_psz.doc](http://www.fcbwjk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatierapport_evc_ko_psz.doc)

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by KVB by email 28/08/2007

### 1.5.6 Links to formal standards and qualifications

Examples can be drawn from the 2007 Inventory country chapters of initiatives which have endeavoured to develop their own occupational or competence profiles, without linking into national systems. Others have been developed to link in with national frameworks of qualifications or standards, which should help to ensure an element of transferability and sustainability for the projects.

The 2007 European Inventory reveals some examples of projects to develop occupational or competence profiles for the private sector. In Greece, the Leonardo project EPO, *European Postmen*, which started in 2004 is co-ordinated by the Hellenic Post Office and involves Greece Continuing Training Centres as well as the Vocational Education and Training Organisation.<sup>1</sup> The project aims to develop a common competence profile for European postmen involving 15 units and for two different skills levels.

The Value of Work is another example of a transnational project to develop competence standards:

#### **Developing Competence Standards, The Value of Work, Iceland**

In Iceland, the Education and Training Service Centre received a grant from the Leonardo Da Vinci programme for a pilot project entitled "The Value of Work". The project aims to develop methods to validate the actual skills of individuals in the labour market. Partner countries are Denmark, England, Cyprus, Slovenia and Sweden.

In Iceland, Denmark, and Cyprus the pilot project will be applied to bank employees. Standards of competences will be developed for the validation of skills among bank employees. A handbook will be available containing a description of the various elements of skills, and methods and instruments to assess employees' skills will be developed. Emphasis will be put on the general applicability of the project to other areas and the methodology will be transferred to other sectors in Slovenia and Sweden.

*Krka* – mentioned previously in this compendium - in Slovenia, is an example of a company which has developed a validation method to enable its employees to gain a nationally-recognised qualification.

#### **Nationally-recognised qualifications awarded through VINFL, Krka, Slovenia**

Krka is Slovenia's largest pharmaceutical company. Along with in-house training, courses and workshops and training on the job, Krka was the first company to develop and start implementing six standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the

<sup>1</sup> This is an independent organisation that belongs to the Ministry of Education.

national level.

Partners in the process of developing the system were the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (which provided the basic documents and implemented the law regarding the NVQ), Novartis, the second pharmaceuticals company in Slovenia (who helped to prepare and agree the content of the standards, together with CPI), the trade union confederation (a national level partner), the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and the Chamber of Commerce (a national-level partner).

These qualifications have been officially accepted by the Minister responsible for labour. As a result, NVQs at Krka can not only be obtained by completing in-house training (working on the job in production, storage etc) and attending in-house lectures (some 150-200) but crucially also by carrying out practical on the job training and then meeting the official standards in written and practical tests.

Having built a strong network with the other Slovene firms from the pharmaceutical sector, Krka has been designated as the only institution which can assess and certify the NVQ for these six standards. To date, more than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Education and Training Centre, Krka.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system in Slovenia. These institutions are prepared to compile the portfolio and assess the knowledge, skills and competences of the candidates. The firms are mostly located in the capital city, Ljubljana, but also in other large towns such as Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto, Nova Gorica (where the main actor is the Technical school centre) and Murska Sobota.

All fields of activity are represented. The two largest companies are Krka (pharmaceuticals) and Elektro Slovenija –Eles (the only electric power transmission company in Slovenia). Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation (to have the necessary materials, financial conditions and human resources in place) to become certification centres.

The introduction of profiles or standards based on competences or learning outcomes is recognised as a challenging process. For actors in the private sector, whose expertise may not lie in the education and training, it is therefore to be recommended that the development of competence or occupational profiles is carried out in partnership or with a high level of support and if possible, to link in with national frameworks. The example below of the Lithuanian company Achema outlines the barriers faced by projects which are developed independently, in terms of take-up and transfer of the methodologies developed.

#### Linking with national standards, Achema, Lithuania

The stock company Achema is the largest nitrogen fertilisers company in Lithuania and the largest factory

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of Krka, October 2007

that is involved in this type of activity within the Baltic countries. It has over 1,500 employees.

According to the company's representative, human resources are seen as one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness. The company is actively engaged in developing its own system for human resource development where assessment of competences, skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning plays a very important role.

At the moment, the company is developing a system of competence requirements for every type of work activity performed within the company, which means that the specific competence requirements will be assigned to each role within the company. In turn this will be later linked to the occupational standards currently being developed at the national level. It is expected that the system will clarify, facilitate and render transparent the present process of competence assessment and encourage employees to take up lifelong learning.

The main competences the company is validating are those acquired through work experience. Special attention and encouragement is provided for the employees wanting to learn or validate their knowledge in foreign languages. These are matched with the award of pay increases.

Among the main validation methods used are observation and collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations performed by the direct line manager or formal examinations. The latter usually follows formal training in the company's training centre. Indeed, many positions within the company require a certificate, which can be obtained for example by attending one of the training courses of the company – and validation of informal and non-formal learning is a part of this system. The assessment is usually performed by the experts of the company's training centre and successful assessment of relevant skills and competences lead to the award of a company-recognised certificate.

The initiative was developed by the company's training centre with constant review and improvement via indirect input of the beneficiaries – provision of feedback by those who participated in the training as well as their managers is encouraged at the end of every training course as well as regular assessment in the longer term.

As the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by the company individually, the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies even of a similar kind. Therefore despite many benefits associated with the delivery and recognising informal/non-formal learning, for example, fairer rewards and better matching between individuals and skills needs as well as better structuring of job profiles, there are still quite a lot of obstacles, both internal and external to greater take-up of the initiative by the employees within Achema and by other companies. For example: the development of assessment and validation methodologies are only affordable by large companies, employees themselves lack motivation as the certificates are only recognised within one company and there is a lack of a systematic approach which results in scattered learning initiatives rather than a comprehensive and complete process.

Yet, it has been noted that the application of agreed assessment standards forms the basis of reliable validation systems. For those countries where these challenges have been overcome and competence-based standards or learning outcomes have been introduced, it is possible to see that the development can help to facilitate the introduction of VINFL, by ensuring that assessments are consistent across all sectors and providers.

Further discussion on the complexities and tensions associated with the introduction of standards or learning outcomes can be found in the Public Sector Compendium of the 2007 European Inventory.

## 1.6 Methods employed

A number of methods are currently in use in the private sector. The example of *Radiocom*, given earlier, illustrates this. The company “*has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios*”. We have seen that private sector initiatives can be developed for a wide range of reasons and it therefore is likely that a range of methods must also be employed, in order to meet these needs, address different circumstances and ensure the desired outcomes and results for all stakeholders involved. This variety has to be balanced against the need for convergence of multiple methods and tools, in order to spur active use of validation in enterprises, which cannot allow themselves many trial-and-error initiatives in the field of validation. In particular, European validation projects can contribute to a certain convergence of methods and tools.

It seems that declarative and portfolio methods are the most prevalent (as in the third sector) although the research has also uncovered some examples of the use of tests / examinations. We now examine some examples of the use of these three methods within the private sector, which have been taken from the European Inventory individual country chapters.

### 1.6.1 Tests and Examinations

Tests and examinations can be used to validate informal and non-formal learning in order to award qualifications (that may or may not be integrated in national standards). In The Czech Republic for example, a system of certification of training training of has been developed since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing. Participants who do not wish to undertake the courses can apply to CIMA and the examination commission and participate directly in the exams if their expertise gained through non-formal and informal learning is considered to be sufficient.

The Finnish company Koskisen Oy 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 (various wood production and management qualifications). All the participants require 1-2 years of work experience. The skills are assessed by a team that consists of an external assessor and employer and employee representatives and the assessment is made up of practical and written skills tests. See Section 1.8 for further details of this initiative.

In Turkey, TESK<sup>1</sup> (The Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen) uses examinations to award certificates of knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning, as outlined in the box below:

#### Tests and Examinations, TESK, Turkey

One important role of the Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen (TESK) is to implement and manage vocational/ occupational training activities in apprenticeship centres located in many small industry clusters. These activities of vocational education and training are carried out jointly with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of National Education. TESK evaluates and certifies the knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning (mainly work experience) of individuals in professions which are not covered by the apprenticeship training system (as defined by the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training).

The Confederation awards the following certificates;

- The TESK certificate of assistant-mastership;
- The TESK certificate of mastership; and
- The TESK certificate of tradesmanship.

Individuals who started working after 1993 in professions not covered by the apprenticeship training can attend examinations three times a year at the chambers of professions that are branch organisations of TESK. Those who successfully complete this examination can receive one of the above-mentioned certificates. The examination commission consists, under the presidency of the head of the relevant chamber, of:

- Two members designated by the related chamber of profession.
- One member from the Chamber's Professional Training Consultancy Unit.
- A teacher designated by the Professional Training Center of the Ministry of National Education that provides apprenticeship training services.

The examination for the 'Tradesmanship Certificate' can only be taken in a written form, while the examinations for the certificates of assistant-mastership and mastership include both written and practical assessments.

The certificates issued by TESK are replaced with their equivalent certificates by the Ministry of National Education, if that profession is taken into the coverage of apprenticeship training practice of the Law No. 3308 on Vocational Training.

## 1.6.2 Declarative Methods

There are some examples of private sector initiatives which are based on 'declarative methods'. These are based on an individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, which are verified by a third party. Declarative methods may involve a self-assessment against given criteria or none at all.

1 <http://www.tesk.org.tr/>

In Sweden, for example, the Non-manual Workers' Union developed an interactive tool for members to identify and organise existing competences and to identify competences that need to be developed through further studies<sup>1</sup>.

A more detailed example of a project using a declarative method was found in Norway, where a pilot project was developed in the agriculture sector, to support farmers to document their non-formal and informal learning.

#### Declarative Method of Validation, The Agriculture Sector, Norway

The Norwegian State Agricultural Administration supported a pilot project between 2004 and 2006 for the documentation of competences developed by agriculture sector workers (farmers). The national associations of farmers and small farmers cooperated with partners in Nordland county (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service) to deliver this initiative.

The national associations developed a course in how to document farmers' competences, to be used in study groups of 6-8 individuals. Schemes for CV and Competence Passport (professional competence including economics and ICT, personal/social competences, managerial competences) were part of the course material. In four meetings, the farmers discussed their varied work tasks and learned how to assess their competence and document it, how to find partners to validate and sign the Competence Passport (i.e. Agriculture Guidance Service staff) and discussed possible needs for further education.

The following project, developed by the *Arbeiterkammer Tirol* (Tyrol Chamber of Labour) in Austria, demonstrates how a declarative method used in the private sector assesses an individual's learning in all areas of their life.

#### Validation of life-wide learning, Arbeiterkammer Tirol, Austria

The Chamber's think tank, the Zukunftszentrum ("Centre for the Future"<sup>2</sup>), has, with the support of the regional government, developed a 'competence statement'. This methodology, which was developed in conjunction with business and organisational behaviour psychologists, is a six-step process completed over three weeks to identify the skills and knowledge a person has gained through non-formal and informal learning. A personal coach supports and guides the individual throughout this process. Participation is supported by the regional government with participant contribution limited to 190 euros.

As a first step, the coach provides information about content, aims and usefulness of the competence statement and the individual begins to reflect on the important experiences in their life. The second stage is the creation, by the participant, of an all-encompassing profile of their life including family, schooling, vocational training, work and leisure. A discussion with the personal coach helps the individual, thirdly, to become aware of important learning experiences, recognition of abilities and of the importance of different stages in their life. Fourthly, the individual writes their CV at home referring to certificates as well as competencies. The fifth stage is a self-assessment: how does the individual see themselves, how do others

<sup>1</sup> UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.zukunftszentrum.at/>

## Validation of life-wide learning, Arbeiterkammer Tirol, Austria

see them? What is important to them for their future? Both questions and answers are discussed with the personal coach. In the final and sixth stage, further steps and objectives for the future are defined. The end product of this process is a written 'competence statement' showing a person's main skills and abilities.

The Centre's competence statement is widely applied. Participation is open to all members of the Chamber of Labour (that is, all employees including apprentices). During the pilot phase, some 1400 participants received a competence statement. The second phase was launched in early 2006.

Declarative methods can also be used to conduct a formative assessment of the beneficiary - to help employers/employees to identify skills gaps and training needs. The example below shows how a validation procedure can be used to form a 'Development Plan' for workers in SMEs.

## VAI, Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs<sup>1</sup>

The VAI partnership is led by EBLA, a bilateral body involving SME associations and Trade Unions<sup>2</sup>. The project, which commenced in 2006, aims to identify, develop, test and fine-tune a methodology and a set of tools (the 'VAI KIT'), suitable to recognise and give evidence of different and often non-recognised learning modalities existing within European SMEs, with special attention to non-formal and informal learning. The purpose of this is to create the best possible conditions for SME managers to support the creation of new learning opportunities – internal or external to companies – in a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective and to valorise individual efforts in lifelong learning.

The VAI project responds to the need expressed by consultants, learning facilitators, SME managers and heads of companies to create tools and methodologies to support SMEs and workers to increase their knowledge base, also recognising the experiences and related competences developed in non formal (e.g. on the job) and informal learning contexts (e.g. leisure activities). Furthermore, the VAI approach also aims to provide new solutions which allow evidence to be given for all existing learning processes within SMEs.

The project provides different tools and methodologies to assess informal learning. The assessment process is explained in a guide on how to describe individual learning pathways and acquired competences. A comprehensive list of criteria is provided and for individual learning recognition, there is an individual 'acquis chart', based on the European CV.

The key outcome of the process, called the 'Development Plan', affects both the individual and the company.

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from a Leonardo VPL-2 Case Study Grid

<sup>2</sup> Other members are FEDERLAZIO and CAN (associations of SMEs and micro enterprises), FORMARE, ERFAP and SMILE (training agencies, belonging to SMEs associations and/or Trade Unions), EXA TEAM (an SME with expertise in designing and managing European funded projects), SEDA (a technological partner), CRIA (a Spanish consulting firm, with strong expertise in local development and enterprise creation), CEEFIA (a French training agency, with consolidated expertise in competencies development), IAGO (a UK-based consulting firm with expertise in local development and European funded project management) and CKP: an organisation in the Czech Republic active in local development and social enterprise creation.

## VAI, Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs<sup>1</sup>

In this process the role of the learning facilitator (FAI) is pivotal, representing the 'trait d'union' between the organisation and the employee. The FAI utilises different tools (from the VAI Model) to support the identification, evaluation and valorisation of competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

The VAI methodology considers three groups of competences: basic, relational and technical competences. The elements that are validated focus on the learning contexts/modalities concerning personal life and work/professional life.

The VAI Model follows four steps:

### Information

1. Inform and explain to the management and the employees that knowledge can occur through non formal and informal learning methods.
2. Explain the benefits generated by the implementation of non formal and informal learning methods.

### Identification

1. Identify existing non formal and informal learning practices in the company.
2. Identify non formal and informal learning practices that could be implemented in the company.

### Evaluation

1. Organise the results of the evaluation step.
2. Analyse the non formal and informal learning in the company which takes place at an individual level and/or a global level.

### Valorisation

1. Design the development plans for the company and the employees
2. Valorisation of the non formal and informal learning practices inside the company.
3. Valorisation of the competences and abilities acquired through non formal and informal learning practices.

All kinds of knowledge, skills and experiences are validated through an original grid for the identification of informal/non formal learning practices that employees already implement within or outside the company. The "User Guide for the Assessment Tool" is available at: <http://www.progettovai.org>.

The tools and methods used to identify and value competences are a) the VAI Tools and 2) the Curriculum Vitae:

- a) VAI offers two types of tools to help managers, heads of companies, employees to acquire awareness of non-formal and informal learning processes and opportunities:

Information tools, which guide the VAI assessment process:

- Explanation of the VAI methodology and phases
- Explanation of the concepts used
- Inventory of best practices in informal learning
- Case studies and informative presentations

Assessment tools: to assess learning:

- Informal learning assessment tool

## VAI, Valorising non-formal and informal learning in SMEs<sup>1</sup>

- Guide on how to describe your own learning pathway and knowledge competencies
  - List of criteria for individual learning recognition
  - Individual *acquis* chart
- b) European Curriculum Vitae, through which individuals can record their own knowledge, competences and know-how acquired during professional experience or daily life, therefore in non formal and informal contexts, too.

The results of the validation procedure are felt to be:

For the *organisation*: the investigation and experimentation of possible conditions for SMEs managers and heads of companies to support the valuation and recognition of different learning opportunities – within and outside the company – in a lifelong and lifewide learning perspective, so to valorise individual efforts in lifelong learning, improving motivation and effectiveness of work practices.

For the *individuals*: the recognition and valorisation of individual competences acquired in non formal and informal context allows to promote equal opportunities in the access to labour market and in strengthening employability for all.

We have also identified a number of projects which have made use of the ICT in order to develop tools and programmes for use within a validation procedure. In Norway, for example, internet-based tools were developed during the national Validation Project for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies. Most of these digital tools start with self-assessment of the kind of work tasks the employee has performed and responsibilities he/she has held in the enterprise. This self-assessment is then subject to discussion, evaluation and ultimately validation and signed by the employer as a Competence Passport, to be combined with a CV. These tools are therefore used to facilitate a declarative method.

### 1.6.3 The portfolio method

The 2005 Inventory gives the following definition of the portfolio method:

*"Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways. In the most general of senses, competence portfolios tend to involve a self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria, interview(s) with a third party and / or an assessment centre."*

Our case study of the use of validation within the processing industry in the Netherlands is a good example of a portfolio method. The validation procedure used involves five phases:

1. Information and Quick-Scan
2. Preparation of Portfolio
3. Practical Assessment
4. Transfer Assessment
5. Validation Statement

The quick scan and portfolio are prepared by the individual beneficiary. Steps three and four involve assessments by both internal (the practical at step three) and external (the transfer assessment at step four) assessors, thus ensuring that the method does not rely only on the individual's judgement of their own competences and abilities. More detail of this procedure can be found in the full version of our case study, on the Inventory website.

The *Chambre des Employés Privés*, in Luxembourg, uses the portfolio method to award certificates in vocational subjects, as explained in the box below:

#### **The Portfolio method, Validation at the Chambre des employés privés (CEPL), Luxembourg**

The CEPL offers evening courses to adults in a variety of vocational subjects, including ICT and administration, accounting and management, law and sales. The courses are delivered by the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC) and on completion of six modules students are issued an official diploma from the Ministry of Education (although this diploma does not constitute a formal state qualification).

Since January 2007 candidates have been entitled to apply for *validation des acquis* (validation of skills and competences) in order to obtain these certificates. Candidates must have a minimum of three years' relevant experience in relation to the desired certificate. The methodology for the validation process is outlined below:

- 1) Candidates submit a dossier to the LLLC, made up of relevant documentation to use as evidence in the validation process. The LLLC must authorise the validation process, based on this dossier.
- 2) Approved dossiers are submitted to a jury, made up of professionals and stakeholders from the LLLC evening classes. The jury's decision is based on an analysis of the candidate's experience in relation to the skills and knowledge required to obtain the certificate. The candidate's education and continuing professional training may also be taken into account.
- 3) The jury may request an interview with the candidate or an additional test (written, oral or practical).
- 4) The jury may grant the diploma in full or in part. Candidates who receive validation for a number of modules within a certificate should take the remaining examinations within a period of five years in order to be awarded the certificate in full.

The validation process costs 150 € in total per certificate. A small number of candidates have made use of the validation process since its introduction at the beginning of this year (2007).

More information can be found at [www.cepl.lu](http://www.cepl.lu), under *Formation Continue*.

The portfolio method can also be 'formative'. Our case study on the Investing in People project in Italy is an example. Here, we have taken excerpts from the case study to illustrate the use of the portfolio method as a formative assessment. It is important to note that we have not given detail of all stages of the procedure here – additional steps, involve further assessment of the individual's competences by internal and external assessors.

The method used in the project consists of a number of activities and processes, which include the completion of a portfolio and the creation of a personal plan:

- **Completing the portfolio.** The portfolio is entitled "*Individual Dossier Skills and Training Booklet*". It commences by informing the employee of the validation process and the purpose of validation. It then proceeds to document their formal educational qualifications (achieved both inside and outside of the workplace) and their non-formal/informal experience (achieved through the employees' work activities/experiences, any voluntary sector experience they may have and any knowledge or experiences they may have acquired through their hobbies/ life).

Employees complete the portfolio with the help of their tutor (the Process Supervisor). They identify all of their training and work experience and include evidence of their competencies. This 'evidence' can take a number of forms. For example, a declaration from a previous employer, certification of prior vocational training, pictures of themselves working voluntarily videos etc. Employees also complete a questionnaire on their behavioural competencies at this point. This is a self-evaluation questionnaire that assesses such characteristics as motivation, leadership skills, determination etc using a French software package called 'performance'. The findings are only shared with the employees' tutor and not the management.<sup>1</sup>

- **Creating a personal development plan.** On the basis of the assessment stage, the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the beneficiary all work together to produce a 'Personal Development Plan'. This plan defines a career strategy for the worker based on his/her competencies and the companies' own requirements.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the project tutor also completes the questionnaire on behalf of the employee and the results are then compared. This exercise is thought to be valuable but it is again not shared with the company management.

The Personal Development Plan, which is also known as the 'Individual Development Plan' consists of an assessment table identifying whether the employee seems 'qualified', 'unqualified', 'partially qualified' or 'unsuitable' in each of his/her job areas. It proceeds to offer a summary of the employee and provides a list of the skills that are 'possessed', 'need improvement' or 'need to be developed'. Its conclusion is a 'training forecast' which has been collectively drawn up by the HR department or management, the tutor, the internal and external assessors and the workers and which specifies the training that each employee needs<sup>1</sup>.

More detail on the Investing in People project can be found in the full case study, available from the European Inventory website.

The project below, supported by funding from the Leonardo da Vinci programme, is a detailed example of a validation initiative which made use of electronic tools.

#### Use of electronic tools, Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills (AKS), Norway<sup>2</sup>

The AKS project took place over the period 2003-2004 and was funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme. It was a follow-up to a project carried out by ELBUS (the national centre for electro technical vocational education in Norway) during the national Validation Project. The project's scope of work was to develop the validation, assessment and transferability of formal, non formal and informal learning in the electro-technical industry throughout Europe. The lead partners were the two Norwegian organisations OREE (advisory council for vocational training in the electro technical centre) and ELBUS. The other partner countries were Denmark, Greece, Sweden and the UK.

The project group developed a methodology to enable electro-technical or other enterprises to document and assess accumulated knowledge and skills of an employee or potential employee. This methodology is explained in a handbook, and is supported by a web/electronic-based tool to aid the process. All five partner country languages are present in both the methodology and the tool and the tool was piloted in several different European electro-technical pilot companies.

The 'assessment' stage of the methodology involves a conversation with the employer, based on what the individual has recorded about him/herself. This conversation should follow clearly defined guidelines and will be strictly confidential between the individual and the employer. To aid this development dialogue the project partners developed an 'Ability to take action' questionnaire. The main objective of this assessment is to develop the basis of a personal development plan involving measures that the employer is able to initiate or support.

Subsequent steps in the validation process are:

- Information
- Individual assessment
- Development interview

The difference between an ordinary appraisal interview and a development interview is that the

<sup>1</sup> Investing in People IT-G2-MAR-013 Individual Development Plan

<sup>2</sup> [www.aks-international.com](http://www.aks-international.com)

development interview only has focus at the employee's competences and potential. The Development interview was found to be a great challenge for those who took part in this advisory counselling. At the same time this guidance was a great success. In many companies, it was the first time that the employees had been offered anything like a development interview.

100 individuals were involved in the project from Norway, five from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.

The mapping tool is web-based whilst the CV and the 'Ability to take action' forms are available electronically through the AKS web site.<sup>1</sup>

The AKS project was one of three to receive the first ever Leonardo da Vinci award launched by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aks-international.com/>

## 1.7 Outputs / Outcomes and Impact

### 1.7.1 Quantitative data

For some of the private sector validation initiatives we have identified, it is possible to quantify their outputs in terms of, for example, certificates awarded or portfolios completed. The table below gives an overview of data we have found for the projects included in this compendium:

Private sector validation initiatives – quantitative data
<b>Accumulation of Knowledge and Skills (AKS), transnational</b>
100 individuals were involved in the project from Norway, five from Sweden, 20 from England, 15 from Denmark and 20 from Greece.
<b>Arbeiterkammer Tirol, Austria</b>
During the pilot phase, some 1400 participants received a competence statement.
<b>Construction Industry Federation, Ireland</b>
Six construction company employees achieved FETAC awards on the basis of RPL for the first time in Ireland.
<b>FCB, Netherlands</b>
In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC-procedures in the child care sector
<b>Freescale Semiconductor, France</b>
Around 25 employees then went on to pursue a qualification through the French national system of VINFL.
<b>Investing in People, Italy</b>
Investing in People was set up to validate the skills and experience of 30 employees across the three companies and, by December 2007, it will have achieved this. The majority of these employees were over 45 years of age, with 15/20% of beneficiaries being disabled.
<b>Jernvilje project, Northern Jutland, Denmark</b>
85% of participants in this project have re-entered the labour market.
<b>Koskisen Oy, Finland</b>
During the past 10 years some 400 employees (approx. 37% of all employees) have been able to validate the skills and learning they have acquired at work and have obtained an official qualification.
<b>Krka, Slovenia</b>
More than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Krka Education and Training Centre. The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system. Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation to become certification centres.
<b>Radiocom, Romania</b>
Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies

It is clear that these initiatives have had a limited impact to date in terms of the numbers of beneficiaries supported. However, it is important to remember that many of the projects we have looked at and provided data on take-up were pilot projects, often supported by European funding to develop innovative methodologies and tools. It remains to be seen whether these projects, and others like them, will be sustained in the future and create a wider impact.

Further, it is important to remember that the impact of such initiatives also depends on the quality of the 'soft outcomes' they produce and other 'results', such as facilitating access to formal education and training or employment.

### 1.7.2 Benefits for individual companies

In the section 'Rationale for involvement' we have seen that individual companies become involved in the development and implementation of VINFL for a number of reasons. The project examples given throughout this compendium serve to illustrate how companies can benefit from validation in a number of ways.

For example, validation enables a company to make better use of employees' skills and competences, often enabling a company to save time and money in the long run. VINFL helps to make informed decisions in order to match the right person to the right job, which can lead to increased motivation among employees, increased productivity, and an improved profile for the company.

In the Czech Republic, in fact, various surveys among employers have shown that they actually prefer skills acquired informally (communication skills, leadership skills, team spirit, etc.) over formal qualifications.

In Spain, our country report notes that a number of large companies, for example the Institute of Theatre of Barcelona (*Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona*) and the Technological Institute of Castilla y León have shown good practice in developing policies of ongoing assessment of their human resources. It is suggested that this has helped not only to identify gaps and define competence development activities, but also to make the most of human capital and to increase efficiency.<sup>1</sup>

The example of *Radiocom* in Romania, showed that for employers affected by technological innovation, the benefits of validation can be a reduction in the time required for personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced and to learn how to work and monitor equipment.

<sup>1</sup> Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

Finally, a company representative of the Lithuanian company *Achema* noted that human resources is one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness. Validation, as a method of supporting and developing individuals to realise their full potential, represents a valuable tool for firms in today's competitive, knowledge-based economy.

### 1.7.3 Benefits for individual beneficiaries

As indicated previously in this document, individuals can gain 'soft outputs' from participating in a validation procedure, such as increased motivation, confidence and self-esteem and a better understanding of one's own abilities. Such outcomes are much harder to measure but can have a significant impact on society and the economy, by facilitating individuals' career development or enabling them to access education and training or employment.

A Danish study<sup>1</sup> found that from the employees' perspective, there is often a feeling that companies want to help them develop, and that through identifying 'who can do what' the skills and strengths of employees were openly appreciated, which improved employee relations, and generally increased self-esteem and enabled employees to feel more valued. As an example, our case study of the Investing in People project in Italy found that the employers involved gained insight into the skills inherent within their organisation and an understanding of where the skill gaps lie, which led to better-targeted training. The employees were empowered by the knowledge that they have learned certain skills through a number of different life situations, both in work and outside of work. They should be able to use this information to progress their career. Importantly, they accessed further training with the company without having to repeat anything that they already knew about. This bespoke training was a key output of this project.

As well as soft outputs, individuals can benefit from tangible outcomes such as certificates to recognise their competences, (formal) qualifications and regular performance assessment, leading to career and salary progression (as in the case of *Radiocom*). The Norwegian project working with farmers presented previously noted that they could benefit not only from development as a farmer but that VINFL could also help to plan future new production (i.e. in niche markets) or to meet demands for quality assurance and documentation in relation to the markets.

<sup>1</sup> Ramboll Management Study

#### 1.7.4 Results

The 'results' of validation are again hard to measure. These are the secondary effects of the introduction of VINFL – for example individuals gaining access to employment or improved career prospects some of which have been covered to some extent already. We have seen the results validation can also bring to individual companies – increased efficiency savings, for example, and the use of validation to address technological or economic change. The use of VINFL in the private sector can also bring results for society / the economy as a whole, by helping to reduce unemployment or supporting disadvantaged groups.

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 nineties. Their initiative has not only benefited the employees and the company itself but it has had a wider impact on the industry sector. The experience from *Koskisen Oy* is presented in the box below<sup>1</sup>, as an illustration of the results which can be generated by validation initiatives.

##### Results of validation, Koskisen Oy, Finland

*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 that consists 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:

- Individual benefits (employees):
  - Improved self-confidence.
  - Broadened and improved skill-base.
  - Greater understanding and adoption of work processes and tasks.
  - Opportunities for higher pay and grants.
- Benefits to the company:
  - Multi-skilled, motivated, committed, adaptable employees.
  - The company has succeeded to transform itself from a basic manufacturing enterprise into a high value-added production company – the highly skilled workforce has been the fundamental base.
  - Transformation towards a team-working culture – staff members increasingly work together and are able to replace one another during absences.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Interview with Esa Kallinen from *Koskisen Oy*.

- Move towards a more equal, less hierarchical employee structure due to increased skill levels and awareness of these.
  - National level recognition for its human resources policies.
  - Excellent working environment and low staff turnover levels (turnover levels have reduced by 35% in ten years [which is likely to be linked to the individual benefits mentioned above]).
  - A number of national certificates / awards (e.g. award for good employer, best apprenticeship scheme provider of the year, best place to work 2004 '*Suomen parhaat työnantajat 2004*' - 2nd position and the only awarded manufacturing company)
  - In spite of the major role of education and training, the productivity levels have always remained high. During the early training periods, the productivity of each participating employee slightly falls but in the longer term significantly improves as a result of new skills and motivation.
- Wider effects:
    - Has helped to raise the status and credibility of the wood production industry.
    - The largest companies in the same industry (e.g. Stora Enso, UPM) have now also introduced similar procedures.

## 1.8 Barriers to take-up

Our research has identified several barriers to the take-up of validation in the private sector. These are examined in turn below:

- Fear of the implications in terms of contractual / salary demands

As we have seen, validation can bring many benefits to both employers and employees. However, both parties may also fear negative consequences of the implementation of VINFL, in terms of contractual or salary implications. In Norway, for example, employers' confederations showed some scepticism about the use of validation tools in the work place – they feared that employees who had undergone a validation process would demand a salary increase.<sup>1</sup> Employees too may be sceptical about how the documentation might be used by the employers in times of downsizing and fear the consequences of 'failing' a VINFL process.

In Denmark, a study of six companies<sup>2</sup> which implemented 'Individual Competence Assessment' (IKA) uncovered the perceived benefits and disadvantages to the employees as well as the employers. Employers noted that they felt they must act on the assessment by offering targeted training, or their employees would have a negative impression of the process. They also found that employees can be fearful of competence assessment, which leads to greater hostility between employees and management. The study identified one negative consequence of the project for employees, which was that it fully identifies those that are not achieving within the organisation, which can make them vulnerable.<sup>3</sup>

- Difficulty to transfer / apply validation methodologies (e.g lack of standards/definitions such as learning outcomes/ occupational profiles)

In countries where there is no national reference framework for standards and methodologies, difficulties may be encountered in developing VINFL initiatives which can be transferred to other companies and/or sectors.

The example above of the VINFL procedure developed by Achema in Lithuania demonstrates the difficulties which can be encountered in ensuring the transferability of private sector methodologies. In this case, as the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by Achema individually, the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies, even of a similar kind. This reduces the incentives for employees to participate.

<sup>1</sup> Skule, S., in Skule, S. and Ure, O B, Lifelong Learning – Norwegian Experiences, Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Fafo Paper 2004:21

<sup>2</sup> 'The Ramboll Management Study'

<sup>3</sup> OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Denmark

- VINFL not considered a private sector responsibility

In some countries, private sector stakeholders may be reluctant to get involved in development and delivery of VINFL because they feel that such activities are the responsibility of the public sector. In Hungary, for example, our country report suggests there seems to be a general expectation on the sectoral level that initiatives will be taken by the government and national bodies (ministries).

- Unwillingness to share experiences/policies

As noted in the European Inventory 2005, the lack of available data on validation initiatives within the private sector may have been a sign of the reluctance within the sector to share ideas and methodologies. Often, companies are unwilling to share information on their human resources and training policies, which can prevent the development of common methods of assessment and certification, as well as good practice and lessons learned.

- Hostility towards 'newly' obtained qualifications

In certain countries, some mistrust or hostility towards VINFL is evident, due to the traditional belief in the value and importance of formal educational qualifications. For example, such mistrust has been expressed in France by members of professional associations and employees in the formal education system. The value traditionally attached to formal diplomas in France and the importance for the individual of having credible, transferable qualifications meant that there was only limited development of standards and certification.

## 1.9 Success Factors

Our examination of VINFL within the private sector enables us to conclude with a list of good practice recommendations. Although the methods used in the private sector appear generally to be further developed than those in the third sector, these recommendations are similar to those made in the third sector compendium. It is thus clear that learning can be transferred across, as well as within sectors.

- *Developing methodologies which are competence-based, or linked to learning outcomes (where possible, linking with nationally-recognised standards/profiles)*

Methodologies which describe the competences/skills an individual has developed, rather than simply the time they have spent, or the role they have held, are more transferable. Where these methodologies are linked to nationally-recognised standards or profiles, they bring significant benefits in terms of transferability (e.g. for beneficiaries, it is better to receive a certificate of competences which is recognised by other employers).

- *Partnership-working and consultation*

Working in partnership to develop VINFL initiatives can help to ensure consistency and transferability. Working with public sector partners can also ensure that private sector initiatives are developed in line with any national standards and procedures. Consultation with relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries and social partners, helps to ensure that validation initiatives are developed in line with demand and tailored to individual and sectoral needs.

- *Seeking support / buy-in from relevant stakeholders*

A clear vision and declaration of the benefits to all stakeholders of an initiative can help to secure buy-in and support. Support and buy-in from stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, stakeholders, other private sector companies) can help to ensure the success and sustainability of any new initiative. It can also help when seeking (financial) backing. For example, we have seen that Collective Labour Agreements can encourage wider take-up and financial support for a validation initiative.

- *Learning from others and sharing experiences*

It is important for all stakeholders involved to encourage monitoring and evaluation of existing projects, as well as the sharing of learning and good practice to inform further the development of quality initiatives.

- *Incorporating quality assurance methods*

It is important to ensure that quality assurance procedures are in place to verify consistency and equality of treatment across all assessments. Quality assurance procedures also give an initiative 'credibility' among stakeholders and users.

## 1.10 Conclusions

This compendium has given an overview of key trends, characteristics and methodological approaches to VINFL within the private sector. It is based on the research carried out to produce the 32 country chapters of the 2007 European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. Examples have been given throughout to illustrate the range of initiatives which are currently in use and the lessons which can be learned from these.

Despite some difficulties in obtaining data, it is possible to see that there is an increasing awareness of the benefits of introducing VINFL in the private sector. VINFL can above all be used as a recruitment tool, to inform the development of in-house training and to support career development (among other uses). Experience to date is helping to form an understanding among individual companies and social partners of the issues which must be taken into account when introducing more VINFL to the sector, such as the importance of partnership-working and linking to national standards and/or qualifications.

Validation can bring many positive outcomes for both private companies and their employees. It forms a vital element in the transformation of primarily internal labour markets into external ones with more entrances for people with a variety of backgrounds. It now remains for all stakeholders to work together in order to improve the quality and transferability of validation in the private sector, to overcome barriers to take-up and encourage more organisations and individuals to get involved. Good practice and lessons learned can be drawn from existing initiatives and it is crucial to monitor and evaluate these initiatives, then to share learning and experience both nationally and transnationally.